

A valuable addition to the history of rural resistance in South Africa

Thembela Kepe and Lungisile Ntsebeza (eds), *Rural Resistance in South Africa: The Mpondo Revolts after Fifty Years*

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The history of the Mpondoland Revolt has been a subject for debate for some time in the rural resistance history of South Africa. It is therefore fitting that the editors and contributors of this book decided that while many academics and others, interested in the issues of rural resistance history and its direct results were revisiting their consequences, they completed their research by re-evaluating the Mpondoland Revolt, tracing the 50-year period from when it occurred. The Mpondoland Revolt refers to the action taken by the iKongo to reject the tribal and self-government of the Transkei, initiated by the Bantu Authorities Act of 1951. During a protest held in the district of Bizana, community members in the crowd called upon Saul Mabude, a tribal authority to explain the contents and implications of the Act. His failure to do so angered these members to the extent that they ultimately destroyed his house in protest. This sparked what later became known as the Mpondoland Revolt.

The book addresses a number of topical issues which appear to have been neglected by scholars in writings about rural resistance in South Africa. It is divided into three parts, namely Part One, which discusses the revolts; Part Two, dealing with the influence of the revolts; and Part Three, which explores their meaning and significance. These three parts comprise 13 chapters written by prominent scholars who are experts in various disciplines such as history, sociology, anthropology, politics and geography. The contributors address a range of broad topics relating to the revolt.

Part One deals with the historiography of the Mpondoland Revolt, an analysis of the revolt, and its contextualisation in the rural resistance history of South Africa. This part of the book situates the revolt in the broader context of the popular struggles against colonialism and apartheid. In his chapter, Ntsebeza succeeds in situating the causes of the revolt as resulting from the dissatisfaction with the introduction of rehabilitation schemes and the passing of the Bantu Authorities Act by the apartheid regime. In his chapter, Pieterse begins with the premise that the revolt had an impact on the politicisation of members of the ANC in the Eastern Cape region and successfully examines different sources in justification of this assertion. Drew then provides an analysis of the writings by Govan Mbeki on the revolt. According to Drew, Mbeki had close contact with the leaders of the uprising, making his writing one of the few authoritative sources on the revolt. In his chapter, Beinart argues that there is very little evidence in the literature about the individual experiences and political trajectories of the leaders of the revolt. His conclusions are based on interviews conducted with Leonard Mdingi and Anderson Ganyile. These

interviewees linked the general dissatisfaction of the 1960s with the outbreak of the revolt. He also dedicates a few pages to the lack of consultation on issues pertaining to the Bantu Authorities Act as a contributory factor. In the final chapter of Part One, Hendricks and Peires unpack the reasons why this revolt was a hotbed of resistance against the Bantu Authorities and the so-called Betterment Scheme. Interestingly, they also advance arguments on the divisions in the chieftaincy of the Mpondo people. Here, the contributors highlight the divide between Western and Eastern Mpondoland.

Part Two tackles the direct and indirect influence of the revolt and comprises only two chapters. These chapters attempt to answer questions on the impact of politics and the organisational abilities of Mpondo migrant workers in the urban areas. They dispel the myth that urban politics have a direct influence on political organisation in rural areas. Using the Mpondoland revolt as a case in point, the contributors show how the rural influence in fact enhanced the organisational capacity of trade unionists and activists in urban areas who played a role in this kind of struggle. Moodie and Phundulu's chapter traces Phundulu's role as a Mpondo migrant worker who later became one of the founding leaders of the National Union of Mineworkers. According to him, the revolt had an immense influence on his politicisation in his childhood years. The second chapter, authored by Sitas explores the consequences of the revolt. The immediate aftermath of the unrest, he argues, spelt hunger and rapid proletarianisation. He tracks the journey of the migrant workers who came from Mpondoland and subsequently resided in the Durban hostels where they lived in abject poverty. Of particular interest in this chapter is how Sitas links the Mpondo Revolt with the industrial focus of what happened in KwaZulu-Natal in later years.

Part Three of the book focuses on the meanings and significance of the revolt. In chapter 9, Wylie narrates the shocking incidents of what happened on 6 June 1960. On this fateful day, the police helicopters dropped teargas on a gathering on Ngquza Hill. This was followed by open fire on the crowd and 11 people were killed. In this chapter Wylie succeeds in highlighting the role of the magistrate courts and the district surgeon in the worsening of the name-blaming turmoil in the aftermath of the shooting. The findings of the Van Heerden Commission, outlined in the report that followed, are also interrogated in an attempt to determine the root causes of the shooting. As mentioned in this chapter, the shooting erased the trust that once characterised the paternalistic form of colonial government in the Transkei. Müller's chapter provides a recollection of what transpired at Ngquza's Hill. Unlike other chapters, this one devotes much attention to the understanding of the Pondoland landscape and its relationship to the recall and representation of the revolts. Visual interpretations explaining the Ngquza Hill site during the shooting are inserted in the chapter.

In chapter 11, Steinberg addresses the different meanings of the Mpondoland Revolt in the eyes of the ordinary Mpondo people today. His visit to the area of Lusikisiki gave him a broader understanding of the area. In Lusikisiki he spent some

time with one of the families, talking about their impressions of what had happened. Kepe, in chapter 12, deals with post-apartheid rural land reform in the context of the Mpondoland Revolt, the results of which formed part of his research conducted in the Eastern Cape for a PhD thesis. His study reveals how differently villagers responded to the implementation (or non-implementation) of the land reform programme. The quest for land rights in the subsequent years after the revolt drew strength mainly from the Mpondoland Revolt. The observation in this chapter is that land reform, as one of the key post-apartheid policies in South Africa, has been slow in terms of meaningful implementation in many rural areas, including Mpondoland. Then follows a chapter by De Wet, in which he discusses the contemporary nature of rural resistance as imposed on Eastern Pondoland. Interestingly, he argues that fifty years after the last of the Mpondoland revolts, the ordinary people of Mbizana continue to exercise their collective agency to defend their right to shape their own lives. In the chapter different developmental projects, such as mining, are discussed despite incisive criticisms of such initiatives.

The book's value is enhanced by the inclusion of visual diagrams. There is a select, albeit very comprehensive list of sources after each chapter, which attests to the thorough research that has been done over a period of years. Kepe and Ntsebeza have succeeded in assembling a team of academics to contribute to the topical issues pertaining to the Mpondoland revolts after fifty years. It is recommended that those interested in the history of rural resistance in South Africa should read this fascinating and thought-provoking book.

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