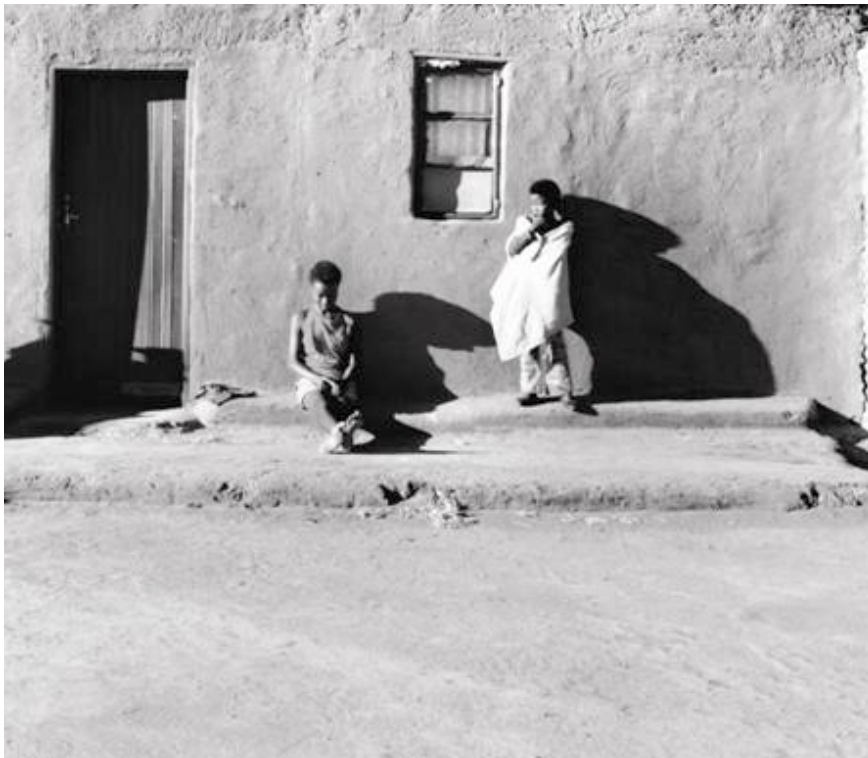


The Purchase Of The Farm Braklaagte By The Bahurutshe ba ga Moiloa - Whose Land Is It Anyway? (1908-1935)



Basking in the early morning sun

Photo: Michelle du Pisani

Braklaagte, registered as farm number 168 on the Transvaal farm register (the number was changed in the second half of the twentieth century to JP-90), was 3,152 morgen and 529 square rood in size, which is equal to 2,700.5441 ha in metric measurements.

The first title deed to the farm was registered in October 1874 in the name of Diederik Jacobus Coetzee. Ownership of the farm was transferred several times to other white farmers. W.M. Beverley was the last white owner before the farm was bought by the Bahurutshe ba ga Moiloa.

In 1906 a dispute arose in the Bahurutshe ba ga Moiloa tribe of Dinokana in

Moiloa's Reserve between Abraham Pogiso Moiloa and Israel Keobusitse Moiloa. When Abraham's father, Ikalafeng, had died in 1893 he was a minor and Israel, Ikalafeng's younger brother, would for a number of years act as regent. When Israel had to hand over the bokgosi (chieftainship) to Abraham in 1906 differences arose between them. A section of the tribe, led by Israel, moved eastward and settled at Leeuwfontein.

Already in 1876 Leeuwfontein had been bought for the tribe by chief Sebogodi Moiloa of Dinokana at the price of 200 head of large cattle, equivalent to about £1,000, but the transfer of the farm to the tribe had not yet been effected. 'Quite an exodus' of the Bahurutshe ba ga Moiloa took place from Dinokana to Leeuwfontein and by 1907 the majority of Israel's adherents had settled there.

After some time chief Abraham Moiloa visited Leeuwfontein in an attempt to persuade Israel's followers to return to Dinokana to their old homes and lands. He promised to forget about the past, to forgive them and to treat them fairly. They refused to return to Dinokana without Israel and indicated that they regarded Leeuwfontein as their permanent village. Abraham then tried to solicit the help of the Native Affairs Department of the Transvaal Colony to evict Israel's people from Leeuwfontein in terms of the Squatters Law, supposedly because they were defying any authority, but at first he was not successful. In 1908 he managed to get Israel and his brother Malebelele banished to the Heidelberg District of Transvaal, but they returned to Leeuwfontein in 1911.

of their section of the Bahurutshe ba ga Moiloa tribe, received their title deeds on the land. Thus Braklaagte was bought in undivided shares by a group of named black farmers, on behalf of a section of the Bahurutshe ba ga Moiloa tribe. Because the government was unwilling to recognise the community as a separate tribe, they held the property under an undisclosed trust.

Sebetlela Ceremony

Israel Keobusitse Moiloa requested his brother Malebelele Sebogodi of the third house of kgosi Sebogodi to settle at Braklaagte and he became the headman and performed the sebetlela ceremony. Sebetlela is the ceremony performed when a traditional leader settles with his people at a new place. Four sticks are cut from a môrobê tree (*Ehretia rigida* subsp. *Nervifolia*, English popular name: puzzle bush), sharpened, treated by the traditional healer with special medicine and planted in the soil at the four corners of the land. It marks the land as belonging to that specific tribe, and the medicine should protect the people from danger.

Braklaagte was subordinate to Leeuwfontein. Just after the land had become the legal possession of the tribe, their struggle to hold on to it commenced. They took a mortgage on the purchase price of £1,500. This mortgage was repaid, amongst others, by deductions that the Zeerust native commissioner made from wages earned on the mines by Braklaagte residents. By 1913 they had fallen behind with the payments on the mortgage and they faced legal action, which could deprive them of the land. However, little by little the mortgage was repaid, and they managed to evade being put off the land for financial reasons.

The acquisition of the farms by Israel Moiloa's section of the Bahurutshe ba ga Moiloa occurred at a time when, according to revisionist historical studies, a transformation in labour and agrarian relations was taking place on the Transvaal Highveld because of capitalist development in South Africa. Processes of accumulation and dispossession resulted from the rise of mining and agricultural capital. Revisionists differ on the nature of the 'uneasy' alliance between 'gold' and 'maize', but agree that it led to the exploitation of cheap black labour and the impoverishment of the rural peasantry, both white and black. Mine owners and white commercial farmers needed workers and pushed for legislation that would give them easier access to African labour. Legislative measures to this effect were indeed adopted: access to land was made more difficult for black peasants, taxes and fees were raised, and stricter control over 'squatting' was introduced. The rural black peasantry, according to Bundy and other revisionist historians, was

gradually deprived of the means to pursue an independent livelihood on the land. Whereas they initially managed to maintain their autonomy up to the end of the nineteenth century, their position vis-à-vis white commercial farmers and the white-controlled state rapidly deteriorated in the early twentieth century.

After the conclusion of the second Anglo-Boer War in 1902 black chiefs, who had supported the British war effort, including Bahurutshe chiefs, hoped to receive more land. However, this did not materialise and in the period of British colonial rule over the Transvaal a contrary process was taking place. Because of increasing labour demands by capitalist mining and agriculture rural Africans were increasingly being restricted to and even dispossessed of their tribal lands and incorporated into the capitalist economic system. Relationships of exploitation in the rural areas were changing. In the interior, Morris argues, rent paying tenants and sharecroppers increasingly found themselves impelled into labour tenancy. The next phase would be the conversion of labour tenants into wage labourers on white commercial farms.

In the Transvaal, where the Bahurutshe ba ga Moiloa lived, colonial control over land and labour was intensified during the post-war Milner period, which made it increasingly difficult for black peasants and tenants to produce food for the markets, and therefore to resist full dependence on wage earnings. In July 1907 the local sub-commissioner in the Native Affairs Department reported 'a marked increase in the number of natives proceeding to Johannesburg in search of work'. During that month no fewer than 490 passes were issued to blacks in the Marico District.

Commercial agriculture was bolstered, which benefited Afrikaner landowners more than anyone else. The victory of the Het Volk party in the Transvaal elections of 1907 was based on their promise to restore white hegemony in the rural areas at the expense of African producers. Legislation against squatting, formerly applied rather patchily, was bound to be enforced more strictly. The Marico Farmers' Co-operative in fact requested the government to assist farmers to apply the Squatters Law strictly.

In terms of the African agency discourse, mentioned in the introduction as one of the main threads of the Braklaagte narrative, it is clear that the purchase of farms outside the reserve by the Bahurutshe ba ga Moiloa was a deliberate action. These people exercised one of the few options available to them to get access to land. Thus they were resisting the processes of dispossession and

proletarianisation that at that stage threatened to pin them down in an overcrowded reserve. The purchase of such farms in effect amounted to a means for black communities to extend the reserves. Their purpose was not to commercialise their farming and the newly acquired farms were immediately communalised.

Impact of the 1913 Natives Land Act

After the establishment of the Union of South Africa the political system accelerated the decline of the rural black peasantry. In 1913 the Natives Land Act was passed in parliament. The act reserved the shrinking areas under black communal control for occupation exclusively by blacks, but at the same time prohibited blacks from acquiring land outside the reserves. Scheduled land, that is, land set aside as reserves for black ownership in the schedule to the act, extended over about 9 million hectares or 7 per cent of all the land in South Africa. In addition the act attempted to curb squatting by blacks on white farms, by allowing them to stay on the farms only if they were employed there on a permanent or temporary basis.

The Natives Land Act was not the result of a desire to create the territorial basis of a just, if segregated, society. It was rather the response to the needs of white farmers, then the dominant interest group in South African politics, who required continued access to a supply of low-wage labour. It was intended to minimise competition for land by prohibiting blacks from acquiring land outside the reserves. In effect the 1913 act forced the majority of rural blacks, even formerly self-sustaining peasants, to work for someone else in order to be able to make a living. This was the case because the reserves were simply too small to provide a livelihood in agriculture for all their inhabitants. Therefore, the Natives Land Act is regarded as the death knell to the prosperity and possibilities of the peasantry. White commercial farmers only started acting in unity through farming associations towards the end of the 1920s. It took many years before the controls over sharecropping and squatting transformed labour relations into a pattern of labour tenancy. However, in the long run the population of the reserves became captive labour for the mines and the tenants became trapped labour for commercial farmers.

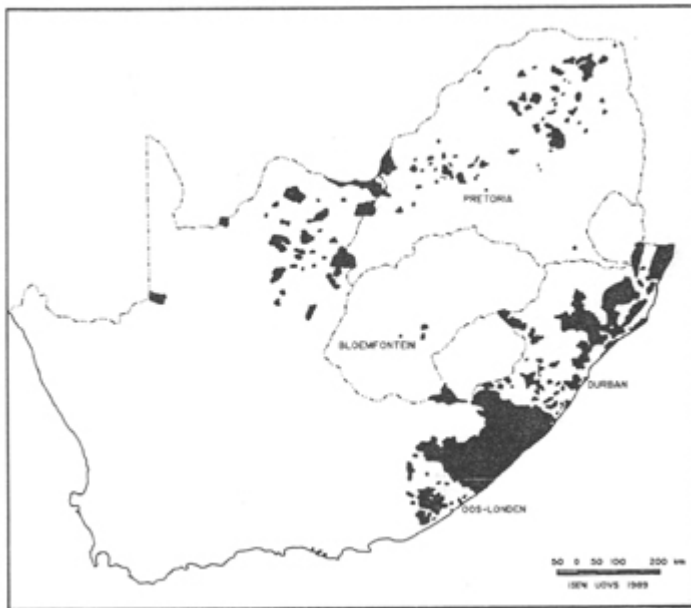


Figure 2.2: Scheduled lands in terms of the Natives Land Act, 1913. Moiloa's Reserve was part of the scheduled lands, but Braklaagte was not.

Attempts to get the Braklaagte Title Deed transferred to the Minister

Although Braklaagte's community was in a better position than most of the other rural communities, the ownership of Braklaagte was immediately at stake again when the 1913 Natives Land Act was passed. Private land ownership by blacks on land outside the areas reserved for them was restricted by the new legislation. The Bahurutshe of Braklaagte were in real danger of losing their claim to the land the moment the last of the five deed holders would die. To protect their tenure the black inhabitants of Braklaagte requested the local native commissioner in 1921 to transfer their title deeds to the Minister of Native Affairs, who would hold the deeds in trust for them as the rightful residents. At three different occasions F.S. Malan (Acting Minister of Native Affairs, 1915-1921), J.B.M. Hertzog (Prime Minister, 1924-1939 and also Minister of Native Affairs, 1924-1929) and E.G. Jansen (Minister of Native Affairs, 1929-1933) signed letters in which permission was granted for the transfer.

At that point in time the old feud between the Bahurutshe of Dinokana and the Bahurutshe of Braklaagte flared up again. During the 1920s and early 1930s the successive kgosi (chiefs) of Dinokana, Alfred Moiloa and Abraham Moiloa, were involved in disputes with the kgosana (headmen) of Braklaagte, Malabelele Sebogodi (Moiloa) and George Moiloa. Because the Department of Native Affairs did not want to make a precedent by recognising the section of the Bahurutshe ba ga Moiloa which was settled at Leeuwfontein and Braklaagte as a separate tribe,

they seemed in no particular hurry to comply with the request for the transfer of Braklaagte's title deed to the minister. There had been an earlier Supreme Court ruling that a section of a tribe could not purchase land independently from the tribe of which it formed part. Consequently the transfer was delayed for more than a decade.

At this point the system of land tenure at Braklaagte was already moving away from true communal ownership under customary law to what Budlender and Latsky refer to as a system of 'nationalised ownership' held by the state. A few remarks need to be made here about the role of communal tenure and the situation of the black peasantry in the first half of the twentieth century.

Communal tenure, although it was originally based on African customary law, was modified by successive South African governments in the course of the twentieth century. Alternative forms of tenure were effectively denied to black people by law. In the literature communal tenure has been described as

... an essential component of the migrant labour system, facilitating the concentration of the maximum possible number of Africans in the reserves/homelands, preventing the emergence of a stratum of rich peasants or capitalist farmers and providing the basis for a high degree of social control through compliant tribal leaders who controlled access to land.

Formal title (in the form of deeds) of most communal land, including Braklaagte, was held by a state official on behalf of the state in trust for specific tribal communities and allocated by traditional leaders to people living under their jurisdiction on a usufructuary basis. Communal tenure was a hybrid form, which combined elements of individual and collective property rights. An individual's right to use the land flowed from membership of a tribal community rather than from private ownership. However, communal tenure did not imply communal ownership of all resources and communal agricultural production. Allocated residential and arable plots were reserved for the exclusive use of the occupying household, and unallocated lands were available as a commonage, providing pasture for livestock. Those who were allocated land by the chief or headman obtained a right to the use and benefits of that land, but had no right to sell it. In effect communal tenure in twentieth-century South Africa meant 'a degree of community control over who is allowed into the group, thereby qualifying for an allocation of land for residence and cropping, as well as rights of access to and use of the shared common pool resources used by the group (i.e. the commons)'.

Many South African social historians have argued that the native reserves were deliberately underdeveloped in order to force Africans to sell their labour to the farms, mines and factories of an industrialising South Africa. Colin Bundy contended that the African peasantry in the late 19th and early 20th centuries responded by increasing their production for the market. Then a rapid decline of the peasantry set in and by the 1930s an independent peasantry no longer existed. In his analysis of agricultural production Simkins came to the conclusion that the disintegration of the peasantry occurred a bit later, in the 1950s. Drummond states that available evidence from Dinokana would tend to support Simkins's view. Agriculture in Dinokana seems to have remained stable and productive till at least the Second World War period and even into the 1950s. A range of agricultural products was produced at Dinokana and in the 1930s the community, regarded as a 'model native area', received a large grant from the Minister of Native Affairs for agricultural improvements. When the government completed an irrigation system during the drought of the early 1930s a local councillor expressed optimism that increased production would ensure a 'great future' for Dinokana.

One of the residents of Lehurutshe recalled:

Even when I was attending school before 1937 I was gardening all the time. Only a few were running gardens under irrigation. Most people were farming on dry land – kaffir corn and mealies. At that time we ploughed and irrigated wheat to a large extent. People were financially strong. I once harvested ninety bags of wheat, which I sold in Zeerust for Two Pounds Ten Shillings a bag. I sold vegetables locally as well.

In the case of Braklaagte it is not as easy to set a date for the decline of the peasantry, due to the lack of production data for the early twentieth century. Braklaagte was not as suitable for crop cultivation as Dinokana, because it did not have the same abundant water supply. Livestock farming was the main agricultural activity.

George Mosekaphofu Moiloa succeeded Malebelele Sebogodi after his death in 1925 as the headman at Braklaagte. He was the son of Israel Keobusitse Moiloa's second wife, Mmamosweu. Because of family differences Israel had moved to Braklaagte, died there in 1923 and was buried in Malebelele's cattle kraal. Mmamosweu and George Mosekaphofu stayed on at Braklaagte after his death. Malebelele's rightful heir in terms of customary law, Lekoloane John Sebogodi, was only eleven years old when his father died. An ethnologist, Isaac Motile

Selebego, gave evidence to the Mabiletsa Commission in the 1990s that Lekoloane had been banished to Barberton, but he did not state by whom and why he had been sent away. In terms of the later rivalry for the headmanship between the Sebogodis and the Moiloas it is important to note that George did not become headman in the customary way through a decision by the serobe (royal family council) and was never inaugurated in that position by the kgosi-tona (supreme chief). In reality he was acting on behalf of Lekoloane. However, he tried to strengthen his own hold on the position. He had the backing of the government, because the native commissioner recognised him as headman.

Although the government refused to grant George's request that the Braklaagte community should be recognised as a separate tribe, they did in fact function independently from the chief at Dinokana. When in 1926 they purchased the rest of Wilverdiend, the headman of Braklaagte was given autonomy to facilitate the administration involved in the registration of the farm. To repay the debt incurred by the purchase of the farm a special rate of £2 per annum was later levied on each member of the Bahurutshe ba ga Moiloa at Braklaagte.

In May 1929, at a tribal meeting in Zeerust, the chief, councillors and members of the tribe of the Bahurutshe ba ga Moiloa resolved with a majority of votes to once again request the transfer of Braklaagte to the minister. A list of 255 names of male members of the tribe who had contributed to the purchase-price of Braklaagte, and of their descendants, was attached to the resolution. From the number of names on this list it is clear that the number of inhabitants of Braklaagte had increased considerably in the 21 years since the purchase of the farm in 1908. If each of the 255 men had on average three dependents, there were at that stage more than 1,000 people on Braklaagte and Wilverdiend.

As a result of continued conflict between chief Abraham Moiloa of Dinokana and headman George Moiloa of Braklaagte the magistrate of Zeerust approached the Ministry of Native Affairs towards the end of 1933 and suggested that a headman should be elected by the inhabitants of Braklaagte. This headman should be appointed under the jurisdiction of the chief of Dinokana, with the qualification that the chief could not interfere in issues related to farmlands, dwelling-places, grazing rights and water. The headman would have the final say over these matters, with the right of appeal to the magistrate. Apparently the magistrate hoped that the democratic election of a headman would resolve the divisions in the ranks of the Bahurutshe ba ga Moiloa.

On 23 February 1934 the election was held between two candidates, which were George Moilola, the serving headman, and Johannes Moilola, whose candidature was supported by chief Abraham Moilola, his brother-in-law. George won the election by 134 votes to 116. Those who had voted for Johannes declared themselves willing to accept George's appointment, provided that he fulfilled his responsibilities without usurping the powers of the chief again. George's appointment as headman of Braklaagte, with civil and criminal jurisdiction, was approved by the Governor-General a full seven years later, in terms of the Native Administration Act (act no. 38 of 1927).

As far as the authorities were concerned the dispute among the Bahurutshe ba ga Moilola had been settled with George's election in 1934 and the transfer of the land could now proceed. The legal process for the transfer was set in motion and on 25 September 1935 the farm Braklaagte was transferred to the Minister of Native Affairs, who would hold it in trust for the particular section of the Bahurutshe tribe. The descendants of the members of the tribe who had contributed to the initial purchase-price of the farm would, in terms of the registered deed of transfer, have the only and exclusive right to the occupation and use of the land.

N o w t h e r e f o r e , he, the said Ap-
pearer, in his capacity as Attorney aforesaid, did by these
Presents, cede and transfer, in full and free property, to,
and on behalf of the

MINISTER of NATIVE AFFAIRS for the
UNION of SOUTH AFRICA
i n t r u s t for the
BAHURUTSI T R I B E

His Successors in Office or Assigns :-

Certain Quitrent farm BR A K L A A G T E ON ONLY
No. 1 6 8 , situate in the district of M a r i c o

Figure 2.3: Extract from deed of transfer, 1935

It seemed as if this section of the Bahurutshe ba ga Moiloa was now assured of their land, even though in terms of the discriminatory legislation of the Union of South Africa it could not remain their private property any longer.

Concluding remarks

The historical events narrated in this chapter can be linked to two of the central issues identified in the introduction as the focus of this book, that is, (1) the manipulation of ethnicity by the government to implement segregation and consolidate their control over black communities, and (2) the agency of the Bahurutshe ba ga Moiloa at Braklaagte in maintaining as much independence as possible under a system of racial discrimination.

The way in which the South African government handled the internal strife between the two sections of the Bahurutshe ba ga Moiloa at Dinokana and Braklaagte and the election of a new headman for Braklaagte sheds light on the manipulation of ethnicity and traditional leadership to support the implementation of segregationist policies. It demonstrated the other side of the coin of divide and rule strategies.

The fact that the government constantly refused to grant full autonomy to the people of Braklaagte as a separate tribe with their own chief, but at the same time granted jurisdiction over some domestic affairs to the headman at Braklaagte, was in line with the policies of the Department of Native Affairs. The Department did not wish to provide power bases for rural black communities outside the reserves. They regarded the chief at Dinokana as their agent who would ensure compliance of his subordinates with the implementation of government policies. The taxes imposed on the reserves made it virtually impossible for a chief to escape this role in the government system. The chief at Dinokana would be keen to maintain his jurisdiction over communities outside the reserve, such as the one at Braklaagte, because it enhanced his status among his own people and, if he performed his duties in a satisfactory way, would lead to a favourable assessment by the native commissioner. For the government it was all a matter of maintaining strict control over black communities, both inside and outside the reserves. The tension between Dinokana and Braklaagte could be, and was from time to time, utilised by the authorities to strengthen their control with regard to the Bahurutshe ba ga Moiloa.

The available sources do not indicate that the government unduly interfered with the election of a headman for Braklaagte in 1934. This was probably because

there was no evidence in the possession of the local native commissioner that either of the candidates would resist compliance with government policies. Therefore the government probably had no special preference for either of the contenders.

The agency of the Bahurutshe ba ga Moiloa at Braklaagte in working out their own destiny was clearly demonstrated by their purchase of the farm and the way in which they fought to retain their possession of the land. The initial purchase of Braklaagte was an act of defiance, not only against the segregationist policies of the Transvaal government and the capitalist-induced process of proletarianisation that threatened to force them into wage labour, but also, as a breakaway group, against being directly controlled by the 'mother community' at Dinokana. These people used the opportunity, created by a 1905 court ruling, to purchase their own land from a white farm owner, thus repossessing a small part of the former Bahurutshe heartland.

They had to actively fight the squatters laws and later also the 1913 Natives Land Act to hold on to the farm, even if it meant ceding their title to the Minister of Native Affairs. Despite the financial pressure on them created by the tax system they managed to slowly repay the mortgage. Ironically they managed to do this, at least in part, by selling the labour of the able-bodied men among them to the distant gold mines and regularly having a portion of their wages deducted by the local native commissioner. By the sweat of their brow they earned a right to the land.

Whose Land is it Anyway? (1908-1935) - Chapter 2 from: [The Last Frontier War - Braklaagte and the Struggle for Land before during and after Apartheid](#) - Kobus du Pisani.

Savusa Series co-published by:

Rozenberg Publishers - 2009 - ISBN 978 90 3610 090 8

Unisa Press - 2009 - ISBN 978 1 86888 562 6

The book tells the story of how a black community in rural South Africa, the Bahurutshe ba ga Moiloa, managed to hold on the farm which they purchased in 1908 and resist attempts by the successive white-controlled governments to forcefully remove them from their land.

Braklaagte, the farm in the Northwestern corner of the country near the

Botswana border, was in terms of the Land Act a “black spot” in “white” South Africa.

When the Apartheid regime failed to effect the forced removal of the community under resolute leadership of their traditional leader, John Lekoloane Sebogodi, they were first expropriated and later forcefully incorporated into the Bophuthatswana homeland. Thus losing their South African citizenship. The Braklaagte community lived through serious violence before being reincorporated into reunified South Africa in 1994.

The purpose of the book is not to tell the Braklaagte story for its own sake, but to interpret the narrative in the context of the discourses of South African historiography. This is achieved by focussing on three issues:

- The role of ethnicity and traditional leadership in Apartheid South Africa
- The relationship between insecurity of tenure and rural poverty
- The Braklaagte experience as proof of African agency in the face of oppression.

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From the Web - The World Atlas of Language Structures

THE WORLD ATLAS
OF LANGUAGE STRUCTURES
ONLINE



The World Atlas of Language Structures (WALS) is a large database of structural (phonological, grammatical, lexical) properties of languages gathered from descriptive materials (such as reference grammars) by a team of 55

authors (many of them the leading authorities on the subject).

The first version of *WALS* was published as a book with CD-ROM in 2005 by Oxford University Press. The first online version was published in April 2008. Both are superseded by the current online version, published in April 2011.

WALS Online is a joint effort of the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology and the Max Planck Digital Library.

It is a separate publication, edited by Dryer, Matthew S. & Haspelmath, Martin (Munich: Max Planck Digital Library, 2011)

ISBN: 978-3-9813099-1-1. The main programmer is Robert Forkel.

Read more: <http://wals.info>

Martin Gambrill ~ Addressing The Urban Sanitation Crisis: Time For A Radical Shift



Children in Maputo,
Mozambique
Photo credit:
Isabel Blackett/The World
Bank

A successful city is economically and culturally vibrant, healthy, safe, clean and attractive to business and tourism, and provides quality of life to its citizens. This vision is appealing but remains hard to realize as developing cities have to cope with changing demographics and climate with limited financial and human resources. [The sustainable development goals](#) have given a new impetus for cities to be inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable ([SDG11](#)), ensure citizens' health and wellbeing ([SDG3](#)) and secure access to sustainable water and sanitation services ([SDG6](#)).

[World Toilet Day](#) on November 19th is the opportunity to remind ourselves of a few facts and propose a set of guiding principles for a renewed and revitalized urban sanitation agenda.

Many cities struggle to deal with the most basic municipal task of managing human excreta. Some are effectively “drowning” in human waste. [Urban population growth continuously outpaces gains in improved sanitation access](#) and, globally, nearly one billion people live in urban slums with poor or no sanitation.

✖ Only 26% of urban excreta is deemed to be safely managed. The results? Environmental degradation, endemic disease leading to mortality and morbidity, especially among children, poor school attendance and performance, low productivity, constraints on the delivery of essential urban services such as housing, transport, safe water and drainage, and, ultimately, limits on economic growth and urban development. In short, a silent crisis that impedes the realization of the urban transformation framed in SDG11.

Read more: <https://blogs.worldbank.org/water/addressing-urban-sanitation>

How Public Housing Transformed New York City 1935-67 ~ Part One.

Historian Joel Schwartz takes us on a guided tour of New York City before the NYC Housing Authority razed large swaths of run-down neighborhoods to build public housing projects. These arresting photographs of a long-vanished New York City owe their astonishing detail to the 4×5 inch negatives captured by the NYCHA photographers. Photos are from the NYC Housing Authority collection housed at the La Guardia and Wagner Archives.

Part Two: <https://youtu.be/kJ62bxhj3iA>

Trump In The White House: An Interview With Noam Chomsky



Noam Chomsky

On November 8, 2016, Donald Trump managed to pull the biggest upset in US

politics by tapping successfully into the anger of white voters and appealing to the lowest inclinations of people in a manner that would have probably impressed Nazi propagandist Joseph Goebbels himself.

But what exactly does Trump's victory mean, and what can one expect from this megalomaniac when he takes over the reins of power on January 20, 2017? What is Trump's political ideology, if any, and is "Trumpism" a movement? Will US foreign policy be any different under a Trump administration?

Some years ago, public intellectual Noam Chomsky warned that the political climate in the US was ripe for the rise of an authoritarian figure. Now, he shares his thoughts on the aftermath of this election, the moribund state of the US political system and why Trump is a real threat to the world and the planet in general.

C.J. Polychroniou for Truthout: Noam, the unthinkable has happened: In contrast to all forecasts, Donald Trump scored a decisive victory over Hillary Clinton, and the man that Michael Moore described as a "wretched, ignorant, dangerous part-time clown and full-time sociopath" will be the next president of the United States. In your view, what were the deciding factors that led American voters to produce the biggest upset in the history of US politics?

Noam Chomsky: Before turning to this question, I think it is important to spend a few moments pondering just what happened on November 8, a date that might turn out to be one of the most important in human history, depending on how we react.

No exaggeration.

The most important news of November 8 was barely noted, a fact of some significance in itself.

On November 8, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) delivered a report at the international conference on climate change in Morocco (COP22) which was called in order to carry forward the Paris agreement of COP21. The WMO reported that the past five years were the hottest on record. It reported rising sea levels, soon to increase as a result of the unexpectedly rapid melting of polar ice, most ominously the huge Antarctic glaciers. Already, Arctic sea ice over the past five years is 28 percent below the average of the previous 29 years, not only raising sea levels, but also reducing the cooling effect of polar ice reflection

of solar rays, thereby accelerating the grim effects of global warming. The WMO reported further that temperatures are approaching dangerously close to the goal established by COP21, along with other dire reports and forecasts.

Another event took place on November 8, which also may turn out to be of unusual historical significance for reasons that, once again, were barely noted.

On November 8, the most powerful country in world history, which will set its stamp on what comes next, had an election. The outcome placed total control of the government — executive, Congress, the Supreme Court — in the hands of the Republican Party, which has become the most dangerous organization in world history.

Apart from the last phrase, all of this is uncontroversial. The last phrase may seem outlandish, even outrageous. But is it? The facts suggest otherwise. The Party is dedicated to racing as rapidly as possible to destruction of organized human life. There is no historical precedent for such a stand.

Is this an exaggeration? Consider what we have just been witnessing.

During the Republican primaries, every candidate denied that what is happening is happening — with the exception of the sensible moderates, like Jeb Bush, who said it's all uncertain, but we don't have to do anything because we're producing more natural gas, thanks to fracking. Or John Kasich, who agreed that global warming is taking place, but added that "we are going to burn [coal] in Ohio and we are not going to apologize for it."

The winning candidate, now the president-elect, calls for rapid increase in use of fossil fuels, including coal; dismantling of regulations; rejection of help to developing countries that are seeking to move to sustainable energy; and in general, racing to the cliff as fast as possible.

Trump has already taken steps to dismantle the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) by placing in charge of the EPA transition a notorious (and proud) climate change denier, Myron Ebell. Trump's top adviser on energy, billionaire oil executive Harold Hamm, announced his expectations, which were predictable: dismantling regulations, tax cuts for the industry (and the wealthy and corporate sector generally), more fossil fuel production, lifting Obama's temporary block on the Dakota Access pipeline. The market reacted quickly. Shares in energy corporations boomed, including the world's largest coal miner, Peabody Energy,

which had filed for bankruptcy, but after Trump's victory, registered a 50 percent gain.

The effects of Republican denialism had already been felt. There had been hopes that the COP21 Paris agreement would lead to a verifiable treaty, but any such thoughts were abandoned because the Republican Congress would not accept any binding commitments, so what emerged was a voluntary agreement, evidently much weaker.

Effects may soon become even more vividly apparent than they already are. In Bangladesh alone, tens of millions are expected to have to flee from low-lying plains in coming years because of sea level rise and more severe weather, creating a migrant crisis that will make today's pale in significance. With considerable justice, Bangladesh's leading climate scientist says that "These migrants should have the right to move to the countries from which all these greenhouse gases are coming. Millions should be able to go to the United States." And to the other rich countries that have grown wealthy while bringing about a new geological era, the Anthropocene, marked by radical human transformation of the environment. These catastrophic consequences can only increase, not just in Bangladesh, but in all of South Asia as temperatures, already intolerable for the poor, inexorably rise and the Himalayan glaciers melt, threatening the entire water supply. Already in India, some 300 million people are reported to lack adequate drinking water. And the effects will reach far beyond.

It is hard to find words to capture the fact that humans are facing the most important question in their history — whether organized human life will survive in anything like the form we know — and are answering it by accelerating the race to disaster.

Similar observations hold for the other huge issue concerning human survival: the threat of nuclear destruction, which has been looming over our heads for 70 years and is now increasing.

It is no less difficult to find words to capture the utterly astonishing fact that in all of the massive coverage of the electoral extravaganza, none of this receives more than passing mention. At least I am at a loss to find appropriate words.

Turning finally to the question raised, to be precise, it appears that Clinton received a slight majority of the vote. The apparent decisive victory has to do with

curious features of American politics: among other factors, the Electoral College residue of the founding of the country as an alliance of separate states; the winner-take-all system in each state; the arrangement of congressional districts (sometimes by gerrymandering) to provide greater weight to rural votes (in past elections, and probably this one too, Democrats have had a comfortable margin of victory in the popular vote for the House, but hold a minority of seats); the very high rate of abstention (usually close to half in presidential elections, this one included). Of some significance for the future is the fact that in the age 18-25 range, Clinton won handily, and Sanders had an even higher level of support. How much this matters depends on what kind of future humanity will face.

According to current information, Trump broke all records in the support he received from white voters, working class and lower middle class, particularly in the \$50,000 to \$90,000 income range, rural and suburban, primarily those without college education. These groups share the anger throughout the West at the centrist establishment, revealed as well in the unanticipated Brexit vote and the collapse of centrist parties in continental Europe. [Many of] the angry and disaffected are victims of the neoliberal policies of the past generation, the policies described in congressional testimony by Fed chair Alan Greenspan — “St. Alan,” as he was called reverentially by the economics profession and other admirers until the miraculous economy he was supervising crashed in 2007-2008, threatening to bring the whole world economy down with it. As Greenspan explained during his glory days, his successes in economic management were based substantially on “growing worker insecurity.” Intimidated working people would not ask for higher wages, benefits and security, but would be satisfied with the stagnating wages and reduced benefits that signal a healthy economy by neoliberal standards.

Working people, who have been the subjects of these experiments in economic theory, are not particularly happy about the outcome. They are not, for example, overjoyed at the fact that in 2007, at the peak of the neoliberal miracle, real wages for nonsupervisory workers were lower than they had been years earlier, or that real wages for male workers are about at 1960s levels while spectacular gains have gone to the pockets of a very few at the top, disproportionately a fraction of 1%. Not the result of market forces, achievement or merit, but rather of definite policy decisions, matters reviewed carefully by economist Dean Baker in [recently published work](#).

The fate of the minimum wage illustrates what has been happening. Through the periods of high and egalitarian growth in the '50s and '60s, the minimum wage — which sets a floor for other wages — tracked productivity. That ended with the onset of neoliberal doctrine. Since then, the minimum wage has stagnated (in real value). Had it continued as before, it would probably be close to \$20 per hour. Today, it is considered a political revolution to raise it to \$15.

With all the talk of near-full employment today, labor force participation remains below the earlier norm. And for working people, there is a great difference between a steady job in manufacturing with union wages and benefits, as in earlier years, and a temporary job with little security in some service profession. Apart from wages, benefits and security, there is a loss of dignity, of hope for the future, of a sense that this is a world in which I belong and play a worthwhile role.

The impact is captured well in [Arlie Hochschild's sensitive and illuminating portrayal of a Trump stronghold in Louisiana](#), where she lived and worked for many years. She uses the image of a line in which residents are standing, expecting to move forward steadily as they work hard and keep to all the conventional values. But their position in the line has stalled. Ahead of them, they see people leaping forward, but that does not cause much distress, because it is “the American way” for (alleged) merit to be rewarded. What does cause real distress is what is happening behind them. They believe that “undeserving people” who do not “follow the rules” are being moved in front of them by federal government programs they erroneously see as designed to benefit African-Americans, immigrants and others they often regard with contempt. All of this is exacerbated by [Ronald] Reagan's racist fabrications about “welfare queens” (by implication Black) stealing white people's hard-earned money and other fantasies.

Sometimes failure to explain, itself a form of contempt, plays a role in fostering hatred of government. I once met a house painter in Boston who had turned bitterly against the “evil” government after a Washington bureaucrat who knew nothing about painting organized a meeting of painting contractors to inform them that they could no longer use lead paint — “the only kind that works” — as they all knew, but the suit didn't understand. That destroyed his small business, compelling him to paint houses on his own with substandard stuff forced on him by government elites.

Sometimes there are also some real reasons for these attitudes toward

government bureaucracies. Hochschild describes a man whose family and friends are suffering bitterly from the lethal effects of chemical pollution but who despises the government and the “liberal elites,” because for him, the EPA means some ignorant guy who tells him he can’t fish, but does nothing about the chemical plants.

These are just samples of the real lives of Trump supporters, who are led to believe that Trump will do something to remedy their plight, though the merest look at his fiscal and other proposals demonstrates the opposite — posing a task for activists who hope to fend off the worst and to advance desperately needed changes.

Exit polls reveal that the passionate support for Trump was inspired primarily by the belief that he represented change, while Clinton was perceived as the candidate who would perpetuate their distress. The “change” that Trump is likely to bring will be harmful or worse, but it is understandable that the consequences are not clear to isolated people in an atomized society lacking the kinds of associations (like unions) that can educate and organize. That is a crucial difference between today’s despair and the generally hopeful attitudes of many working people under much greater economic duress during the Great Depression of the 1930s.

There are other factors in Trump’s success. Comparative studies show that doctrines of white supremacy have had an even more powerful grip on American culture than in South Africa, and it’s no secret that the white population is declining. In a decade or two, whites are projected to be a minority of the work force, and not too much later, a minority of the population. The traditional conservative culture is also perceived as under attack by the successes of identity politics, regarded as the province of elites who have only contempt for the “hard-working, patriotic, church-going [white] Americans with real family values” who see their familiar country as disappearing before their eyes.

One of the difficulties in raising public concern over the very severe threats of global warming is that 40 percent of the US population does not see why it is a problem, since Christ is returning in a few decades. About the same percentage believe that the world was created a few thousand years ago. If science conflicts with the Bible, so much the worse for science. It would be hard to find an analogue in other societies.

The Democratic Party abandoned any real concern for working people by the 1970s, and they have therefore been drawn to the ranks of their bitter class enemies, who at least pretend to speak their language — Reagan’s folksy style of making little jokes while eating jelly beans, George W. Bush’s carefully cultivated image of a regular guy you could meet in a bar who loved to cut brush on the ranch in 100-degree heat and his probably faked mispronunciations (it’s unlikely that he talked like that at Yale), and now Trump, who gives voice to people with legitimate grievances — people who have lost not just jobs, but also a sense of personal self-worth — and who rails against the government that they perceive as having undermined their lives (not without reason).

One of the great achievements of the doctrinal system has been to divert anger from the corporate sector to the government that implements the programs that the corporate sector designs, such as the highly protectionist corporate/investor rights agreements that are uniformly mis-described as “free trade agreements” in the media and commentary. With all its flaws, the government is, to some extent, under popular influence and control, unlike the corporate sector. It is highly advantageous for the business world to foster hatred for pointy-headed government bureaucrats and to drive out of people’s minds the subversive idea that the government might become an instrument of popular will, a government of, by and for the people.

Is Trump representing a new movement in American politics, or was the outcome of this election primarily a rejection of Hillary Clinton by voters who hate the Clintons and are fed-up with “politics as usual?”

It’s by no means new. Both political parties have moved to the right during the neoliberal period. Today’s New Democrats are pretty much what used to be called “moderate Republicans.” The “political revolution” that Bernie Sanders called for, rightly, would not have greatly surprised Dwight Eisenhower. The Republicans have moved so far toward a dedication to the wealthy and the corporate sector that they cannot hope to get votes on their actual programs, and have turned to mobilizing sectors of the population that have always been there, but not as an organized coalitional political force: evangelicals, nativists, racists and the victims of the forms of globalization designed to set working people around the world in competition with one another while protecting the privileged and undermining the legal and other measures that provided working people with some protection, and with ways to influence decision-making in the closely linked public and

private sectors, notably with effective labor unions.

The consequences have been evident in recent Republican primaries. Every candidate that has emerged from the base — such as [Michele] Bachmann, [Herman] Cain or [Rick] Santorum — has been so extreme that the Republican establishment had to use its ample resources to beat them down. The difference in 2016 is that the establishment failed, much to its chagrin, as we have seen.

Deservedly or not, Clinton represented the policies that were feared and hated, while Trump was seen as the symbol of “change” — change of what kind requires a careful look at his actual proposals, something largely missing in what reached the public. The campaign itself was remarkable in its avoidance of issues, and media commentary generally complied, keeping to the concept that true “objectivity” means reporting accurately what is “within the beltway,” but not venturing beyond.

Trump said following the outcome of the election that he “will represent all Americans.” How is he going to do that when the nation is so divided and he has already expressed deep hatred for many groups in the United States, including women and minorities? Do you see any resemblance between Brexit and Donald Trump’s victory?

There are definite similarities to Brexit, and also to the rise of the ultranationalist far-right parties in Europe — [whose leaders were quick to congratulate Trump on his victory](#), perceiving him as one of their own: [Nigel] Farage, [Marine] Le Pen, [Viktor] Orban and others like them. And these developments are quite frightening. A look at the polls in Austria and Germany — *Austria and Germany* — cannot fail to evoke unpleasant memories for those familiar with the 1930s, even more so for those who watched directly, as I did as a child. I can still recall listening to Hitler’s speeches, not understanding the words, though the tone and audience reaction were chilling enough. The first article that I remember writing was in February 1939, after the fall of Barcelona, on the seemingly inexorable spread of the fascist plague. And by strange coincidence, it was from Barcelona that my wife and I watched the results of the 2016 US presidential election unfold.

As to how Trump will handle what he has brought forth — not created, but brought forth — we cannot say. Perhaps his most striking characteristic is

unpredictability. A lot will depend on the reactions of those appalled by his performance and the visions he has projected, such as they are.

Trump has no identifiable political ideology guiding his stance on economic, social and political issues, yet there are clear authoritarian tendencies in his behavior. Therefore, do you find any validity behind the claims that Trump may represent the emergence of “fascism with a friendly face?” in the United States?

For many years, I have been writing and speaking about the danger of the rise of an honest and charismatic ideologue in the United States, someone who could exploit the fear and anger that has long been boiling in much of the society, and who could direct it away from the actual agents of malaise to vulnerable targets. That could indeed lead to what sociologist Bertram Gross called “friendly fascism” in a perceptive study 35 years ago. But that requires an honest ideologue, a Hitler type, not someone whose only detectable ideology is Me. The dangers, however, have been real for many years, perhaps even more so in the light of the forces that Trump has unleashed.

With the Republicans in the White House, but also controlling both houses and the future shape of the Supreme Court, what will the US look like for at least the next four years?

A good deal depends on his appointments and circle of advisers. Early indications are unattractive, to put it mildly.

The Supreme Court will be in the hands of reactionaries for many years, with predictable consequences. If Trump follows through on his Paul Ryan-style fiscal programs, there will be huge benefits for the very rich — estimated by the Tax Policy Center as a tax cut of over 14 percent for the top 0.1 percent and a substantial cut more generally at the upper end of the income scale, but with virtually no tax relief for others, who will also face major new burdens. The respected economics correspondent of the Financial Times, Martin Wolf, writes that, “The tax proposals would shower huge benefits on already rich Americans such as Mr Trump,” while leaving others in the lurch, including, of course, his constituency. The immediate reaction of the business world reveals that Big Pharma, Wall Street, the military industry, energy industries and other such wonderful institutions expect a very bright future.

One positive development might be the infrastructure program that Trump has

promised while (along with much reporting and commentary) concealing the fact that it is essentially the Obama stimulus program that would have been of great benefit to the economy and to the society generally, but was killed by the Republican Congress on the pretext that it would explode the deficit. While that charge was spurious at the time, given the very low interest rates, it holds in spades for Trump's program, now accompanied by radical tax cuts for the rich and corporate sector and increased Pentagon spending.

There is, however, an escape, provided by Dick Cheney when he explained to Bush's Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill that "Reagan proved that deficits don't matter" — meaning deficits that we Republicans create in order to gain popular support, leaving it to someone else, preferably Democrats, to somehow clean up the mess. The technique might work, for a while at least.

There are also many questions about foreign policy consequences, mostly unanswered.

There is mutual admiration between Trump and Putin. How likely is it therefore that we may see a new era in US-Russia relations?

One hopeful prospect is that there might be reduction of the very dangerous and mounting tensions at the Russian border: note "the Russian border," not the Mexican border. Thereby lies a tale that we cannot go into here. It is also possible that Europe might distance itself from Trump's America, as already suggested by [German] Chancellor [Angela] Merkel and other European leaders — and from the British voice of American power, after Brexit. That might possibly lead to European efforts to defuse the tensions, and perhaps even efforts to move towards something like Mikhail Gorbachev's vision of an integrated Eurasian security system without military alliances, rejected by the US in favor of NATO expansion, a vision revived recently by Putin, whether seriously or not, we do not know, since the gesture was dismissed.

Is US foreign policy under a Trump administration likely to be more or less militaristic than what we have seen under the Obama administration, or even the George W. Bush administration?

I don't think one can answer with any confidence. Trump is too unpredictable. There are too many open questions. What we can say is that popular mobilization and activism, properly organized and conducted, can make a large difference.

And we should bear in mind that the stakes are very large.

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Charlie Chaplin ~ The Great Dictator