

CHAPTER NINE

on

Worker consciousness, ethnic -
particularism and
nationalism: the experiences

of a South African migrant,
1930-1960"

William Beinart

This chapter is based on a series of interviews conducted with one man in Bizana district, Transkei, in 1982.! In calling him M, it is not the intention to conjure any sense of romantic mystery about his life although there is a quality of excitement about his memories. His lot, like that of most Africans in white-dominated South Africa, has been one of hardship. Born around 1925, perhaps a little earlier, he shared in the general experience of his generation of youths in Pondoland, migrating to work as an unskilled labourer on the Natal sugar-fields and Rand gold-mines. His description of that period of his life is similar to that recounted by other former migrants and offers striking insights into the linked worlds of compounds and rural homesteads. But neither should the designation M suggest that he was the prototypical Mpondo male migrant. M was sought out specifically not so much for a record of his working life but because of his significant political role in the late 1950s, a period which culminated in mass urban and rural mobilisations in Natal and Pondoland. For unlike many of his rural peers, he had by then moved to Durban, an urban environment and broader political involvements. More than most, he was able to push beyond the networks and ideas of rurally based migrants, but without completely losing his earlier identity. Indeed, it was only during the course of detailed interviews about the Pondoland revolt of 1960 that he began to recall fragments of his earlier experiences. These then increasingly came to dominate the discussion. And it is these, largely, that are offered here because they seemed to reveal a number of relatively unexplored strands in the consciousness of African migrant workers.

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-A chronicle of one manâ\200\231s life cannot explain or capture the totality of social change, nor can ideology and consciousness be reduced to one manâ\200\231s ideas. However, an exploration of an individualâ\200\231s experience can illuminate patterns of change and elements of broader consciousness. Biography can only be part of the raw material from which social history is constructed. But in its own right, set in context, it can suggest routes for social analysis obscured by the generality and bluntness of sociological concepts and categories. Mâ\200\231s memories, not

least because of the variety of his experience and his transition from
rurally based migrant to nationalist political activist, raise issues which
_ are important to an academic analysis of the changing patterns of
African political ideas and organisation in South Africa. In particular,

- his memories require that such concepts as worker consciousness,
_ ethnicity and nationalism (all of which could be said to be present and
intertwined in his political thinking), their content and the connections

between them, be further examined.

* M was born and brought up in Bizana, the coastal Transkeian

district which borders Natal.² (It is well known as the epicentre of the

* 1960 revolt and more recently as the site of a casino complex which

may become second only to Sun City.) His father had no cattle of his
own and, when he wished to marry around 1920, found himself a
beggar for bridewealth from his male kin. He started his family with
â\200\230nothing, absolutely nothingâ\200\231, accumulating only a few head by pur-

chase from his wages as a migrant labourer. Mâ\200\231s father was also very
- much a traditionalist with scant respect for mission education. How-

ever, some of the members of his fatherâ\200\231s family, among whom they
were settled, were both better off and, though not necessarily Chris-
tian, more â\200\230progressiveâ\200\231 in their attitude to schooling. Indeed, M
perhaps exaggerated only slightly when he recalled that his own father
was â\200\230the only one who was a bhunguâ\200\231, member of a traditionalist youth
organisation, in their cluster of homesteads. The family was also settled
very near to Bizana town in the centre of the district.

In Pondoland as a whole at the time probably less than 10 per cent of
children of school-going age actually attended school. But M found
that his peers were being educated and there was considerable pressure
on him to join them. While his mother gave him support, his father
would not provide him with clothes. Being near town, however, he
was able to find a way around his fatherâ\200\231s indifference. Bizana was
hardly a metropolis, although it was larger than some of the other
Transkeian trading and administrative centres, not least on account of
its importance as a recruiting post on the routes of Pondoland to Natal.

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By 1936 the village population reached 469, including 257 white and Coloured people, in a district of close on 58,000. Some of the inhabitants were no longer poor frontier traders but wealthy businessmen. They had sufficient resources, and the appropriate self-image, to sustain a golf course â\200\224 thus providing a little seasonal employment for children in the vicinity. â\200\230We used to be caddiesâ\200\231, M remembered, â\200\230a round of nine holes was three pennies, that was something.â\200\235 Then he also â\200\230had luckâ\200\231. He â\200\230struck friendship with the son of a lawyer here in Bizanaâ\200\231 for whom he caddied. The lawyerâ\200\231s wife would give him â\200\230a piece of jobâ\200\231, saying, â\200\230When you have finished I will give you a shirt.â\200\235 Thus M acquired clothing for school and, achieving some economic independence from his father at an early age, pressed through rapidly to Standard V and â\200\230became very brightâ\200\231.

Ms life had begun to take an unusual trajectory for the son of poor and uneducated Mpondo parents. His urge for education, and his success in proceeding further at school than the average rural youth, were to have an important influence on his later life. They helped determine what kind of rural youth association he was to join, a central social commitment, and where he would migrate to work. But Mâ\200\231s passage to higher education was abruptly halted in 1939 when his father decided to move. Bizana still had frontiers for settlement in the 1930s; despite considerable in-migration, a coastal belt roughly ten miles wide remained sparsely inhabited. Coastal grazing was good â\200\224 the area had largely been used as winter pasturage â\200\224 but the sandy soil was not highly productive. Nevertheless, population pressure in some inland spots persuaded many families to migrate coastwards into the large and remote Amadiba location; general reliance on wages reduced the necessity for them to depend on rural production alone. Mâ\200\231s father found a site in what was to become, in the next few decades, a location with a large and mixed population of increasing political importance in the district. (Areas along the main road near the casino may now become almost peri-urban.)

As most youths went away from home to a major mission institution once they reached high school, the move did not necessarily preclude further education. M had in fact spent a brief period working on the wattle plantations just across the border with Natal to raise cash. But by now his father was ill and could not migrate to work. And shortly after the move â\200\230we got a message â\200\224 by that time my brother had gone to the mines to work â\200\224 that my brother had died. . . . Everything now rested on my shoulders.â\200\235 Local jobs generally necessitated some post-school qualification. Though the mines sometimes took males

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under 18, most youths from eastern Pondoland, and more especially from Bizana district, took their first few contracts as unskilled workers on the Natal sugar estates. There was no effective age limit or medical test, and the local traders specialized in supplying youths to the estates. So that at about 15 or a little older (1939/40), M signed on with a trader in Amadiba for a six-month contract.â\200\231

Memories of their first few visits to the sugar-fields die hard in the minds of many older men in Bizana. They went on foot to the railhead

in southern Natal, then entrained for their estate or for a clearing-house. M found himself in a compound in Durban called Thandabantu (Lover of people) where he was resold to Gledhow sugar estate. As soon as they arrived on the estates, migrants were given their working clothes a sack with holes cut for head and arms. Plantation discipline was notoriously harsh and M recalled that the compound manager was an aggressive chap, everybody shivered when they saw him: all this for wages of less than £2 a month and little chance to earn a bonus.

Though they may have been far from home in a harsh environment, youths from Pondoland were generally among people from home. By this time, Indian workers, apart from those in supervisory roles and in the mills, had left the sugar-fields. (Few estates still had their own mills.) And though seasonal labour from neighbouring farms supplemented that of the core migrant labour force there were not many Zulus there. Zulus did not want to go and work in the sugar-cane fields. The compounds were manned mostly by the Pondos; the Zulus felt that to go to the sugar-cane fields was degrading. Migrants from Pondoland to the sugar-fields were entering into one of the well-established patterns of migration from specific rural districts to particular area of employment. The importance and tenacity of these ethnic patterns of migration should not be underestimated. Nor were they essentially imposed by employers, although they often provided the latter with advantages. Through such networks, workers could retain contact with home and establish defensive structures at work. The consciousness of rurally based migrants cannot be understood until these patterns of migration, and the associational forms and networks which arose, are uncovered. In this sense, ethnicity was an important element in developing migrant organisation and consciousness. It is arguable that in the earlier phases of South African industrialisation particularist associations at work made self-protection and organisation possible, rather than constrained them.

It was at the sugar estates that M first came into close contact with the indlavini, the male associations established about a decade before,

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around 1930, which had begun to lure youths with even a smattering of education from the traditionalist bhungu groups.* He had been aware of these groups at his father's old home near Bizana town and their

style and activities on the sugar-fields appealed to him. Although I did

not join up there, I said I must line up with the indlavini and not with the amabhungu. M joined on his return to Amadiba after working out his contract; the attachment remained a primary loyalty throughout his life. The indlavini groups had grown directly out of an earlier youth subculture, but not organisation, known as the imirantiya, which spread through the eastern Transkeian districts in the 1920s, Those who remember the term imirantiya probably a vernacular rendering of migrantâ in Pondoland say it referred to people who just wander aboutâ. Such youths wandered about in the sense that they had broken away from the highly localised bhungu groups which were often restricted to just one location, and to which most young men then still belonged. The imirantiya were impatient with the deeply rooted traditionalist character of the bhungu expressed in their forms of song, dance, social relationships and dress. They were social innovators in all these respects, meshing the experience of school and compound with the older forms of rural youth organisations. At that stage they did not have a strong base in particular locations. Relatively few in number, they would gather from all over Bizana, and even beyond, at large meetings or weddings. The indlavini were the more localised organisations and groups which, as numbers increased, emerged from this imirantiya subculture.

Samuel Mazeka, a founder member of an indlavini group in Bizana in the late 1920s, recalled that they had formed these much tighter associations for the purposes of self-regulation, fighting strength and control over courting. They had also adopted a distinctive form of dress, including baggy bell-bottom trousers apparently copied from Bhaca migrants on the Rand. Indlavini groups were primarily rural associations. They met every Sunday, entabeni, on the hills, and governed themselves through a strict hierarchy of posts. They eschewed supervision by older men, drawing up a code of rules relating to courting, access to women, loyalty and discipline, fighting and weapons, as well as membership lists and lists of girlfriends, all recorded by each group's secretary. They recruited aggressively especially among those who had been to school but dropped out early to move into contract labour. The imirantiya and indlavini subcultures extended local male networks, linking youths from different locations and districts in eastern Pondoland and providing a tight associational

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attachment for those leaving their blankets behind. But they remained

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explicitly district based and âMpondoâ in their identity. L1 i oe
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received a little education and ES coming â\200\230detribalisedâ\200\231, but shifting the content of what it meant to them â\200\224 perhaps forging a new ethnicity.

While it is hardly surprising that M avoided the Hn did his father more education than the average member of the indlavin:.

ly not in the milieu of i> reflected the fact that he was clear 7 1 of u aa but not always from wealthier Christian a i bd Cons as boarders to major mission ie or oe : in the case o i | youth groups. He was not, as in nn Mda (now elected MP for Bizana and a of by rs parliamentary opposition in Transkei), one of a > > i i lati high was active in the la the Bizana Students Association with ThSge i i h youths tended quickly p during school holidays. Suct y ee i ifl hnic identity and form wide confines of a specifically et : Se i ing l lture of a national "elite, though their way to sharing in the cu : eT i i i ? bership of the indlavini help had its regional shadings. Mâ\200\231s mem ; ER or him i iti d culture. His education did, hc : anchor him in local politics an a l p in Ama . him to become secretary of an indlavin g Ri a of an intellectual of and adviser to groups 2 a Even today they always come to me for advice and all that from } ni eroups all over the district.â\200\231 on re once to the sugar fields, and then, from 1941 to ne four contracts to the gold-mines which offered higher Wpr ho was by no means unusual for Mpondo migrants, although : youths might return to the sugar-fields on a a before going north. Like many Mpondo migrants, e 3 i East Rand Proprietary Mines rr near aot Wl a ierants went to the mines rom most Tr : rd Sal men from the same district sometimes 0 0 establish themselves in ta Tin ns ry a l opu Randfontein on the West Rand had been pc SR ieth century when Mackenzies, one : i od many to the Robinson mines with be ee Once there, in Angelo compound, ERPM, M wor underground.

d at one stage I was offered k underground. You understand : ai a simply because clerks are paid low wages and you

donâ\200\231t mix with your own people. I donâ\200\231t know why, I liked staying with my

people in the compound.

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â\200\234You have to belong somewhere
on the mines more generally.

M's sense of belonging to a group operated at different levels, but number of these involved attachment, in different ways, to a specifically Mpondo identity. He not only encountered the indlavinis; on the sugar-fields but also, as a member, on the mines. Indlavini groups could on occasion be important in organising their members to go out to work. And while they were essentially rural associations, they could be strong in compounds at labour centres with large numbers of workers from Pondoland. There, because youths were removed from home and thrown very largely into the company of their male peers, the groups could be quite cohesive. M lived in a section of the compound with all workers from Pondoland but, he insisted, â\200\230while I was in the mines, everybody knew that I was an

indlaviniâ\200\231, The groups organised many of their own leisure-time activities. They were â\200\230centred in certain placesâ\200\231.

ea\200\231, mused M, discussing his experience

There was Bhaca indlavinis . . | indlavinis from Mount Ayliff, indlavinis from Lusikisiki, Flagstaff and Bizana. When we come back from work then we 80 out and wash, have our meal. Go out and sit there â\200\224 the Bizana indlavinis have their own group. . . . They were the same indlavinis as in the rural areas. We had been recruited to work in the mines and when they were there they formed these groups. We used to have competitions with other compounds â\200\224 we sing, we play and all that. From our area, Bizana, we had our inkosi, our indlavini chief. But when we are going to have competitions then we vote for one chief from the whole of Pondoland.

M was also at great

disciplined peopleâ\200\231 and that their stru went beyond leisure activities. Such

patterns both of control and of protest in the compounds; â\200\230we are recognised by the manager there, the compound manager, he must know that there are indlavini thereâ\200\231. (Although Bhungu-type also functioned on the mines they apparently tended to lack Â¢ cohesion of the indlavini and to accept the authority of older migrants.)

In certain contexts, however, Mâ\200\231s identity as an indlavini could be subsumed in a sense of belonging to a larger Mpondo group. There were, of course, men from many other rural areas in Angelo compound, but they tended to be housed along â\200\230ethnicâ\200\231 lines â\200\224 as perceived

by managers and many workers themselves. â\200\234There was one wing for Pondos, one for Bhacas, one for Shangaans, one for Zulus.â\200\231 Perhaps he exaggerated when he remembered that â\200\230groups like Bhacas and Pondos, Pondos and Zulus never mixedâ\200\231 in their living quarters.

pains to make it clear that the â\200\230indlavini are highly

ctures of authority and obedience
groups could be of importance in

groups
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l him and they start
to the Zulu side, the Zulus do not know
Nard ring all sorts of things. They hit him and pe he Ss
back : the Pondos then the Pondos start arming. . . . That was what usually
sparked off faction fights.

M described the derogatory image which various groups held of one

another. The â\200\230Shangaansâ\200\231, perceived to be particularly hh 2 ry
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ices, Â sed by the Pondos, so much s
homosexual practices, â\200\230were despi Â° 2
Pondos said â\200\234the Shangaans are not men, they are just womenâ\200\235â\200\231.
Agai ;
â\200\234Xhosas speak of Pondos as boysâ\200\231 because Mpondo men were no

â\200\234circumcised. M did not like these divisions and, perhaps imposing an

i 9 licy of the mines . . .
is since developed, he felt it was â\200\230just the policy of
CE what a causing all the faction it os . But hh
i in a â\200\230faction fightâ\200\231, he fully recognise

he was not personally involved in a â\200\230faction fy ay
internal dynamic and power of the identities mo i
SE And he did have immediate experience of a conflict oe
directly reflected the â\200\230ethnicâ\200\231 and sexual tensions in the compound. Wh
en
he was still an ordinary labourer, lashing,

id, â\200\230I think you have made
boy suggested love to me. Well, I said, !
: a SE e wanted to force me. And then we fought i right
a top of the shaft. His friends came to help him and I was driven down.

ite miner had to separate them. ed x
Bate) of jobs and control of sexual relationships came within
the orbit of other kinds of organisations in some ma at % es

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. The Isitshozi, modelled on the ines
a leading black criminal organisation in 1 3 ne
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a Whereas migrants from Pondoland at the turn â\200\231 the So
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l to the mines and closely loc

pis Ry long-timers, from Pondoland, too, a > decades ik
: f the gangs. The Isitshozi were â\200\230mainly
It was they who formed the core o : y
i few Bhacas; there were som
Pondo, Xesibe and a few Bhacas, very rp

ho ll, but mostly Pondosâ\200\231. The m
Xhosas, hardened Xhosas, as we , i

Randfontein and Boksburg, strongho

EE in with a friend from home who was a

igrants from the area. M fell in with a frien ,
a and joined himself. â\200\234Those people are the people rl
eople on the mines; I wanted to know exactly why and how a l
Ws membership was, he claimed, fairly peripheral in that he : = /
anybodyâ\200\231. He had a scarce resource â\200\224 â\200\230fortunately I had that bi
>
a â\200\224 so that he could do other duties. â\200\234These tough guys respecte
I used to write letters and read papers.â\200\235
a â\200\230that these people were running the business on more or less

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army linesâ\200\231. They organised â\200\230stealing, or burglary from white houses, storesâ\200\231. They controlled the paths around the compounds and mines at night. A member was â\200\230really free, nothing will ever harm you whereas if you know nothing you are in troubleâ\200\231. The leaders ran the gangs from disused mines (esigodanent) and prisons, but the organization was also strong within some compounds such as ERPM. And though migrants from Pondoland may have accused Shangaans of being women, M found that among his own people â\200\230miners were not encouraged to go out and meet women outside but were doing homosexuality here inside the compoundâ\200\231. â\200\230Although the Shangaan excelled in this even the Pondos were doing it; it was something that was open.â\200\235 The pressures of massive single-sex institutions and the constraints on getting outside the compound reinforced the strength of the â\200\230controlling bodyâ\200\231 of homosexuality, the Isitshozi. Members, including those established in the mine hierarchy, would supervise the recruitment of boy-wives from youths coming fresh from Pondoland.

At that time, right inside the mines it was terrible. The work was very very hard. So much that a person would fall unconscious because of the hard work. It was very hot inside the mine. . . . The baas boys said: â\200\230If you agree to be my wife then I will give you a better job.â\200\231 White managers might find that there were dangers in having strong gangs in the compounds, but some at least accepted and exploited such lines of control within the workforce. Mr McLucky, a compound manager who himself hailed from Tabankulu, Pondoland, would say: â\200\230Hey, look here, I donâ\200\231t want anybody to go out courting women because you get sick. We have got enough women here inside the compound.â\200\231

Unlike the indlavini, the Isitshozi was not an association which itself bridged the urban and rural areas; it was not, apparently, carried back to Pondoland. But the gang as a whole, and its various branches, was associated with migrants from specific rural districts and with the compounds they favoured on the Rand. Such linkages were affirmed by the patterns of recruiting for the gang, by its leadersâ\200\231 sense of their own history and by the fact that individual members did go back to the countryside. Recruits were â\200\230told about the forefathers of the whole thing . . . people like Mamsathe, Mamsatheâ\200\231s group at Boksburgâ\200\231. Indeed, Mamsathe was from Mâ\200\230s home location, Amadiba; â\200\230I met him when I came back from the mines.â\200\235 The hard core of the gangs was probably only â\200\230a few hundredâ\200\231 in number, but very many more migrants had some experience of them.

While gangs and homosexuality, apparently operating along largely

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ethnic networks in the compounds, were a product of the divisions and institutions described, they could at the same time reinforce ethnic identities and associations. Women at home, according to another informant, were aware of and not necessarily opposed to such practices. They were known to warn their husbands or lovers against consorting with the opposite sex, with â\200\230Sothoâ\200\231 women outside the,

compounds, because of the dangers of venereal disease. Men without women were also less likely to form permanent liaisons in town. Such heterosexual, cross-regional relationships were no doubt of importance in the breakdown of ethnic particularism and the growth of a more generalised urban working-class culture, although this aspect of African proletarianisation has been little studied. Certainly, Hellman's portrait of a Johannesburg slum yard in the early 1930s, with its mixed population, its high proportion of cross-ethnic marriages and its lack of particularist networks stands in stark contrast to compound life as described by M. Yet, probably the majority of workers who came to Johannesburg, at least until the Second World War, were housed in compounds, and this had important implications for the patterns of worker consciousness that emerged in South Africa. To suggest that M's experience on the mines was predominantly one of close involvement in various groups, serving different purposes, associated with his rural background and ethnic identity is not to argue that he lacked worker consciousness. In the first place, these were the associations of workers and played a considerable part in the way that migrants responded to their position at the place of work. Secondly, although Isitshozi gangs and indlavini groups could be tight organisations, their members did not have to be closed to the rest of the urban world. Certainly M felt that the necessity of obtaining permits, and the dangers of tsotsis (urban location gangs), greatly discouraged contact with people in locations. But the compounds were not closed and it was during this period that M first started to take an interest in broader political issues. He was still yearning for education, although I was an indlavini . . . I read newspapers that was during the war and I was very interested in everything that was taking place.

And thirdly, he did develop contacts with migrants from other areas, particularly in the process of working underground where teams were more mixed. He learnt other languages: I was very good in Shangaan; I used to work mostly with Shangaans. Even though shift bosses, and black boss boys protecting their own, could divide jobs in the underground teams along ethnic lines, these groups of workers could develop solidarity as underground miners. M recalls particularly the efforts

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he made to incorporate into his team a Tswana youth, who had great difficulty communicating with other workers.

M does not remember that wage levels on the mines were a particular issue for him during his early contracts. Indeed, after his fight with the â\200\230Shangaan boss boyâ\200\231 he became, as did most established Mpondo

migrants, a â\200\230machine boyâ\200\231. A skilled driller had the opportunity to earn

a better wage and bonuses. Although the machines, and the work, were heavy, â\200\230it was worth itâ\200\231. He claims to have worked up to earnings of â\200\230Â£7

a month and it was much better compared with the ordinary labourerâ\200\231. During 1946, however, M did remember that wage issues came to the fore; â\200\230we struck work and we refused to go undergroundâ\200\231.

The African Mineworkersâ\200\231 Union had been launched in 1941 under the leadership of J. B. Marks. By 1944, it claimed 25,000 members and its conference drew â\200\230700 delegates from every mine, 1,300 rank and file membersâ\200\231 and â\200\230a telegram of support from the Paramount Chief of Pondolandâ\200\235."! But it could not organise easily in the compounds. The union was â\200\230based in Johannesburg proper and they were not allowed to enter the minesâ\200\231; to Mâ\200\231s knowledge there was â\200\230nothing at allâ\200\231 in the

way of union organisation among Mpondo migrants. They first heard of the action through â\200\230pamphlets telling us about the strikeâ\200\231, and â\200\230papers distributed inside the compound and on our way to the mineâ\200\231. Workers certainly responded â\200\230because people were underpaid and when they say work nine months it is not ordinary monthsâ\200\231. But for M and apparently the majority of workers in his compound, there was no real involvement in worker organisation.

Oâ\200\231Meara sees the strike as an important moment of transition from peasant to proletarian consciousness. The growth of the Mineworkersâ\200\231 Union was indeed a significant episode, but its longer-term effect is by no means so clear. Migrants had long been conscious of their wages and conditions. But in Mâ\200\231s compound, at least, and perhaps elsewhere, it seems that the internal organization of the strike depended on networks such as those described rather than the union itself. These were associations of people being proletarianised, and through which workers could defend themselves, but they were not essentially class-conscious worker organisations. How such particularist associations operated in different compounds in the 1946 strike, the actual progress of the strike, and the position of the gangs which may have been threatened by, or may have supported union organisation, all require more investigation. The collapse of the union after 1946 may suggest its roots were insufficiently deep to withstand state repression.

M had not neglected to build up his rural base while on the mines.

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Like the vast majority of migrants from Pondoland he had invested some of his wages in cattle which were â\200\230very cheapâ\200\231 at the time (c. n 10s. a head).!2 By 1943, on his contract on the mines! : me only Â£10, and one contract on the mines,

re RE laid down five head for lobola (bridewealth) to which his father added four. In the next few years, taking over his father's role in Amadiba, he bought plough, planter and all the household implements. Such investment of wages affirmed and cemented

rural links. After completing his contract in 1947, he stayed at home for over a year, perhaps closer to two. His father was now just soon to die, and his marriage was under pressure. During his initial contract his wife had been going out with another man; despite his long absences he felt this to be unacceptable although he did forgive her. But the family needed a wage income. A traditionalist with no education would probably have had little choice but to return to the sugar-fields or the mines. M was certainly now in a position to earn : relatively reasonable mine wage, but he was unhappy with compound

conditions and underground work; he also wanted to maintain closer contact with home. Thus in 1949 he went to Durban, arranging a job

through a contact from Bizana an ex-policeman who worked as a

clerk in Wispeco (the Wire Industries, Steel Products and Paint Company). He said he would fix me up with a job and I am a bit of trouble with the pass. Ja 2 a day worked at the firm for 12 years, and visited home regularly. : in the ports often reflected and reinforced slightly broader cultural indentifications among migrants from Pondoland, and so it was with M. He lived in a more mixed environment at the S.J. Smith hostel near the city's industrial area. Although it was for single men, there was little of the tight male organisation which he had encountered on the mines, and little homosexuality. Women were not allowed to go in but they did; access to town was also easier. I was quite different, we were just together Zulus, Shangaans . . .". At work he was mostly with men from Natal farms and he made sufficiently close contact to travel up to weddings and visit families far afield as Mooi River. He also decided to continue his education and signed on with the Efficiency College. And at least one of his links with home was loosened in that his wife again formed an attachment with another man in Bizana and they were finally estranged. Now in his late twenties, he began to expand his cultural horizons and political involvements in Durban. It was the Defiance Campaign in 1952, the protest against apartheid

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led by the Congress movement, which brought him into closer contact with an explicitly political organisation.!?

They were holding meetings and I was very interested in the spirit of the ANC at that time, people going to jail. . . . I was involved but I didn't go to jail myself although I was very keen to go to jail. . . . What the police did as the campaign got hotter, they simply didn't arrest people. Our group would walk the streets the whole night and the police would simply laugh at us. M's entry into a nationalist political movement requires some explanation. The focus of the Defiance Campaign, after all, was essentially on urban issues such as night curfew, segregated facilities and pass raids on the streets. Certainly these were real and oppressive enough to urban dwellers, but they hardly seemed to be central questions in M's experience as a migrant before he arrived in Natal. Indeed, he does not recall that rural issues were particularly important in pushing him into broader political associations; and migrant labour itself seemed so much at the centre of his experience that he had neither the ideas nor the machinery to change it. The African National Congress (ANC) programme at that moment hardly succeeded in translating rural and migrant experiences into the nationalist political platform. Initiatives taken in the 1940s to organise migrant workers on the mines, and in the sugar industry, had faded. Activists were now seeking to mobilise a mass movement through campaigns on national and race-discrimination issues rather than by taking up the demands of peasants and workers. They had only limited success among Africans in Natal. There, the ANC still had few branches and was in the throes of displacing its provincial leader, A. W. G. Champion, with Albert Luthuli. There was certainly a general politicisation as apartheid laws began to bite. But this did not, for most, involve the commitments developed by M; the ANC had not yet become a mass movement. M responds to questions about this phase of his politicisation in a variety of ways. His shift away from compound life, which partially encapsulated the majority of migrants from Pondoland, provides the context for this important transition, a shift which was related to his early education. It is also important to stress that he did not immediately become a nationalist organiser, or even absorb all the ideas current in the Congress movement. Rather, he was now personally affected by the issues which Congress was bringing to the fore, those that most immediately affected urban residents, and the ANC therefore seemed the logical organisation to join. He had personal experience of police brutality on the streets. Contact was certainly made easier by the fact that an ANC branch had been established in the S. J.

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Smith hostel reflecting its more open character in comparison with mine and estate compounds although M does not remember the hostel dwellers as highly politicised. And through such links he came to attend political meetings and was particularly inspired by the speeches of Bertha Mkhize, long an Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (ICU) and ANC activist in Natal. Of course, many migrants from Pondoland and elsewhere, even hostel dwellers who

shared a similar background, did not become so involved. But M

points to his long interest in broader political issues and general sense of enquiry manifested in his following of news in the papers. He also maintains that he was very aware of the need to participate in

organisations and associations which might answer to the pressures inherent in the specific conditions of oppression which he experienced. This is not to equate the indlavini with the ANC or to suggest that many indlavini joined the ANC in the 1950s, although there are indications that such groups shared in the general politicisation of the time, composing songs against â\200\230Malanâ\200\231s lawsâ\200\231 and the â\200\230d ompasâ\200\231. However, M does see a parallel in their stress on organisation and discipline; and it was through attending Congress meetings as a rank-and-file member over the next few years that he began to develop a more generalized political analysis. : :

While M was broadening his involvements in town, he still kept in touch with other migrants from Pondoland in Durban, visited home and retained strong links with the indlavini. It was a loyalty to a particular association in Bizana, to a form of Mpondo rural identity expressed in the morality, social roots and rules of the group. M was not particularly hostile to the traditionalist bhungu groups although he recalled how the indlavini distanced themselves from them; â\200\230we used to call them amafilistiyaâ\200\231 (philistines). He could accept, even respect, them because they had values, particularly in connection with women and fighting, which indlavini to some extent shared. His vitriol was reserved for the so-called amanene, or gentlemen, who, he felt, betrayed Mpondo rural values. 5

- By the time of Mâ\200\231s adulthood the term amanene, originally used of close councillors to the chief, later of the educated Christian Ælite, also had ironic connotations. It referred to those youths of Christian families who were constrained neither by the traditionalism of the bbhungu, the discipline of the indlavini, nor the behaviour expected in the church. M might indeed have become one of them, for they tended to stay longer at school, without becoming professionals, or to migrate to town locations rather than compounds. They were not formed into

associations, but shared a wider, urban-based culture. While there had been few such youths in Pondoland in the 1930s, they had become, by

the 1950s, a significant and identifiable social category, at least in the eyes of M and his fellow indlavini.

They were seen as particularly dangerous and unprincipled; rural tsotsis. Two features of their behaviour seemed to M the most unpleasant.

Why is there that? Why the indlavini hate the amanene? The amanene come from more or less the same Christian families. But they differ in this way. They are not a group. And they believe in fighting with a knife. They believe in stabbing. They believe in bribing parents of the girls . . . they go straight in there and then go into the girl's house, the girl's room, and they sleep there. With the result that most of these girls who are in love with the amanene get pregnant and the indlavini do not want that.

The indlavini met girls away from home or at weddings; in M's view, the girls who are in love with the indlavini rarely get pregnant. Though they were renowned for their strong-arm tactics at weddings, and their willingness to fight, indlavini used sticks and clubs only. It is essential to understand these elements in M's identity and morality for he was still very committed to them so much so that in 1954 he

participated in a major fight between indlavini and amanene at Amadiba.

They had taken over our wedding. We were not invited there; the amanene were invited instead of us. Then we wanted to go and break that wedding. We went there and a fight took place. The amanene were armed with bush knives, swords, spears, hatchets. We were only armed with sticks. If you see this scar here [points to forehead] this is a bushknife here. I was lucky I

didn't die.... But we drove them away, we got an upper hand. The indlavini are skilled fighters.

He was fighting against elements of a more generalised urban location culture that was seeping into rural districts.

During the later 1950s, M drifted away from indlavini activities at home as he became more absorbed in politics in Durban. After nearly ten years, he had risen to a clerical position at work, and was earning top wages of £5 a week. But this did not increase his security; on the contrary, he was sacked in 1958. The management, he argued, got rid of black workers who were becoming too expensive and replaced them with younger and cheaper staff. His political activities no doubt contributed to the decision. For by now he was becoming more involved in trade union activities at the place or work, reflecting the increased stress that the Congress movement began to lay on worker

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organisation through the South African Congress of Trades Unions

(SACTU). M was now more wedded to town life and had new emotional attachments in town. He also tried to secure an income without resort to employment in a white-owned firm which rendered him so vulnerable. I had bought two sewing machines and I was doing a little sewing. He continued studying so as to achieve fluency in English. And during the next two years he moved from his position as

a rank-and-file follower to that of political initiator. His lines of

political involvement took him back to the rural areas. There were many men who could bridge the worlds of urban Congress politics and the Transkeian elite. Many of the ANC activists came from rural Christian families and found nationalist politics through Lovedale, Fort Hare or other leading educational institutions. But there were few who could make the bridge to the ordinary peasant/migrant. His political mentors recognised this in him, and he recognised it in himself, at a time when Congress, swept along by events, was beginning to perceive more clearly what was involved in organising an alliance of worker and peasant.

During his political work he became friendly with M. P. Naicker, a radical member of the Natal Indian Congress, by this time banned from political activity but still influential in Congress circles and local editor of New Age. In the mid-1940s, Naicker had seen the potential for organisation on the sugar-fields at the time when the African Mine Workers' Union was reaching its peak on the Rand. A union was set up, and considerable publicity given to the atrocious conditions on many estates. But no permanent organisation was achieved. Now Naicker, together with Moses Mabhida, SACTU leader in Durban, sent [M] out to go and organise the sugar cane workers'. The choice was apt. Not only was it necessary for any organiser to understand the language, associations and concerns of migrants from Pondoland if he were to have success, but he had also to escape the notice of compound managers, ever vigilant for agitators'.

- Yes, since I was a Pondo I didn't have much trouble. I was regarded just as a visitor who had come to visit friends. Of course I did not dress like an urban African. I tried to dress like the Pondos: just an ordinary jacket, khaki shirt, khaki trousers with patches . . . looked more or less like a Pondo.

He found himself back in an environment from which he had been absent, except for occasional visits, for over a decade.

Though M might have been as good a person as was available, his efforts met with little success. He was, he felt, breaking more or less virgin territory for unionism and he saw his failure largely in terms of

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the highly controlled nature of the compounds. He found that even if he got into a compound with ease, the indunas and policemen would soon

find out "if you have got something to say". And though he tried to

strike friendship with indunas, and later draw them into the discussions, many did not want to co-operate. He was only able to meet

three or four people at a time. Moreover, the workforce was so transient that his contacts would sometimes have gone home between his visits

and he would have to start all over again. He also felt he had erred in

starting at Tongaat. It was one of the biggest companies, employing a large number of workers and easily accessible from Durban, But Tongaat had consistently kept one step ahead of other sugar companies

in the facilities it offered and was thus a relatively popular place of employment." Although the wages leave much to be desired the living - conditions are much better and even food is much better. M and his

advisers felt we cannot make a breakthrough here. He switched his attention to less salubrious estates where he concentrated on telling the workers about low wages . . . better conditions of work and also the

living quarters, which were very dirty and even food was no better than

that of pigs. M did feel that, despite his inability to establish any

organizational base, he had made important contacts with migrants in the compounds and instilled some broader political consciousness. The

sugar estates, short of workers because of industrial expansion, were beginning to make conditions more attractive, offering extra meat rations and bonuses. According to one former compound manager this helped to undercut any potential unionisation. !A®

M now began to perceive the political potential of the rural areas more clearly, and to see the need for more co-ordinated organisation, Up to this time, he had tended to accept, following the lead of most Congress leaders, that the cutting edge of politics was in town, and that it would take years to educate rural people. His experience on the sugar-fields helped to make him realise that it was also urban leaders who needed to be educated in rural issues. More important was the fact that in 1958-59, rural Natal exploded in political protest and Congress, though it could hardly keep up, expanded rapidly in the rural areas and found, of necessity, that rural issues became of far greater importance in its programme. M began to travel to Pondoland more regularly. He was quite aware of the dissatisfaction and now widespread unease over rural rehabilitation schemes and Bantu Authorities. In Bizana it was rumoured that the government would establish a plantation. He made closer contact with a man he had known for some time, Theophilus Tshangela, near his home at Amadiba.

Tshangela's background was very different from Mâ's. He was born around the turn of the century into a relatively wealthy peasant family: immigrants into Bizana from the Cape, Anglicans and considerable

roducers of crops. Tshangela received some education and, apart from his involvement in the family farming and trading activities, became locally employed as dipping foreman. He had no experience of migrant labour, mines and sugar-fields, nor of male migrant associations. During the 1940s, when he was approaching middle age,

he left the family lands nearer to town and migrated down to Amadiba location to establish a new homestead. Lack of land played its part in motivating his move as well, for he had become a large stock-owner.

He was particularly keen on horses, which he had begun to keep, oe even to breed and sell, on some scale. He became known as one of the most successful owners at the regular race meetings held in Transkeian districts at the time. One of the attractions of Amadiba was the expansive and relatively under-utilised communal grazing. He was known to be outspoken and independent-minded. Because of his wealth, influence and popularity, he soon became a leading councillor at the great place of the Amadiba chief, Gangatha. He also SR the district council. Tshangela hardly seemed a candidate for radica political leadership; but, unlike some men of similar background, he was not one of the Ålite who became strong government supporters in

. the political events that begun to unfold in Pondoland.

Tshangela began to move away from Chief Gangatha in the late 1950s as the state started to put pressure on the chiefs to support their rural programme. (Amadiba, with its rapidly growing population, was becoming an important part of the district.)

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h talk about the rehabilitation schemes, about these Sedu off and all that. So Tshangela was quite Ea about all these things. He was being paid by the Bunga for being a mem but he decided to leave the job. And he was paid handsomely by the chie for being his adviser . . . but he left that too.

Tshangela was concerned about the strength of popular feeling a the chief and the government's plans. He resented the way in which 7 government was going about implementing the schemes. Perhaps e was worried about the threat of stock-culling; large owners were to have a disproportionate number of animals confiscated. Mâ's kraa was near Tshangela's.

i i i liked a lot and he wanted

I t to see him at his house, his kraal. ... Weta as certain things; I had brought with me a copy of New Age; that was the pro-ANC paper. He was very interested and we discussed the paper. . . .

Told him to keep every copy I sent him, because when I go back we will discuss what was said in the paper. I will say that we had great influence on Mr Tshangela. :

M may exaggerate this influence. But Theophilus Tshangela became perhaps the second most important leader of the rebels in 1960.

It should not be thought that the ANC, or any other national organisation, played a major role in the disturbances of 1960.¹⁷ The leadership of the hill committees was local and the national organisations followed rather than initiated the action except in the sense that the revolt in Pondoland took place at a time of general political turmoil. The aims of

the leaders in Pondoland were still significantly particularist. They were

fighting for a limited local independence from state authority and a form of local political authority which was answerable to the people. Their struggle was certainly related to the broader changes in the national political economy, and the movement increasingly imbibed some more general ideas of political liberation. But with significant exceptions, such as Govan Mbeki, Congress leaders did not fully recognise the importance and potential for organisation in Pondoland.¹⁸ Even the Unity movement, which had a longer record of commitment to rural mobilisation, and the Pan- Africanist Congress (PAC), which attracted significant support from Transkeian migrant workers, do not appear to have made much impact.

Nevertheless, there was scope for involvement by those in national organisations who could build bridges and win trust locally. Anderson Ganyile, a protégé of Mbeki's, was dismissed from Fort Hare and returned to his home in Bizana to become secretary to the Central Committee of five elected leaders in Pondoland. And M himself came down from Durban again. Though well accepted at Amadiba, he was not automatically recognised at his first hill meeting.

Just before I left Durban I already had wind there was going to be a mass meeting at Ndhlovu hill. . . . I went straight to the hill. . . . Of course it was my first time.

There were hundreds of Pondos there. They were all talking â\200\224 I mean the leaders were talking. At question time I raised a few questions. I was shouted down by the Pondos. They wanted to know where I came from. What did I know about this thing? Do I come from Durban? So in Durban you people have heard that we are making [collecting] a lot of money here so you are coming here to grab our money, steal our money. Anyway, that was nothing to me. I knew that if the people do not know you then they are sure to be hostile to you.

Nevertheless, because of his background, M was able to provide important links for the movement. He helped to arrange legal representation for Tshangela and others when they were arrested. He activated his established networks of workers from Pondoland in Durban and collected funds. He rapidly made good contact with the central leaders, played some advisory

tole and later put them in touch with Natal activists. He also made

representations to the van Heerden Commission of Inquiry into the disturbances.

'M stayed on in Durban for a decade and a half after the revolt in

- Pondoland. These were difficult years for former political activists and he was detained on more than one occasion. Nevertheless, he was able to purchase more sewing machines and keep his business going. After 1976, he returned to the Transkei, making a living as a tailor. Some of

his custom comes from the indlavini for whom he makes the large bell-bottomed trousers, although they are now a fading force.

~ Mâ\200\231s memories, and the character of the experiences and events he

lived through, suggest that a number of important facets in the

changing patterns of African consciousness in the twentieth century

are still inadequately understood. It has certainly been convincingly argued that migrant workers in southern Africa could be, from the

earliest phases of mass labour migration, deeply conscious of

alternatives on the labour market, wages, conditions and contract

terms.!!Â® Constrained by the restrictive and coercive environment of compounds, they were nevertheless able to resist â\200\230in the nooks and

crannies of the day-to-day situationâ\200\231 â\200\224 resistance manifested in such

acts as desertion, theft, loafing and â\200\230impertinenceâ\200\231.?Â® It is now also clear

that migrant workers could, though not unionised, organise or participate in strike action in a wide variety of situations.?! (Un-ionisation of migrants on any significant scale has, with a few exceptions, been a relatively recent and minority phenomenon.) But many migrant workers also retained deep roots in a changing rural social environment. Van Onselen reminds his readers that â\200\230the simple act of a journey to the mines did not destroy old loyalties and obligations that belonged to a different world, neither did it automatically render obsolete beliefs and practices founded on village societyâ\200\231.2? Nor did it necessarily do so even in the longer term. Indeed, to illustrate how migrants responded at the place of work is to capture only a very partial view of their diverse consciousness. The elaboration of the concept â\200\230worker consciousnessâ\200\231, while an important corrective to a view of migrants as passive target workers, should not obscure this

fact. The importance of controls exercised on migrants within rural

society, and migrantsâ\200\231 links to their rural base, in shaping choices on the labour market and even their responses at work are only beginning to be explored. One route of investigation, suggested strongly by Mâ\200\231s experience, is the history of associations and networks among men which bridged town and countryside and perhaps took on new im-

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portance in both worlds as migrancy became more central to rural African societies. :

The very nature of these groups, often associated with a particular rural area, in turn raises the question of 'ethnicity' among migrants. Ethnic and particularist associations among workers have certainly been documented in the region, especially in Central Africa, as has the

potential for conflict within a workforce where uneven proletarianisation and the division of jobs along ethnic lines could

emphasise such differentiation.* But in the literature on South Africa,

ethnicity has tended to be seen as a product of manipulation by mine managers or the result of segregationist and apartheid policies.

Certainly, industry and the state could use and intensify such divisions. However, the very unevenness of the process by which people

from different areas came on to the labour market, and the rootedness

of migrants in particular rural areas, suggests an internal dynamic to

changing forms of ethnicity. These emerged directly out of their linked experience of town and countryside. His narrative shows that such forms of consciousness, and networks, were the very means by which

workers organised themselves and were intrinsic to the development of 'worker consciousness'. They should not be ignored in a quest for the origins of an apparently purer expression of class consciousness. The major strikes on the mines, in both 1920 and 1946, may indicate that such particularist associations in the workforce did not preclude the possibility of united working-class action. They may even have made such action possible. Clearly, far more investigation is needed of the various layers of migrant consciousness, and of the way in which these could intertwine with broader, more explicitly class-conscious ideas, or be used to divide the workforce, in specific situations.

His shift to broader nationalist and class-conscious positions in the 1950s was clearly a response to his changing position, and geographical location, as a worker. But it was by no means a total turnabout. He took with him some of the ideas, values and networks that had been central to his previous experience; these were overlaid with, or meshed with, his newly developing political ideas. Nationalism was not an exclusive position for him, and probably for very many others like him, in the rank and file of the Congress movements. Indeed, it was the very complexity of the layers of his ideas which proved most useful to the Congress movement. If nationalist and union leaders argued against particularist consciousness and organisation, they nevertheless had to recognise that it was through people like M that they could

reach the great majority of South African blacks who had not fully

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absorbed their generalised positions. Perhaps the advances made in mass organisation in the 1950s were in part dependent on the kind of eclecticism, and the very variety of ideas, which lower-level activists such as M carried with them into the political arena. ¹

Finally, M's experiences give some hint as to how difficult it is to pin sociological categories on to the nature of consciousness. Or to grasp the totality of consciousness, individual or class, at any particular moment. Clearly, the responses of a group or class are framed by its position in the political economy of the society as a whole. But in the rapidly changing world of South Africa's industrial revolution, where people could find themselves peasants, workers, lumpenproletarians and petty entrepreneurs in close succession, and not necessarily in that order, any analysis of the development of political ideas must be able to cater for the variety of the condition of oppression. Moreover, the prevalence and institutionalisation of migrancy meant that rural social forms, always changing but in some areas deeply embedded in the pre-colonial past, exercised a continuing influence on the perceptions of very many workers. The pattern of M's earlier life, though he escaped his rural past more than most, expresses some of these complexities. Forms of consciousness, whether national, racial, ethnic or worker are not necessarily exclusive; they are neither self-evident and self-explanatory, nor mere epi-phenomena of class categories, to be read off

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from simply abstracted relations to the means of production.

Notes and references

1 All quotations are taken from the transcripts of interviews with M unless otherwise indicated. All interviews were conducted in English so that quotations, apart from some reshuffling, are in his own words. M has given permission for the article to be published but prefers to remain anonymous for the present. (Some supplementary, unrecorded discussions were held in 1984). Other interviews conducted in Bizana in 1982, including those with Samuel Mazeka, Albert Ngunze, Headman Tshangela, Mcetywa Mjomi, Petros and Phato Madikizela, George Green, Annie and Bertie Mgetyana, Anderson Ganyile, Caledon Mda and Meje Ngalonkulu, have been useful in providing background and context to M's responses. The fact that a number of interviews were focused on migrant experiences and male youth associations is reflected in the weight given to these issues in the chapter.

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