

Political Banishments in South Africa

Presentation to DSG Class

20 September 2011 (09.00)

It is 1964. In a remote, desolate and arid rural camp, six people idle away the hours, day after day, month after month, year after year. Paulus Mopeli, a Basotho chief and grandson of Moshesh, is from Witzieshoek in the Free Stateⁱ. So are his partner, Treaty Mopeli and Piet Mokoena. Alex Tikana, Theophilus Tshangela and Mtetunzima Ganyile are all from the Transkei - Tikana from Cala, the latter two from Bizana. The six, ranging in age from the thirties to the late sixties, are inmates of Frenchdale Trust Farm, some 89 kilometres from Mafikeng in present day North West province.

A striking feature of the camp 'is the quiet. There (are) no children's voices, no yipping dogs, none of the murmuring sounds of daily living: there (is) not even the faraway background hum of passing cars. Nothing'.ⁱⁱ The six people live in huts with dirt floors; there are 'no lavatories or baths, and no electricity'. Water for drinking and washing has to be fetched from over a kilometre away and food is a constant problem - 'there never (is) enough'.ⁱⁱⁱ

'Once each month', the six people walk 19 kilometres to a village 'to receive their grants and to spend them at the one store there'. Each of the group receive R4 a month, 'three in meal and one in cash which goes to purchase extras... Then they hike home again. It is an ordeal for these aging people, but it is also the big event of their month'.^{iv}

The six inmates are almost entirely cut off from other people and society. Visitors are extremely rare. 'Precious letters from home are read over and over again. Letters are saved for years until they yellow and crumble'. Some of the six have 'lost count of the days. Monday looks like Friday in Frenchdale. Nothing breaks the monotony. Nothing breaks the unvarying routine. There are no youngsters at home on Saturday, no church bells on Sunday, no rush and hurry of shopping days and laundry days during the week. What is Christmas like? Like every other day. Only sunrise and sunset (mark) the days. The passage from light to darkness (is) their calendar'.^v

Each of the six inmates has been expelled from her/his usual place of residence, summarily removed from his/her community. Each has been dumped over a thousand kilometres away in an inhospitable camp on Frenchdale Trust Farm. Each had dared to criticize or actively oppose the apartheid state. As a result, each has been banished.

The period of banishment is indefinite. There was no judicial process involved. No appeal to a court to challenge the banishment was possible. 'The brilliance of banishment is that it is indeterminate, a limbo which has none of the legal and procedural trappings of prison, yet effectively removes leaders from circulation and breaks up the cohesiveness and forward momentum of the people they left behind'.^{vi}

The harsh kinds of political repression that existed under apartheid are generally well-known – show trials; imprisonment; detentions, bannings, and assassinations

Largely unknown is the *legislated administrative practice* of political *banishment*, in terms of which political opponents of apartheid were plucked from their families and communities and cast, in the words of the late Helen Joseph, ‘into the most abandoned parts of the country, there to live, perhaps to die, to suffer and starve, or to stretch out a survival by poorly paid labour, if and when they [could] get it’.

In 1982 I came across a reference to banishments and discovered that Helen Joseph had become associated with many banished people.

I arranged to meet with Helen Joseph who was banned and restricted to her home in Norwood, Johannesburg. Soon after her banning order was lifted in 1962, Helen had undertaken a 13 000 km journey to visit a number of banished people who were scattered around the country.

▪ **The 1962 journey searching for the banished**

- ✓ The trio – Helen Joseph, Joe Morolong, Amina Cachalia; and others
- ✓ The car – new after ‘Treason Dixie’
- ✓ May-June 1962 – day after Joesph banning order ends
- ✓ Context of the journey – Human Rights Welfare Committee set up during the Treason Trial to track and support the banished and their families
- ✓ Trip to Frenchdale by Ruth First in 1956
- ✓ Reports in *Drum* and *New Age*
- ✓ Scouts before trip – Joe Morolong and Lillian Ngoyi
- ✓ 11 000 km journey – mapping the journey

She was thrilled at my interest in banishments, which was by 1982 by and large a forgotten issue. She provided me a stack of documents and papers that she had, imploring me to undertake research and publish on banishment.

So, on and off, I have been working on banishment for the past thirty years determined to keep my pledge to Mrs Joseph to publish a book on banishments.

My research has tried answers to questions such as:

- Who was banished?
- Why?
- What were the origins of this repressive measure?
- Why was it used given there were other repressive measures?
- From which places and to which areas were people banished?
- To which areas were people banished?
- For how long were people banished?
- Were the banishments accepted passively or were they resisted, and how?
- What was life like in banishment?

After years of research I can now answer these questions.

Hopefully next year a book will be produced, there will be a travelling exhibition of photos and a three-part TV documentary.

The book will have 11 chapters. In the book I will

Give a historical and comparative analysis of banishments

▪ **The history – an old and common practice**

- ✓ Old Testament, Ramayana
- ✓ Greece – Cicero, Ovid and others
- ✓ Many Shakespeare plays deal with banishment
- ✓ Europe – 16th century European towns; 18/19th century English criminals
- ✓ Russian revolutionaries like Lenin and Trotsky
- ✓ In recent times – Malaysia, Tunisia, Chile

Set out the historical development of the laws that provided for banishments

▪ **In South Africa**

- ✓ Indonesian nobles to Cape by the DEIC in the 17/18th centuries – Shaik Yusuf of Macassar through whom Islam came to the Cape
- ✓ Natal Native Code of 1891– Langilabelele and Dinizulu

Document the number of people and the main areas from which they were banished and to which they were banished, and for what periods, and the like. I will show that they were mainly people from rural areas who were resisting apartheid laws and policies

- gaMatlala
- Witzieshoek
- Zeerust
- Sekhukhuneland
- Pondoland
- Thembuland
- Natal South coast

I will show that there were also a small number of urban based political opponents of apartheid that were banished. I will have case studies on Ben Baartman, Elizabeth Mafekeng and Louis Mtshizana.

Then I will show that there were people who were subject to banning-banishment under the Suppression of Communism Act. Here I have three case studies: Maphela Ramphele, Frances Baard and Winnie Mandela

I then have a chapter on the political, social and economic impact of banishment on those who were banished and their families and I describe the conditions under which those who were banished existed. I highlight conditions in two banishment camps in remote rural areas, Frenchdale and Driefontein

Resistance to banishment is the theme of another chapter, including an analysis of the different forms taken by such resistance.

The book will use tables, maps, and photographs to complement description and analysis.

Little known photographs of banished people and conditions in banishment will be sourced from Ernest Cole's *House of Bondage*, other Cole collections, the Baileys Historical Archives (taken by Peter Magubane and G. M Naidoo) and UWC Mayibuye archives.

Finally, I must mention the index of persons banished under the Native Administration Act and the Suppression of Communism Act/Internal Security Act. Support of Ulandi du Plessis

For this newspapers, newsletters, magazines, reports of government departments, parliamentary debates, law reports, archived government, personal and organisational collections, documents and indexes compiled by the HRWC and other organisations, *Race Relations Surveys*, and numerous articles and books had to be scrutinized to compile the index of persons that were banished during the apartheid period.

At the National Archives in Pretoria it was incredibly exciting to hold in one's hands and touch in a thick bound book the original (yellowing) copy of the banishment order that was signed by the Governor General; the document signed by Verwoerd motivating for the banishment, and similar documents.

So too at the William Cullen Library – it was just incredible to be able to read and touch scores of hand-written letters between banished people and Helen Joseph and other members of the Human Rights Welfare Committee.

ⁱ Cole, E. with Flaherty, T. (1967) *The House of Bondage*, page 178

ⁱⁱ Ibid, page 177

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid, page 177

^{iv} Ibid, page 178

^v Ibid, page 179

^{vi} Ibid, page 177