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This document is the Accepted Version [AM]

**Citation:**

EVANS, Laura (2012). South Africa's Bantustans and the dynamics of  
'decolonisation': reflections on writing histories of the homelands. South African  
Historical Journal, 64 (1), 117-137. [Article]

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# South Africa's Bantustans and the Dynamics of "Decolonisation": reflections on writing histories of the homelands.

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## Abstract

*From the late 1950s, as independent African polities replaced formal colonial rule in Africa, South Africa's white minority regime set about its own policy of mimicry in the promotion of self-governing homelands, which were to be guided to full 'independence'. Scholarly study of South Africa's homelands has remained largely apart from accounts of decolonisation in Africa. An interpretation of South Africa's exceptional political path in the era of African decolonisation that has dominated the literature has meant that important debates in African history, which might helpfully illuminate the South African case, have been neglected. In seeking inspiration for new histories of the homelands, this paper looks beyond South Africa's borders to processes of and debates on decolonisation in Africa. Historical accounts of African decolonisation, particularly the work of Frederick Cooper, provide inspiration for ways of thinking about the making of bantustan states, the production of power, the differentiated responses with which the bantustan project was met across localities, classes, genders and generations and the range of alliances that this process forged.*

**Keywords:** *apartheid, homelands, bantustans, decolonisation, gender, generation, influx control, resettlement, Ciskei.*

## Introduction

The current renewal of interest in the history of South Africa's homelands, represented by the recent conference from which this special issue is drawn, is a welcome turn in South African historiography; indeed, it is long overdue.<sup>1</sup> As historians seek new ways of approaching analyses of the bantustans and their related histories, circumspection and reflection on the theoretical underpinnings of such a project are imperative.<sup>2</sup> This paper offers some thoughts for writing new histories of the homelands. In seeking ways to approach these histories, the paper argues for deeper engagement with wider historiographies on Africa and highlights the importance of looking beyond the borders of the South African Republic (including its bantustans) in order to understand the historical dynamics of 'separate development' within

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<sup>1</sup> 'Let's Talk About Bantustans' Conference, NRF Chair in 'Local Histories and Present Realities' (with History Workshop), Hofmeyr House, University of the Witwatersrand, 15<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> April 2011.

<sup>2</sup> In the historical period under discussion, the terms 'bantustan' and 'homeland' were often employed interchangeably by policy makers and administrators. However, the term 'bantustan' (meaning 'Bantu state') has been often used pejoratively by scholars and activists, with reference to the 'stans' created in the course of the partition of India in 1947 and to the Soviet satellite states. This paper follows such usage. Although the paper refrains from the use of inverted commas in making reference to 'homelands', it does not accept the logic contained in this term: that all black South Africans had homes in, or 'ethnic' connections, to such rural areas.

the country. Following a discussion of some of the literature on bantustans, the paper briefly explores the regional context within which South Africa's policy of 'independent' homelands developed with particular reference to the High Commission Territories (HCTs; former Bechuanaland, Basotholand, Swaziland).<sup>3</sup> Having done so, the paper looks for theoretical and methodological inspiration to a wider historiography on decolonisation and related processes in Africa. This literature, it is argued, offers some important insights for writing new histories of the homelands and points to methods that might assist historians to better understand the range of local responses that bantustan policies engendered and the local terrains of power and politics through which these regimes were constituted. A brief discussion of research on resettlement in the Ciskei helps to illustrate the utility of these approaches.

### **African decolonisation and the bantustans**

By the 1950s, colonial governments in Africa were seeking to augment their formal relationships with colonies in response to the political challenges propelled by the changes of the Second World War. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, many former European colonies emerged as new and 'independent' states across the African continent. Meanwhile, in South Africa, a white settler polity independent from Britain since 1910, the ruling National Party (NP) sought in this same period to extend existing patterns of colonial segregation through the devolution of political structures and the promotion of a putative independence in the African reserves.<sup>4</sup> In the context of rapid urbanisation after the Second World War, in response to the ongoing demands of industrialists and commercial farmers for cheap labour, and facing increasingly militant challenges to the system by the oppressed majority, the NP sought to tighten and extend existing systems of 'influx control' designed to prevent the movement of black people to urban areas.

Following intense debate throughout the 1950s, and in the wake of the 1960 Sharpeville massacre, the question of influx control crystallised in the early years of the 1960s, resulting in the 'endorsement out' and forced removal of thousands of Africans from

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<sup>3</sup> Modern-day Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland.

<sup>4</sup> Colonial rule in apartheid South Africa has been regarded as distinct from the forms of rule in other British and French Colonies, where colonial regimes, from the 1940s, encouraged the 'stabilisation' of a 'modern', urban class of Africans. F. Cooper, *Africa Since 1940: the past of the present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 57- 58. For an account of the evolution of colonial policy in South Africa during the apartheid period, see, for example, I. Evans, *Bureaucracy and Race: native administration in South Africa* (London: University of California Press, 1997).

urban areas to the reserves, or homelands/ bantustans as these areas were to become known.<sup>5</sup> Britain's announcement of its intentions to guide the HCTs to independence was soon followed by South Africa's 1959 Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act, which paved the way for the transformation of the 'native' reserves into self-governing homelands and recast colonial labour controls in national terms. According to this formulation, which had been earlier elaborated in Tomlinson's 1955 Report on the economic viability of the reserves, black residents of the Republic were to be domiciled in the ethnic homeland of their supposed 'origin' where they were to possess 'citizenship'.<sup>6</sup> These territories would be guided towards independence by the white South African government.<sup>7</sup> Like many cases of decolonisation, this bantustan project involved the devolution of control over state services and infrastructural projects, and the advancement – though more in image than in material terms – of the 'national' economies of the homelands through 'border', later homeland, industrial programmes.<sup>8</sup> In line with policies for the promotion of self-government in ten such ethnic bantustans, between 1976 and 1981 four of these were granted independent status by South Africa (Transkei, Bophutatswana, Venda, Ciskei). These states were never formally recognised on the international stage, owing to developing anti-apartheid geo-politics.

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<sup>5</sup> See for example, D. Posel, *The Making of Apartheid, 1948- 1961: conflict and compromise* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 227- 255; M. West, 'From Pass Courts to Deportation: changing patterns of influx control in Cape Town', *African Affairs* 81:325 (1982), 463- 477; Surplus People Project, *Forced Removals in South Africa: The SPP Reports. Volumes 1-5* (Cape Town: SPP, 1983); C. Murray, 'Displaced Urbanization: South Africa's rural slums', *African Affairs* 86:344 (1987), pp. 311- 329; B. Freund, 'Forced Resettlement and the Political Economy of South Africa', *Review of African Political Economy* 29 (1984), pp. 49- 63; C. Desmond, *The Discarded People: an account of African resettlement in South Africa* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971); E. Unterhalter, *Forced Removal: the division, segregation and control of the people of South Africa* (London: International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, 1987).

<sup>6</sup> Although Hendrik Verwoerd, Minister of Native Affairs, rejected Tomlinson's recommendations that land purchase and major investment in the reserves were necessary for their economic viability, the principles of territorial and political segregation along ethnic lines were articulated more explicitly than ever before in this document. P. Delius, *A Lion Amongst the Cattle: reconstruction and resistance in the northern Transvaal* (Oxford: James Currey, 1996), p. 140. H. Houghton, *The Tomlinson Report: a summary of the findings and recommendations in the Tomlinson Commission Report* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1956).

<sup>7</sup> Harold Wolpe described this process as the 'modernisation' of the migrant labour system. By the mid-twentieth century, reserve agriculture could no longer sustain rural subsistence to subsidise the cost of social reproduction. Tightened influx controls and political repression thus became necessary to sustain the system of cheap labour power, Wolpe argued. H. Wolpe, 'Capitalism and Cheap Labour Power: from segregation to apartheid', *Economy and Society* 1:4 (1972), pp. 425- 56. The 'articulation of means of production' approach has, however, been subject to wide critique. Bridget O'Laughlin has described the 'four main points to this critique: first, that structuralist approaches reduced gender to class; second, that they minimised the importance and complexity of rural differentiation; third, that they ignored regional specificity, and fourth, that they imposed a rigid teleological model of proletarianisation.' B. O'Laughlin, 'Missing Men? The debate over rural poverty and women-headed households in southern Africa', *Journal of Peasant Studies* 25:2 (1998), p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> P. Wellings and A. Black, 'Industrial Decentralization Under Apartheid: the relocation of industry to the South African periphery', *World Development* 14:1 (1986), pp 1- 38; A. Hirsch, 'Bantustan Industrialization with specific reference to the Ciskei, 1973-1981' (M.A. thesis, University of Cape Town, 1984).

Contemporary commentators on South Africa's bantustans highlighted the context of African decolonisation that had shaped and propelled the promotion of independent homelands in South Africa. In their study of the Transkei, which was to be the white government's example of homeland independence and the first bantustan to undergo the establishment of self-governing parliamentary structures, Gwendolen Carter, Thomas Karis and Newell Stultz noted the comparable process of Britain's promotion of independence for the HCTs and highlighted the significance of developments in South-West Africa (today's Namibia) in shaping the timing of the South African government's promotion of homeland independence.<sup>9</sup> Roger Southall situated the bantustan project in relation to the HCTs in his critique of South Africa's 'neo-colonial' policy through which the white government sought to create a 'commonwealth composed of a white core and black peripheral states'. The promotion of independence in these Territories 'demonstrated the feasibility of separate development' to the South African government and, potentially, to the government's international audience, Southall argued.<sup>10</sup>

However, despite the recognition of the role of processes of African decolonisation in shaping South African homeland policy, comparisons between the bantustans and African decolonisation have most often demonstrated the exceptionalism of the South African case. In so doing, many authors have echoed the logic contained in the South African Communist Party's explanation that South Africa represented a 'special type' of colonialism whereby '[n]on-white South Africa [was] the colony of white South Africa itself.'<sup>11</sup> Nolutshungu, for example, highlighted the significantly different nature of South Africa's political trajectory in comparison to processes of decolonisation elsewhere on the continent.<sup>12</sup> Although Southall's influential political economy of Transkei independence significantly furthered scholarly understanding of the processes underway in this region, his account also aligned with the 'special type' theory, emphasising the different 'decolonising' trajectories of the HCTs and the homelands and, consequently, their 'qualitatively' different relationships with the South

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<sup>9</sup> G. M. Carter, T. Karis and N. M. Stultz, *South Africa's Transkei: the politics of domestic colonialism* (London: Heineman, 1967), pp. xii, 12-14, 91, 124.

<sup>10</sup> R. Southall, *South Africa's Transkei: the political economy of an 'independent' bantustan* (London: Heinemann, 1982), pp. 46, 54.

<sup>11</sup> J. Slovo, *The Road to South African Freedom* (1962) cited in Southall, *South Africa's Transkei*, p. 12. For an account of the intellectual and political history of the SACP's 'colonialism of a special type' theory, see D. Everatt, 'Alliance Politics of a Special Type: The Roots of the ANC/SACP Alliance, 1950-1954', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 18 (1992), pp. 19-39.

<sup>12</sup> S. C. Nolutshungu, 'South Africa and the Transfers of Power in Africa' in P. Gifford and W. R. Louis (eds), *Decolonisation and African Independence: the transfers of power, 1960- 1980* (London: Yale University Press, 1988), pp. 477- 503.

African state. South Africa could not, he argued, be considered a colonial state comparable with Britain or France.<sup>13</sup>

More recently, scholars have argued for the inclusion of South Africa in the historical narrative of decolonisation. Identifying the absence of Britain's dominions (Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa) in the study of decolonisation, Tony Hopkins explores the end of these territories' 'long-established connections' with Britain and their assumption of distinct national identities after the Second World War.<sup>14</sup> Christopher Saunders has traced the late and lengthy decolonisation of Namibia and South Africa, to rectify the exclusion of these states from historical narratives of decolonisation.<sup>15</sup> Both of these accounts identify the moment of 'true' decolonisation for South Africa in 1994, highlighting as exceptional South Africa's late decolonisation. Like much of the literature, Hopkins regards South African apartheid as the 'extreme' and exceptional case among the dominions, highlighting the pursuit of segregation in contrast with other of the dominions where policies of assimilation and, later, pluralism were adopted.<sup>16</sup> South Africa's promotion of independent homelands and the connections between this policy and processes of decolonisation elsewhere are given limited space in these accounts: Saunders' article dedicates two paragraphs to this issue and Hopkins makes no reference at all.<sup>17</sup> These perspectives can be identified in other influential literature on African decolonisation.<sup>18</sup>

Although Southall identified the bantustans and HCTs as representing different typologies of post-colonial, or neo-colonial relations, resulting from the different processes through which South Africa and Britain led these territories to independence, the argumentation used to identify South Africa's exceptionalism may be subject to critique.<sup>19</sup> While an account of the comparison between the HCTs and the bantustans deserves closer scrutiny than can be provided here, some brief evidence is revealing of the rather more close associations between the two than Southall's account might suggest. The discussion below,

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<sup>13</sup> Southall, *South Africa's Transkei*, p.10.

<sup>14</sup> A. G. Hopkins, 'Rethinking decolonization', *Past & Present*, 200 (2008), pp. 211-247, 215.

<sup>15</sup> C. Saunders, 'The Transitions from Apartheid to Democracy in Namibia and South Africa in the Context of Decolonisation', *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 1:1 (2000), pp. 1- 17.

<sup>16</sup> Hopkins, 'Rethinking Decolonization', pp. 222- 224.

<sup>17</sup> Saunders' account describes the bantustans as 'false' decolonisation: "true" decolonisation... requires a transfer of power which enjoys legitimacy in the eyes of the international community", he argues. He concludes that South Africa's 'true' decolonisation only occurred in 1994. Saunders, 'The Transitions', pp. 11-12.

<sup>18</sup> In Frederick Cooper's key account of African decolonisation, South Africa enters the story as an aberration to the rule of African independence. The bantustans episode is mentioned but briefly, and decolonisation is seen as occurring in 1994. Cooper, *Africa Since 1940*, pp. 53-58; 144-155.

<sup>19</sup> Southall, *South Africa's Transkei*, p. 10.

which is necessarily incomplete but nevertheless illuminating, represents just one dimension of an understudied field.<sup>20</sup>

The ongoing dispute over the transfer to South Africa of the HCTs had been the source of deepening discord with Britain since the Act of Union.<sup>21</sup> South Africa had long expected that the HCTs would come into its official political orbit.<sup>22</sup> However, with the election of the Afrikaner nationalists in 1948, and in the context of anti-colonial struggles and growing international hostility to the apartheid regime, by the end of the 1950s it had become clear that incorporation was no longer a viable option.<sup>23</sup> As Britain launched the process of guiding the Territories from self-government to independence, in South Africa a policy of mimicry was commenced that would ‘modernise’ existing patterns of segregation through the development of ethnic national units in which black South Africans might exercise ‘democratic’ rights and ‘national sovereignty’. South Africa’s subsequent withdrawal from the Commonwealth (1961) paved the way for a policy of tightened control over the movements of the black population that was framed in starkly national terms.<sup>24</sup>

Comparisons between the bantustans and the Territories were frequently invoked by apartheid ‘visionaries’ as the government pressed for homeland independence.<sup>25</sup> Such comparisons were drawn between Lesotho and Transkei in particular: Transkei being the largest contiguous reserve area integrated, like landlocked Lesotho, within South Africa’s economy and migrant labour system.<sup>26</sup> In a 1963 speech, Verwoerd reiterated that, should South Africa ‘become the guardian, protector or helper’ of the HCTs, that they would be subject to the same policies of the racial ‘consolidation’ of land and of border industries, as

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<sup>20</sup> For example, the question of South Africa’s short-lived bantustan policy in South West Africa constitutes a central part of the story of the bantustans and that of decolonisation in southern Africa. Under South African mandate, and following the Odendaal Commission, ten ‘self-governing’ areas were established in South West Africa, three of which were granted ‘independence’: Ovamboland, Kavangoland and East Caprivi. A. A. D’Amato, ‘The Bantustan Proposals from South-West Africa’, *Journal of Modern African Studies* 4:2 (1966), pp. 177- 192. By the mid-1970s, this policy had been abandoned. Saunders, ‘The Transitions’, p. 11.

<sup>21</sup> R. Hyam, *The Failure of South African Expansion, 1808-1948* (London: Macmillan, 1972).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> R. Hyam and P. Henshaw, *The Lion and the Springbok: Britain and South Africa since the Boer War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) pp. 102- 117; D. E. Torrance, ‘Britain, South Africa and the High Commission Territories: an old controversy revisited’, *Historical Journal* 41:3 (1998), pp. 751- 72.

<sup>24</sup> R. Hyam, ‘The Parting of the Ways: Britain and South Africa’s departure from the Commonwealth’, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth Studies* 26:2 (1998), pp. 157- 175.

<sup>25</sup> A. Lemon, ‘Lesotho and the New South Africa: the question of incorporation’, *The Geographical Journal* 162:3 (1996), p. 265.

<sup>26</sup> C. Murray, *Families Divided: the impact of migrant labour in Lesotho* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

were being implemented in the bantustans.<sup>27</sup> Yet while Lesotho's independent status was rarely subject to challenge on national grounds and its accession to statehood was received as a 'routine decolonisation', Transkei failed to gain international recognition and became the subject of impassioned attacks by African nationalists and sympathetic parties as 'the greatest single fraud ever invented by white politicians.'<sup>28</sup> As James Ferguson has pointed out, the failure of the South African government to gain international recognition for homeland independence was 'not always obvious or inevitable'.<sup>29</sup> Although the South African government's investment in the economic development of the homelands was limited, the government having rejected the Tomlinson Commission's recommendations for heavy investment in reserve employment in favour of mass resettlement and a minimised version of economic improvement,<sup>30</sup> the levels of funding made available to self-governing Transkei (by South Africa) and Lesotho (by Britain) were not so wildly incomparable, and their respective agendas for the maintenance of investment opportunities similar.<sup>31</sup>

More revealing than the 'typologies' approach criticised above is one that details and interrogates the relationships of imperialism (between colonial states and dependent

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<sup>27</sup> As one contemporary observer noted, 'No one... could escape the conclusion that the intention of the Government of the Republic of South Africa was to turn Lesotho into a bantustan on the pattern of Matanzima's Transkei, or at best a satellite state that would kowtow to Republican whims and fancies.' In 1956 government minister Strydom had described the intention, in line with Tomlinson's proposals, that the HCTs would be administered by South Africa in the same way as other of its reserves. B. M. Khaketla, *Lesotho, 1970: an African coup under the microscope* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), pp. 117- 118. See also J. Ferguson, 'Paradoxes of Sovereignty and Independence: "Real" and "pseudo" nation-states and the depoliticization of poverty', in K. F. Olwig and K. Hastrup (eds), *Siting Culture: the shifting anthropological object* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1997), p. 128. In May 1961, as influx controls within the country were being subject to intense scrutiny, an interdepartmental committee was appointed to investigate the presence and future of 'foreign Africans' in the Republic. The conclusions contained in the Report by Froneman, who was later at the forefront of the drive for mass resettlement into the South African bantustans, highlight the close connections between policies pursued for the HCTs and those for the homelands. According to the report, the estimated 836,000 'foreign Bantu' residing illegally in the Republic (431,000 of whom were from the HCTs) were to be 'totally prohibited' from the Republic and, therefore, 'repatriated', with particular emphasis on the removal of women and children. Republic of South Africa, *Interdepartmental Committee of Inquiry into Foreign Bantu - Froneman Report* (Pretoria: Government Printers, 1962), p. 179.

<sup>28</sup> Ferguson, 'Paradoxes', pp. 127; S. Biko, *I Write What I Like* (1978), cited in Ferguson, 'Paradoxes', pp. 131; G. Mbeki, *South Africa: the peasants' revolt* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964).

<sup>29</sup> A number of contemporary observers – black and white – regarded the newly 'independent' Transkei as a 'not implausible new entry into the world of nation-states'; from 1976 to 1981 Transkei appeared as a nation state on the maps produced by national geographic; and a number of Reagan's advisors were, for a time, not willing to rule out the possibility of recognising the new homeland states. Ferguson, 'Paradoxes', p. 130.

<sup>30</sup> Delius, *A Lion*, p. 140.

<sup>31</sup> Transkei's allocated share of the South African government's 5-year development plan budget for 1961- 1966 was only £9.5 million, for an area 'larger than the Netherlands'. Under this plan, the average annual investment in the Transkei was only 0.5% of total government expenditure for 1961- 1962. These expenditures did not constitute 'a serious effort to develop the reserves in general or the Transkei in particular,' Carter et al. concluded. Carter et al., *South Africa's Transkei*, pp. 176-177. British development aid to Lesotho was not incomparable: in 1965-6, Lesotho received £3.4 million in UK grants and loans. D. Jones, *Aid and Development in Southern Africa: British aid to Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland* (London: Croon Helm, 1977), p. 190.



territories), their character and historical trajectory, and assesses the meanings and significances of decolonisation in this frame. The arguments of Wm. Roger Louis and Ronald Robinson, who have traced the role of American free trade (or, rather, global capitalism) and the '[exchange] of formal control for informal tutelage' in Britain's retreat from formal empire, calling this the 'imperialism of decolonisation', provide a helpful way of framing a potential comparison between the homelands and HCTs by casting focus on the changing nature of imperial relationships in these concrete circumstances.<sup>32</sup>

This leads to a second critique of the 'exceptionalist' argument. Literature on decolonisation in Africa has often focused on processes by which formal political power was ceded by colonial regimes to African national governments. Such accounts have understood decolonisation as referring to the actions and intents of colonial governments. John Hargreaves, for instance, defined decolonisation as the 'measures intended eventually to terminate formal political control over colonial territories and to replace it by some new relationship.'<sup>33</sup> Where studies that have placed greater emphasis on the roles that Africans played in the augmentation of colonial power, the term decolonisation has been usually employed to refer to the moment of the removal of formal colonial rule and the democratisation of national politics.<sup>34</sup> Understood in these terms, South Africa experienced the latest decolonisation across the whole continent, with the advent of majority rule in 1994.<sup>35</sup> The present account finds sympathy with Marxist-inflected interpretations that highlight how bantustan policy reproduced longstanding systems of political oppression and labour control, 'modernising' a system of segregation designed to produce cheap labour by controlling the movements and urbanisation of the black population and the growing numbers of people who became 'surplus' to the needs of capitalist accumulation.<sup>36</sup> However, it may be argued that the frame of analysis in which decolonisation in South Africa is understood only in terms of its 'true' accession to democratic statehood in 1994 offers a limited set of possibilities for extending historical knowledge.

The concept of decolonisation just outlined presents two problems. Firstly, the linear notion of decolonisation – conceived as an endpoint or transition involving the attainment of

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<sup>32</sup> W. R. Louis and R. Robinson, 'The Imperialism of Decolonization', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 22:3 (1994), pp. 462- 511.

<sup>33</sup> J. D. Hargreaves, *Decolonization in Africa* (London: Longman, 1988), p. xv.

<sup>34</sup> F. Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: the labor question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>35</sup> Nolutshungu, 'South Africa and the Transfers of Power in Africa'; Saunders, 'The Transitions'; Cooper, *Africa Since 1940*, pp. 53-58; 144-155.

<sup>36</sup> Wolpe, 'Capitalism and Cheap Labour Power'; Southall, *South Africa's Transkei*.

‘true’ independence (i.e. that recognised internationally) – neglects the role of historical possibilities and contingencies. As Ferguson has shown, making distinctions between ‘real’ and ‘pseudo’ nation states is highly problematic: what came to be considered ‘real’ independence on the international stage was not inevitable, but rather the contingent result of specific historical and political processes.<sup>37</sup> Secondly, conceiving decolonisation as a political process through which independent national states were created, and analysing such shifts at the level of national politics, or in terms of interactions with the former metropole, may lead to the neglect of a range of local-level and transnational dynamics.

How then might decolonisation be better conceived for the purposes of finding new tools to study historical change in, and in relation to, the homelands? Insights may be gained by problematising decolonisation as a moment of political flux. Decolonisation might be used not only as a term to denote a particular pattern of political change but to describe a period – in the case of the bantustans the decades of the 1960s and 1970s, prior to the turbulence of the subsequent decade and during which time homeland independence was being fiercely promoted - in which state institutions, their matrices of power and their local meanings, were being rapidly altered. Seen in this frame, the South African government’s project to create independent homelands with devolved state structures might be productively compared with shifts elsewhere in Africa.

Insights from research on processes of decolonisation in Africa are discussed in detail below. There is, however, a South African literature on class relations in the homelands that provides a central foundation for the intellectual projects proposed in this paper. Scholarly commentators of Transkei’s independence, such as Southall, Duncan Innes and Dan O’Meara, influenced by the lively revisionist endeavour of the late 1970s to reinterpret South African society through the lens of Marxist political economy, focused on an analysis of the class dynamics of homeland independence and the opportunities that this process fostered for political control and capital accumulation by new and existing elites. This research provided important insights that showed how the promotion of self-government in the Transkei, and the decentralisation of control over state resources and creation of a new civil service that this involved, created opportunities for local black elites to ‘collaborate’ and gain a stake in a system that was geared ultimately towards the enrichment of white capital and the white

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<sup>37</sup> Ferguson, ‘Paradoxes’.

minority.<sup>38</sup> These accounts emphasised the importance of macro and systemic analyses of the bantustans in the context of South African capitalism and depicted the bantustan regimes as primarily the result of top-town imposition by the South African government.

Southall argued that even if the homelands could not satisfy the aspirations of the majority of black people in South Africa, they were, in the mid-1970s, 'assuming a momentum and dynamism of their own which could serve to stabilise and perpetuate white domination in South Africa.'<sup>39</sup> Exploring this 'dynamism', Southall sought to 'delineate the various social groups who may be viewed as benefiting from Transkeian "independence"'.<sup>40</sup> The 'principal beneficiaries of independence' were, Southall argued, 'the Transkeian bourgeoisie ['chiefs, politicians, and bureaucrats, and a group of petty traders and businessmen'], international capital and, ultimately, the South African Government.'<sup>41</sup> Southall highlighted the formation of a class alliance among an expanded Transkeian state 'salaried' (which included civil servants of various ranks and a growing group of chiefs and headmen) and the managerial classes tied to South African capital in the Transkei, which formed the support base for the Transkei National Independence Party (TNIP).<sup>42</sup> If Transkei's independence worked in the favour of these groups, by further subverting the labour and the political freedoms of the new polity's residents, the system remained nevertheless illegitimate given the 'indifference' of urban voters in the Transkei, the majority of whom failed to register and whose voices were silenced in a system that privileged rural votes and forced urban dwellers to register in rural areas.<sup>43</sup>

Innes and O'Meara, in their account of class formation in Transkei, highlighted the 'ambiguities' present in the consciousness of the proletariat in this territory, which were shaped, they argued, by the 'structure and relations of South African capitalism'.<sup>44</sup> They highlighted the gulf between, on the one hand, proletarians' understandings of their own oppression and, on the other, the structural conditions of capitalism and labour exploitation that lay at the root of these experiences. Innes and O'Meara rightly highlighted the disjuncture between the material structures of exploitation and the perceptions of these (as

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<sup>38</sup> R. Southall, 'The Beneficiaries of Transkeian "Independence"', *Journal of Modern African Studies* 15:1 (1977), pp. 1- 23; D. Innes and D. O'Meara, 'Class Formation and Ideology: the Transkei Region', *Review of African Political Economy* 7 (1976), pp. 69- 86.

<sup>39</sup> Southall, 'The Beneficiaries', p. 3.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p.11.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>44</sup> Innes and O'Meara, 'Class Formation', p. 82.

Bridget O’Laughlin has also argued for Mozambique).<sup>45</sup> However, they ultimately concluded that the significance of Transkeian independence lay at the ‘level of the imperatives of South African capitalism, their mediation by the state, and the impact on the region’.<sup>46</sup>

While the approaches of these authors hold fundamental importance for ongoing attempts to understand social relations in the homelands, new historical interest brings the opportunity to further interrogate and to better understand class relations and power dynamics and their change over time. For all the major insights of his study, Southall neglected to explore the kinds of politics and circumstances that shaped rural support for TNIP: such support was explained in only brief terms with reference to coercion, patronage, vote rigging and illiteracy in rural areas.<sup>47</sup> While Southall highlighted widespread dissent, he also skimmed over other forms of engagement with the bantustan state. Thus although his account provides a coherent account of the ruling class in Transkei at the moment of independence, it does not offer a satisfactory analysis of state power and its production in relation to the diverse and disaggregated interest groups affected by the processes associated with homeland independence. Innes and O’Meara argued that ‘[t]he real changes’ introduced by Transkeian independence ‘should be situated within the determining context, i.e. the imperatives of South African capitalism’.<sup>48</sup> To this extent, they attributed little importance to understanding local dynamics of politics and power and to their meanings. Like Southall, their main focus was on a ‘collaborationist bourgeoisie’.

In their endeavours to highlight the functions served by the homelands system to South African capitalism, these accounts overlooked the agency of African people in shaping state institutions and governance and in stretching the limits of official power, not only through active resistance but through a variety of other modes of engagement.<sup>49</sup> Identifying and understanding refusals to engage with homeland politics, or highlighting secessionist movements that sought escape homeland rule by allying with alternative political formations—as for example Southall highlights in the attempts of Transkei residents to form alliances with Lesotho and Qwaqwa,<sup>50</sup> will of course continue to be important projects for historical research. Yet a venture of equal importance to historians must also be found in trying to

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<sup>45</sup> B. O’Laughlin, ‘Proletarianisation, Agency and Changing Rural Livelihoods: forced labour and resistance in colonial Mozambique’, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 28:3 (2002), pp. 515- 516.

<sup>46</sup> Innes and O’Meara, p. 80.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 5- 9.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> F. Cooper, ‘Conflict and Connection: rethinking African colonial history’, *American Historical Review* 99:5 (1994), p. 409.

<sup>50</sup> Southall, ‘The Beneficiaries’, pp. 8-9.

understand with what other responses the homeland system was met, and to appreciate the circumstances in which rural elites were able to foster the networks of patronage that are so often referred to but remain little understood.<sup>51</sup> Exploring the modes and effects of the distribution of state resources (pensions, education, land, housing, labour contracts, for example), however limited, as well as the meanings and politics associated with such processes, is central to any discussion of power in the bantustans. There is a need for renewed attention to the decades of the 1960s and 1970s, during which time the state structures of the bantustans were reconfigured. It was in this period that the NP government, through the extensive programmes of the Department of Bantu Administration and Development (BAD),<sup>52</sup> supported by not inconsiderable state financing,<sup>53</sup> undertook a restructuring of the institutions and practices of state in the reserves as part of its project of 'separate development'. Without interrogating the content, the meanings and the historical dynamics of these programmes (of housing, education, industrial development and so on), which constituted the social terrain on which bantustan states were built, it remains impossible to understand the evolution of political resistance to homeland regimes and their eventual collapse.

The endeavours of social historians to reveal and understand local responses to the development of capitalism and the colonial state in twentieth century South Africa provide historians with a rich tradition and strong platform from which to undertake new research on the homelands. Nevertheless, there is a need to critically reflect on approaches to social history and some of the limitations of previous approaches in embarking on new studies. In the late 1980s, Mike Morris and Martin Murray criticised the ways in which South African social historians tended to emphasise popular identity over materialist analysis and often

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<sup>51</sup> As Southall has argued, 'men of prominence in the rural situation have now become financially dependent on the state apparatus of the homelands, and are likely to use this influence to promote support for, and to suppress resistance to, separate development.' 'The Beneficiaries', p. 12. The question this paper suggests historians might ask is: support among whom, how, why, and in what circumstances? The story is not only about those political opportunists, but about the ways in which these people, who came to be representatives of the state, obtained their support.

<sup>52</sup> The renamed Department of Native Affairs was responsible - though not accountable - for public works, legal affairs and all aspects of 'native administration' in the reserves and in urban African townships. These responsibilities were to be devolved in the homelands to respective Territorial Authorities.

<sup>53</sup> The programme of building houses in homeland townships constituted a major budgetary priority for the BAD in these years. Between 1960 and 1969, the South African Development Trust (SADT) (or contractors working for it) built 67,009 houses in a number of townships in the bantustans. M. Legassick, 'Legislation, Ideology and Economy in Post-1948 South Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 1:1 (1974), p. 20; M. Horrell, *A Survey of Race Relations in South Africa: 1962* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1963), pp. 196- 197; *Idem.*, *A Survey of Race Relations in South Africa: 1969* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1970), p. 143; *Idem.*, *The African Reserves of South Africa* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1969), pp. 140, 25.

juxtaposed ‘the state’ and popular ‘resistance’ in problematic ways.<sup>54</sup> Directing his attack at the work of Tim Keegan particularly, Murray pointed to the ways that the ‘new’ social history of the 1980s tended to privilege social divisions of race over those of class, and to over-emphasise levels of social cohesion among black rural dwellers.<sup>55</sup> He argued that the representation of rural African peoples as ‘coherent, homogeneous social entities linked together through similar experiences, common cultural bonds, and shared convictions’ was not only prone to sentimentality, but also overstated the coherence of a group divided by class and gender.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, Murray’s critique continued, this dominant mode of representation overemphasised the strength and resilience of ‘popular struggles’ against agrarian capitalism and overplayed the extent to which these struggles were characterised by expressions of anti-capitalist or anti-colonial sentiment.<sup>57</sup> Although these critiques lumped together, perhaps unfairly, a wide variety of accounts - a number of which were thoroughly informed by class analysis - such critiques do highlight the problem of what Cooper has called ‘autonomist’ accounts of popular anti-colonial sentiment.<sup>58</sup> They highlight the need to question what, in fact, historians mean when they identify ‘resistance’, and highlight the imperative among historians to be wary of metanarratives that ‘tidy up’ and rationalise uneven responses to concrete circumstances, actions that may or may not have been shaped by identification with, or against, a political movement or ideology.

### **Differentiated responses to decolonisation in Africa**

In the context of decolonisation in French and British Africa, Cooper has argued, ‘different groups within colonies mobilized for concrete ends and used as well as opposed the institutions of the colonial state and the niches opened up in the clash of old and new structures’.<sup>59</sup> This formulation is helpful for thinking about the making of South Africa’s homelands. Responses to decolonisation cannot be read off from, or reduced to, a narrative of ‘oppression’ or ‘collaboration’ versus ‘resistance’: whether or not the strategic actions of

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<sup>54</sup> M. Morris, ‘Social History and the Transition to Capitalism in the South African Countryside’, *Review of African Political Economy* 41 (1988), pp. 60- 72; M. J. Murray, ‘The Origins of Agrarian Capitalism in South Africa: a critique of the “social history” perspective’, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 15:4 (1989), pp. 645- 65. For a discussion of the juxtaposition of ‘state’ vs ‘women’, see L. Manicom, ‘Ruling Relations: rethinking state and gender in South African history’, *Journal of African History* 33:3 (1992), pp. 441- 465.

<sup>55</sup> Murray, ‘Origins of Agrarian Capitalism’, pp. 648- 649.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Cooper, ‘Conflict and Connection’, p. 1525.

<sup>59</sup> F. Cooper, ‘The Dialectics of Decolonization: nationalism and labor movements in post-war French Africa’, in F. Cooper and A. Stoler (eds), *Tensions of Empire: colonial cultures in a bourgeois world* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p. 406.

individuals and groups fed into the activities and agendas of nationalist organisations ‘needs to be investigated, not assumed.’<sup>60</sup> It is a task for historians to understand who these ‘groups’ were, how they were constituted, for what ‘ends’ and with what effects, as they engaged with these ‘old and new’ structures of state and power.

Historiographies in modern African history have for more than two decades sought to move beyond paradigms of ‘nationalist’ history that dominated in the years following independence, which identified closely with and legitimated the successes of nationalist movements.<sup>61</sup> Alongside a wide range of scholarly articles, edited volumes on Kenya, Zimbabwe and Zambia have probed the competing visions of independence, the contradictions between different local concerns and national agendas and the ambiguous inheritances of post-colonial contexts.<sup>62</sup>

In these accounts, select examples of which are discussed below, analyses of gender, class and generation have proved key in understanding how responses to political change and state intervention were differentiated in the decolonising ‘moment’. This literature highlights in helpful ways the strategic alliances formed by and among those marginalised in societies dominated by senior men, particularly women and junior men. The following section elicits some of the key theoretical and methodological issues arising from this literature that are of concern for studying histories of the homelands.

Debates in the history of the Zimbabwean liberation war highlight the need to understand in nuanced terms the local politics of the liberation struggle and the nature of social relationships between guerrillas and differentiated local populations. In criticism of Terence Ranger’s tale of ‘peasant consciousness’ in the Zimbabwean liberation war, which posited a widespread ideological commitment among civilians to nationalist guerrilla mobilisation, Norma Kriger contends that contingent, ‘non-nationalist, locally-centred interests’ were crucial in shaping both support for, and lack of co-operation with, ZANLA guerrillas.<sup>63</sup> The liberation war, Kriger has argued, may best be understood as a set of ‘struggles within the struggle’, a perspective that has been supported by subsequent

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<sup>60</sup> Cooper, ‘Dialectics of Decolonization’, p. 406.

<sup>61</sup> One influential example is T. Ranger, *Peasant Consciousness and Guerilla War in Zimbabwe: a comparative study* (London: James Currey, 1985).

<sup>62</sup> E. S. Atieno Odhiambo and J. Lonsdale (eds), *Mau Mau and Nationhood: arms, authority and narration* (Oxford: James Currey, 2003); B. Raftopoulos and A. Mlambo (eds), *Becoming Zimbabwe: a history from the pre-colonial period to 2008* (Harare: Weaver Press, 2009); J. B. Gewald, M. Hinfelaar and G. Macola (eds), *One Zambia, Many Histories: towards a history of post-colonial Zambia* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

<sup>63</sup> N. Kriger, ‘The Zimbabwean War of Liberation: struggles within the struggle’, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 14:2 (1988), p. 317. Ranger, *Peasant Consciousness*. ZANLA stands for the Zimbabwean African National Liberation Army, which was the armed wing of ZANU.

research.<sup>64</sup> In its disruption of established rural power structures, the war presented opportunities for oppressed groups, particularly women and the young, to make beneficial changes to their circumstances through forming strategic alliances with the guerrillas: '[u]nmarried peasant children challenged their elders, women battled their husbands ... and the least advantaged attacked the better off', she argues.<sup>65</sup> In the 'enforced restructuring of rural communities' propelled by the war, established practices governing gendered and generational relations were subject to challenge. Young people, especially men, sought co-operative alliances with the guerillas in order to subvert existing power hierarchies that were dominated by male elders.<sup>66</sup> For young women the war presented opportunities to escape domestic drudgery and to explore new experiences with 'heroic' young men; the reordering of social space in the bush camps and protected villages allowed young women to wrest control over their own sexuality from male and female elders.<sup>67</sup> But while Kriger highlighted the high levels of coercion and violence underpinning the success of guerrilla mobilisation,<sup>68</sup> David Maxwell has argued that 'guerrillas worked out locally specific strategies to respond to the differing agendas they perceived amongst the peasantry.'<sup>69</sup>

This literature exposes how the guerillas' operations were shaped and limited by unequal and uneven rural social relations. In the context of deeply divided gendered and generational relations, the war exposed social cleavages, opened up new social 'spaces' and allowed room for new alliances to be formed. It presented opportunities for some to improve their social status and access to resources, while simultaneously challenging established power hierarchies. The success of the guerillas' efforts to establish local regimes of power rested on their ability to play these local politics and power relations to their advantage. These insights help to elicit new points of inquiry for the homelands: they point to the need to interrogate the limits of local power regimes, and the roles of local social relations, uneven as they were, in shaping the form, content and production of state power in its various guises.

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<sup>64</sup> M. Kesby, 'Arenas for Control, Terrains of Gender Contestation: guerrilla struggle and counter-insurgency warfare in Zimbabwe, 1972-1980', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 22:4 (1996), pp. 561- 584; D. J. Maxwell, 'Local Politics and the War of Liberation in North-East Zimbabwe', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 19:3 (1993), pp. 361-386.

<sup>65</sup> Maxwell, 'Local Politics', pp. 319- 320. Kriger, *Zimbabwe's Guerilla War*, cited in Maxwell, p. 384.

<sup>66</sup> Maxwell, p. 374. Kesby has argued that '[T]hrust by circumstance into positions of authority, young men found it possible to construct a powerful new masculinity based on martial potency which enabled them to secure control over people and access to women and material resources... young men desired the power of the patriarchs and in the extraordinary context of the war they were able, temporarily, to usurp it.' Kesby, 'Arenas for Control', p. 578.

<sup>67</sup> Maxwell, p. 375; Kesby, pp. 579- 580.

<sup>68</sup> Kriger, 'The Zimbabwean War of Liberation', pp. 312- 313.

<sup>69</sup> Maxwell, p. 386.



Social cleavages - particularly the widely marginalised status of rural women - shaped the formation of formal political alliances in the decolonising 'moment'. Marc Epprecht has argued that in late colonial Lesotho, women's apparent political 'conservatism' in their support for the Basutoland National Party (BNP), which was formed by chiefs (and supported by the Catholic church) in opposition to the more 'radical' Basutoland Congress Party (BCP), had little to do with either political passivity or naïvety. Instead, such tendencies stemmed from the ambiguous political spaces women were inclined to enter into in order to articulate their grievances and to find strategic ways of protecting their interests.<sup>70</sup> For example, the Catholic church, 'ostensibly conservative' as it was, offered spiritual refuge and livelihood opportunities for young women seeking escape from rural patriarchy.<sup>71</sup> Women chiefs, in the earliest public role to be opened to women in Lesotho, tended to act in the name of custom in order to resist the detrimental material impacts of rural 'improvement schemes' that were so unpopular among peasants.<sup>72</sup> In the context of male migrant absenteeism, patriarchal styles of chieftainship were gradually adapted to encompass greater consideration of women's complaints, in particular the defence of their right to brew and sell beer. The protection of women's livelihoods remained in the material interests of chiefs, lest they be burdened with the responsibility of support of the poor.<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, 'radical', 'modern' and 'progressive' politics claimed by the BCP were more so in name than in substance, as these factions professed gender equality while also eschewing prejudice against assertive female behaviour.<sup>74</sup> This research highlights key questions that need to be asked of the history of homeland politics: how, when and why did women (and young people, if we are to incorporate insights from the Zimbabwean literature) align themselves with particular political parties and formations in the homelands; with what effects; and how can these alliances be located in the material context of unequal and dynamic social relations?

Literatures on the local reception of rural state interventions remain important stimuli for further research on the homelands. Priya Lal, for example, has recently explored the limits of state power in the implementation of *ujamaa* in postcolonial Tanzania.<sup>75</sup> Her

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<sup>70</sup> M. Epprecht, 'Women's "Conservatism" and the Politics of Gender in Late Colonial Lesotho', *Journal of African History* 36:1 (1995), pp. 29-56.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>75</sup> *Ujamaa* refers to the ideological programme of villagisation, for the purposes of improving 'peasant' production, that formed the cornerstone of Nyerere's policy in post-colonial Tanzania. P. Lal, 'Militants,

account shows how the practices of rural people rarely conformed to the gendered constructions of family that underpinned *ujamaa* ideology and policy. Instead, rural men and women who were the targets of villagisation policy sought to engage with the project of *ujamaa* in ‘ways that maximised their own self-interest.’<sup>76</sup> In the ideologies of *ujamaa*, the responsibilities of rural men and women in the revolutionary project were distinct: young men were charged with responsibility for the militant defence of the new nation through the enforcement of villagisation, while women’s contribution to nation-building was to be as ‘devoted mothers’ ‘both of [their] own children and by extension of the nation as a whole.’<sup>77</sup> Nevertheless, in practice, young men and women (as in Kriger’s case), made strategic alliances and employed concepts of security and self-reliance in selective ways, in accordance with their own needs and circumstances and in relation to enduring practices of livelihood and association. Where young men complied with official orders to enforce resettlement, this was often with a view to maximising their own status and independence in relation to male elders.<sup>78</sup> The nuclear family at the centre of *ujamaa*’s ideological project, for which women were charged with the responsibilities of care and reproduction, proved a smokescreen for the endurance of historical and flexible familial arrangements, as individuals ‘approached family as a contingent social resource and survival strategy, and formed and dissolved marital and kinship alliances’ in response to their own needs for security.<sup>79</sup>

In thinking about responses to state development interventions there is, of course, a comparable literature on the impacts of and responses to so-called ‘betterment’ measures in the South African reserves during the 1950s.<sup>80</sup> Local relations with chiefs were heavily shaped by their association with these programmes, which involved fencing, relocation, land reallocation and stock limitation and impinged materially, and often dramatically, on the lives of rural people.<sup>81</sup> Yet the responses of those affected by betterment planning were cut across starkly by gender and generation, as Anne Mager has shown. Mobilisation against betterment in the Ciskei reserves was marked by changing generational masculinities. Older

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Mothers and the National Family: *ujamaa*, gender and rural development in postcolonial Tanzania’, *Journal of African History* 51 (2010), pp. 1- 20.

<sup>76</sup> Lal, ‘Militants, Mothers and the National Family’, p. 2.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 5- 6.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 12- 14.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 18- 19, 2.

<sup>80</sup> Delius, *A Lion*, pp. 139- 171. See also C. de Wet, ‘Betterment Planning in a Rural Village in Keiskammahoek, Ciskei’, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 15: 2 (1989), pp. 326- 345 ; F. Hendricks, ‘Loose Planning and Rapid Resettlement: The Politics of Conservation and Control in Transkei, South Africa, 1950- 1970’, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 15:2 (1989), 306- 325.

<sup>81</sup> Delius, *A Lion*, pp. 139- 171.

men had mobilised around the threat posed by stock limitation on their abilities to fulfil dominant constructions of masculinity through owning and extending their cattle holdings. However, in the context of the transformation of patriarchal power which saw young migrants' status improve and older men become dependent on their wages, by the mid-1950s younger men, denied opportunities to establish themselves as cattle owners and land holders, sought to reconfigure patriarchal discourse in the language of African nationalism.<sup>82</sup> In contrast, rural women in the vicinity of the Ciskei, marginalised and impoverished in a patriarchal society and a labour market dominated by men, saw moving onto land owned by the South African Native Trust not simply as an act of 'collaboration', as those opposed to betterment may have perceived, but as a viable strategy to improve their livelihoods:

If collaboration with the Trust meant access to land, if co-operation with the authorities allowed women to work, if acceptance of Trust regulations meant women could feed their children and retain their self-respect, then this was an option they would exercise.<sup>83</sup>

In allocating land to single women, the Native Trust 'undermined the domestic patriarchal order and strengthened the power of the state' by forging positive relations with marginalised rural populations.<sup>84</sup> There remains significant further scope for new investigations of state interventions in the bantustans in subsequent decades that employ this revealing and nuanced methodology to reveal the gendered processes through which state power was produced and reproduced.

These accounts foreground the importance of locating differentiated local responses to decolonisation in all its various forms – liberation wars, political allegiances and state planning interventions – within analyses of historical and social change. The emphasis they place upon the contingent material circumstances that shaped different responses to the realities of the decolonising 'moment', and the ways in which individuals pursued strategic means to 'concrete ends', offer crucial ways of reinterpreting acts otherwise understood as marking 'collaboration' or 'resistance'. By focusing on the dynamics of relations between nationalist organisations and differentiated local populations, and between such populations and the state, these approaches suggest new avenues for historical study of the homelands. They stress the importance of exploring shifting power relations and attempts to establish

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<sup>82</sup> A. Mager, 'The People Get Fenced: gender, rehabilitation and African nationalism in the Ciskei and Border region, 1945- 1955', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 18:4 (1992), pp. 771- 777.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 778.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 781.

local hegemonies, whether by militant political formations or by agents of the state, through prisms of gender, generation and class.

The writings of Frederick Cooper, perhaps more than any other historian, present some crucial points of departure for thinking about histories of the homelands. Although homeland regimes were crucially implicated as agents in the systems of control that had long promoted white supremacy, cheap labour and capital accumulation, the meanings and the outcomes of bantustan policy were neither clear cut nor static, and localised responses to these interventions were neither predictable nor even across time and place. Cooper has shown how the coming of independence in west Africa was characterised by ‘possibility and constraint’, as, in particular historical moments, various political options were opened up and closed down.<sup>85</sup> ‘What gets lost in narrating history as the triumph of freedom... is a sense of process’, he argues.<sup>86</sup> In seeking to understand the contingency of historical process in the coming of independence Cooper suggests that historians need to identify ‘moments of divergent possibilities, or different configurations of power, that open up and shut down’, and to ask ‘[j]ust how wide were those possibilities? And how much did actions taken at any one of many conjunctures narrow trajectories and alternatives?’<sup>87</sup>

In the case of the South African homelands, these formulations highlight the need to interrogate key moments that have been subsumed within highly politicised national narratives of oppression and resistance. The promotion of independent homelands has been largely seen as a process driven from above by the South African government and opportunistic homeland elites, as a political shift that protected the intensification of labour exploitation, and as one that found little popular support from below.<sup>88</sup> On the other hand, the ‘reunification’ of South Africa and the collapse of homeland administrations into national and provincial structures has been most commonly identified, it may be argued, as an outcome of successful popular struggle against the apartheid regime and its subsidiary homeland governments. The object here is not simply to refute such explanations, but to subject them to critical scrutiny. There were surely a range of uneven processes that played roles in the making – and undoing – of regimes of power and influence. These processes cannot be understood in abstract terms; rather, they are constituted in the practice of local

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<sup>85</sup> F. Cooper, ‘Possibility and Constraint: African independence in historical perspective’, *Journal of African History* 49:2 (2008), pp. 167- 196.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 169.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> Wolpe, ‘Capitalism and Cheap Labour Power’; Legassick, ‘Legislation, Ideology and Economy’; Southall, *South Africa’s Transkei*; Innes and O’Meara, ‘Class Formation and Ideology’.

policy and politics, and particularly in the allocation of resources, that shaped the relations formed between states and local people.<sup>89</sup> Further research on these themes, in a range of different contexts, is imperative if deeper understandings of the homeland regimes are to be forged.

A fundamental question is thus how to understand the historical evolution of the bantustan state and its practices in local contexts. Cooper highlights the need to recognise the uneven and changing nature of indirect forms of chiefly rule, and suggests how other notions of political power and the ‘social contract’ played a role in shaping forms of governance across Africa in the post-war period.<sup>90</sup> The power of homeland chiefs and officials – appointed and salaried by the white colonial state, often reliant on land allocation for local influence and possessing limited downward accountability – might be subject to further scrutiny around the ways in which such figures constituted their authority (or, indeed, failed to do so) in the coming of homeland ‘independence’ and thereafter. Historians might ask, for example, what processes were implicated in the making of homeland authority and governance in highly populated bantustan areas, such as Ciskei or Qwaqwa, where chiefs had little land to allocate and thereby to establish structures of patronage.<sup>91</sup> The role of ‘non-agrarian’ resources controlled by the state – housing and residential sites, schooling, healthcare, pensions, access to migrant contracts, local business opportunities and employment – are little understood in terms of the role of these resources in forging relations and new political dynamics between the state and local people in the homelands. The key analytical thread of Cooper’s work in this regard is the notion of the ‘gatekeeper state’:

...strong at the point where ex-colonies meet international institutions... Developmentalist ideologies are crucial to the gatekeeper state, for they define the terms in which foreign aid is appealed for. The gate faces inward as well and represents a potent source of jobs and patronage. At the same time, local politicians cannot rest on their modernizing claims to authority or on the modern state’s patronage apparatus but must mobilize political support and clientage on a variety of fronts, in a variety of cultural idioms. The gatekeeper’s alleged

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<sup>89</sup> To this extent, recent debates on ‘the social’ are instructive. See particularly P. Joyce (ed), *The Social in Question: new bearings in history and the social sciences* (London: Routledge, 2002); *Idem.*, ‘What is the Social in Social History?’, *Past and Present* 206 (2010), pp. 213- 248.

<sup>90</sup> Cooper, ‘Possibility and Constraint’, pp. 173- 179.

<sup>91</sup> Sharp has pointed to the importance of ‘non-agrarian’ resources and state patronage in Qwaqwa. J. Sharp, ‘Relocation, Labour Migration, and the Domestic Predicament: Qwaqwa in the 1980s’ in J. Eades (ed), *Migrant Workers and the Social Order* (London: Tavistock, 1987), pp. 32- 33. This finding is echoed in L. Evans, ‘The Makings and Meanings of Homeland Spaces: a social history of resettlement in the Ciskei, c. 1960- 1976’, (PhD thesis, University of Sheffield, 2010), pp. 159- 184.

modernity does not necessarily constitute a hegemonic ideology much beyond the site of the gatekeeper's toll booth.<sup>92</sup>

Postcolonial African states, like South Africa's bantustans, inherited developmentalist ideologies and policies from the colonial past, and continued to be integrated in highly unequal, imperial relations that were sustained through such policy interventions.<sup>93</sup> The state as gatekeeper presents a useful point of departure for seeking ways to better understand the making and the meaning of bantustan states, and the specific ways that elites mobilised political support and clientage at local levels. As has been shown above, writing on the bantustans has hitherto focused on the fact of these structures of clientage, but has largely ignored the history of these and the idioms and local relations through which they were forged and practiced.

This historiography on African decolonisation raises a set of questions that may help to frame new scholarship on South Africa's homelands. The emphases that Cooper, Kriger, Epprecht, Lal and others have placed on concrete, material circumstances and social inequalities lead us to question how, through projects that underpinned and accompanied homeland independence, relations between state structures and local people were constructed across a variety of contexts. How, and in what terms, we might ask, did people call upon homeland regimes for access to state resources?<sup>94</sup> Did homeland regimes manage to establish localised structures of hegemony, and if so, how were these constructed- both materially and discursively? What contingent circumstances allowed bantustan state structures (however precarious and weak they may have been) to attain accommodation among some residents of the bantustans, and how were they challenged? Such points of inquiry demand that 'citizenship' – in terms of the ways that local relations were constituted around state resources – be taken seriously as an analytical problem. It may be instructive to draw connections between the homelands and other decolonising African contexts, in relation to the roles and effects of developmentalist policies pursued by late colonial and postcolonial states.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society*, p. 465.

<sup>93</sup> Louis and Robinson, 'The Imperialism of Decolonization'.

<sup>94</sup> The history of mobilisation around ethnicity in the homelands period seems to be a crucial avenue for further research, as the work of Peter Lekgoathi has shown. S. P. Lekgoathi, 'Chiefs, Migrants and North Ndebele Ethnicity in the Context of Surrounding Homeland Politics, 1965- 1978', *African Studies* 62:1 (2003), pp. 53-77.

<sup>95</sup> Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society*; *Idem.*, *Africa Since 1940*, pp. 20- 65.

## **Farm dwellers and resettlement in the Ciskei**

A brief discussion of research on the resettlement of farm dwellers into rural townships in the Ciskei helps to elicit some of the arguments developed above.<sup>96</sup> By the 1960s, farm labour in the Eastern Cape was widely proletarianised: few farm workers had access to land and payment was widely made in cash and food rations. Farm workers and their families frequently left in protest against low wages and conditions, and went in search of better circumstances on other farms in the area. The 'squeeze' upon farm households produced by agrarian capitalisation and state labour controls precipitated some crucial gendered and generational changes in rural society. In turn, these changes had profound influences on the dynamics of resettlement: differential positions of gender and age fundamentally shaped experiences of resettlement from the farms.

Although some of the people evicted from farms who resettled in the Ciskei lost livestock and access to land as a result of their eviction, and experienced great trauma in the process of resettlement, few of those who arrived in the late 1960s and early 1970s came solely as a result of the coercions of farmers and state labour inspectors. Many resettled families, evicted from farms, had moved around for long periods of time in search of secure tenure. With few other options, house and plot in the resettlement townships provided a secure base for migrant families and an opportunity to escape conflict with farmers over the labour of young migrant men. Some young couples moved to the resettlement townships to set up their own homes. Gaining access to education, to further efforts in migrant job-seeking, was another consideration for parents and young people escaping the farms for the townships.

Some young men, having long been migrant wage earners, sought access to better-paying contracts via the labour bureaux that were close to resettlement townships, where their families could reside without having to fulfil the condition of farm residence by working for the farmer. Moving the family from the farms to the resettlement areas, and thereby assuming responsibility for the care of elderly parents, represented for many migrant men the adoption of a dominant position in the household. These migrants were also able to escape some of the greatest privations of life both on the farms and upon arrival in the resettlement areas. In contrast, women and young men who had been permanent residents on farms prior to their resettlement faced constant threats of eviction from white landlords. The end of degrading, undervalued and underpaid labour on the farms was for these people posed in

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<sup>96</sup> For a full discussion of this case study see Evans, 'The Makings'.

crucial relation to finding autonomy in the new townships. Yet while leaving the farms may have brought a sense of spatial ‘liberation’ from landlords and from the tight control of farm life, this nevertheless went hand in hand with the greater economic exposure that came with extrication from the ‘softening’ aspects of paternalism, most notably rations.<sup>97</sup>

The resettlement of farm workers proved a crucial dynamic in the making of state institutions and their influence at a local level. As Jeff Peires has shown, in the context of the Ciskei’s land consolidation programme, resettlement enabled aspirant chiefs, by claiming ‘ancestral’ land, to achieve territory and a base of patronage simultaneously.<sup>98</sup> Although the resettlement townships of Sada and Ilinge were initially administered by the BAD, the resettlement of farm dwellers proved a similarly crucial dynamic in the making of local structures of state and authority. In the context of the high demand for housing among farm workers and widespread deprivation in the resettlement areas, the state was able to forge structures of patronage and social control that deeply permeated the economy of the townships through the distribution of township housing, limited local employment and food rations through the local offices of the Department, which were adjudicated by township superintendents and known locally as the ‘Trust’.<sup>99</sup>

The creation of local employment under the administration of the Department tied resettled people into webs of rent-paying, and created the basis for new relations between local people and state institutions. Such regularised structures of dependency were both intricate and totalising. Rent payment enhanced the gendered complex of control focused on the prevention of women’s permanent urbanisation. By trapping resettled women into regular employment, and deducting rent from their wages, by binding households into rent payment on a lease-to-buy basis, and by tightly regulating the payment of rent, the utilisation of state resources served to reinforce migrant labour by preventing out-migration to the cities, except through regulated channels for male labour recruitment.

These highly regulated structures were, in 1972, inherited by the new administration of the Ciskei bantustan, and became subject to new imperatives of political patronage. For the period in which the Ciskei administration in the townships was able to allocate housing plots, and to distribute basic goods and access to migrant and local work contracts, the local regime was able to foster, albeit temporarily, a limited form of legitimacy amongst former

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<sup>97</sup> See Evans, ‘The Makings’, pp. 185- 220; *Idem.*, ‘Gender, Generation and the Experiences of Farm Dwellers Resettled in the Ciskei Bantustan, South Africa, c. 1960-1976’ (forthcoming).

<sup>98</sup> J. Peires, ‘Ethnicity and Pseudo-Ethnicity in the Ciskei’ in W. Beinart and S. Dubow (eds), *Segregation and Apartheid in Twentieth-Century South Africa* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 264- 267, 259.

<sup>99</sup> Evans, ‘The Makings’, pp. 159- 184.



farm dwellers and other marginal groups newly resident in the Ciskei. A number of farm dwellers described attitudes towards the Ciskei authorities that were rather less than hostile and were founded on a level of confidence in the Ciskei regime's delivery of housing and basic services.

In the light of similar evidence of farm dwellers' resettlement experiences in other parts of the country, it seems likely that such dynamics might be identified in other of the homelands.<sup>100</sup> While far from complete, this picture begins to suggest how the material conditions faced by farm dwellers and workers on commercial farmland created a set of circumstances in which resettlement opened up spaces of opportunity not only for aspirant chiefs but also for the poorest and most exploited inhabitants of the countryside who sought to find ways to better their migrant strategies. This evidence demands that we think carefully about localised processes of resource allocation, whether through personal patronage or regularised policy, in the making of power relations and state structures in the bantustans. Evidence pointing to the gendered experiences of resettled farm dwellers', while incomplete, points to further opportunities to examine gendered dynamics in the production of power and authority at local levels in the homelands.

## Conclusion

In the recent past theoretical parallels between the bantustans and African decolonisation have been understandably rejected, given the pressing agenda to condemn oppressive homeland governments and the system of racial capitalism they were invested to protect. In seeking inspiration for ways to better understand the creation of the homelands system, and in looking for tools to examine social relations and the production of power in this context, this paper has sought to connect the history of the bantustans with that of decolonisation elsewhere in Africa. Literatures on the social history of Africa, which interrogate diverse aspects of the decolonising 'moment', encourage new ways of thinking about the South African government's bantustan project, the making of these devolved state structures, the

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<sup>100</sup> The attraction of moving to bantustan townships has been cited by others. Examples include I. Niehaus, 'Relocation into Phuthaditjhaba and Tseki: a comparative ethnography of planned and unplanned removals', *African Studies*, 48:2 (1989), p. 164; J. Sharp, 'Relocation and the problem of Survival in Qwaqwa: a report from the field', *Social Dynamics*, 8:2 (1982), pp. 14, 18; *Idem.*, 'A World Turned Upside Down: households and differentiation in a South African bantustan in the 1980s', *African Studies* 53:1 (1994), p. 76; C. Murray, 'Struggle from the margins: rural slums in the Orange Free State', in F. Cooper, *Struggle for the City: migrant labour, capital and the state in urban Africa* (London: Sage, 1983), pp. 287- 311; *Idem.*, *Black Mountain: land, class and power in the eastern Orange Free State, 1880s to 1980s* (Washington D.C., 1992), p. 215; Desmond, *Discarded People*, pp. 85, 96; SPP, *Volume 2*, pp. 94, 212- 213.

experiences of people living in the homelands and the connections of these experiences to the construction and disintegration of power regimes in the bantustans. Through a brief case study of resettlement in the Ciskei, the paper has sought to demonstrate how these approaches might be employed as part of a wider theoretical agenda to interrogate the history of the bantustans as institutions that, through the decentralisation of state resource provision and everyday practices of governance, forged new relations between state and local people with sometimes surprising outcomes. These programmes fostered a range of different responses and alliances, and produced political outcomes, that only detailed historical inquiry can elicit.