

Bophuthatswana: At the edge of time

FRANCINE DE CLERCQ
*assesses the political economy of
South Africa's most prosperous
independent bantustan, and
argues that the neglect of this
area by progressive
organisations is short-sighted.*

Since 2 February 1990, homeland politics has been anything but easy to follow. The majority of the homeland population and its leaders have shown themselves to be in favour of reincorporation into South Africa. Yet there remains a lot of uncertainty about the role that homeland leaders will play in the negotiation process, and the way in which fledgling homeland institutions and administrations will be absorbed into a greater South Africa.

Rather than speculate on the fluid and transient nature of homeland politics, it seems more productive to gather an understanding of the political economy of homeland areas, and highlight the issues that will have to be taken into account in the reincorporation process.

This article looks at Bophuthatswana, the 'model' homeland which remains the only homeland to reject any form of reincorporation. What makes its president, Lucas Mangope, say repeatedly that 'Bophuthatswana will be an independent state one hundred years from now'? What are the political and economic forces at play? Why is the ANC and Cosatu virtually prevented from organising? What are the political prospects for the future?

Economic prosperity and corruption

The major strength of Mangope is the economic prosperity and apparent political stability of Bophuthatswana. Endowed with rich platinum resources and a financially successful tourist industry, the so-called Bop economy hasn't done badly since 1986, when the price of platinum went up. Its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grew from R1 423m in 1986 to R2 400m in 1989. Thanks to platinum, Bop's internal financial situation also shows a healthy improvement. Since 1987 its revenue budget has grown at a steady pace to balance expenditure. Its 1989 budgeted revenue stands at R2 200m and its expenditure at R2 300m.

The fact that the government budget

nearly equals the GDP is rather abnormal by international standards, but must be seen as a reflection of how the government sector dominates the political and economic life of Bophuthatswana. However, Bop's dependence on South African financial assistance is still rather large (over half of the total expenditure). But if one regards customs and excise, and the transfer of income taxes from South Africa, as internal forms of revenue, the proportion of internally generated revenue rises to 70%.

This economic wealth hasn't, of course, benefitted people equally. With such a big concentration of economic and political power vested in the government, it is not surprising that most of this wealth has fallen into the laps of high ranking government officials and their advisers. In addition, mismanagement of funds and



• Lucas Mangope ... has adopted a more sophisticated stance.

financial corruption is known to have reached epic proportions among government officials. This not only worries Pretoria, but also constituted one of the main grievances of the 1988 coup rebels.

Several foreign advisers (like Shabtai Kalmanowitch) have fled Bop with millions of rands in their pockets; others have been dismissed from their jobs or tried in court for embezzling funds, while the rest still run scott free. Local government administrations have also been accused of enriching themselves by imposing imaginary taxes on residents.

Uneven trickle-down effect

Despite this appropriation of wealth by a few, a notable trickle-down has also reached other socio-economic groups who have, to a different extent, a vested interest in the status quo. In particular, generous profits have accrued to South African big businesses like Impala Platinum, Rustenburg Platinum and Sun International. Other smaller South African businesses and suppliers who invested in the few decentralized industrial growth areas (such as Babalegi, GaRankuwa, Mogwasi and Mmabatho) have taken handsome advantage of the favourable financial and labour conditions offered by the government.

The emerging black (african and indian) commercial class (especially those from the Mafikeng/ Mmabatho area) as well as the civil servants and bureaucrats of urbanised areas, have also grown thankful to the government for the more rewarding business and work opportunities. Bophuthatswana impresses residents and foreign visitors alike with its luxurious administrative infrastructure, which has become a source of envy for many African governments. Finally, there has been other substantial physical and social infrastructural developments in water, housing, health and education in some (but not all) areas of Bop.

Despite their uneven distribution, these material benefits go a long way in ex-

plaining the relatively quiet political situation that has prevailed in Bop since independence, in particular in the strategic administrative nerve centre of the capital region.

Of course, resentment and political grievances have also accumulated over the past 14 years. The bias of development policies in favour of a few urban areas; the conditions of worsening poverty and unemployment in the rural areas; the rather authoritarian and personal form of rule adopted by Mangope; the corruption of government officials and the harsh repressive controls of the population by local and regional authorities: all these constituted an ideal breeding ground for anti-government feelings and actions which the authorities never managed to defuse completely.

The employment situation is not comforting, partly because of the legacy of separate development, but also because Bop's economic growth is based on platinum revenue which is reinvested in unproductive white elephant-type activities, and not in an expansion of its productive capacity. As a result, unemployment is growing and probably running at well over a third of the economically active population.

Bop relies heavily on South Africa for migrant and commuter employment opportunities (about 65% of its labour force) and can only offer about 180 000 local employment opportunities: in the mines (more than 55 000), in the booming

construction, retail/catering and tourist industries, as well as in the fast growing public sector (50 000 employees including the parastatals). The latter is another indication of the dominance of the public sector and the unproductive character of the economy.

Repressive political climate

Despite the existence (in law rather than in practice) of a Bill of Rights, the political situation remains overtly and covertly repressive. Freedom of political expression and activity hardly exists, and the ruling Bophuthatswana Democratic Party enjoys complete hegemony in parliament. There have been various attempts at establishing alternative parties and associations, but they never managed to gain momentum because of the repressive security measures, and because activists have been unable to channel their opposition into permanent organisations.

The first serious challenge to Mangope's rule came with the short-lived 1988 coup, which left a festering wound on the side of the Bop government. It has still not managed to recoup its previous apparent strength. Since then, outbursts of opposition have occurred in the eastern regions of Odi/Moretele and Bafokeng/Mankwe where workers, youth and

community activists took to the streets and demanded Mangope's resignation and Bop reincorporation.

Resistance also spread to the rural areas in the southern regions, as well as in Lehurutse (where Braklaagte has been reincorporated). People in Braklaagte have fought against forced reincorporation and the imposition of unpopular chiefs. The capital area has remained rather calm (except for yearly university protests) because of its privileged position and its isolation from the more militant regions.

The government reacted rather nervously to this groundswell of opposition. It used its familiar weapons of detentions, harassment and victimization, and imposed a State of Emergency on 7 March 1990. Resistance continued but remained uncoordinated and rarely gave rise to permanent grassroots organisation.

Indeed, like many other homeland areas, Bop suffers from a lack of a tradition of democratic grassroots organisation. This is due to the repressive, top down authority structures in rural areas, as well as the fact that the South African extra-parliamentary movement (whether the ANC, Cosatu or civics) continuously shied away from mobilizing and organising South Africa's peripheral regions.

ANC and Cosatu organise...

In June/July 1990, the situation started to change with the setting up of several civic and youth organisations in the Odi Moretele area. In addition, the Anti-Bop Coordinating Committee coordinated the formation of 15 Bop ANC branches. Cosatu embarked on a campaign of disruptive action against the Bop government for prohibiting Bop workers from joining South Africa-based unions. In struggling for the standardisation of labour relations and laws, Cosatu wanted the abolition of the Bop State of Emergency and its Labour Relations Act.

The ANC, which is now the main opposition in Bop, continues to campaign to force the Bop government to conform to the spirit of the Groote Schuur and Pretoria minutes by lifting the State of Emergency and allowing complete freedom of political activity and association.

Bop started to feel under increasing pressure from its militant and more organised resident population, as well as from various South African political quarters (including Pik Botha) because it refused to be part of the South Africa political reform process. As a result, the Bop government has had to change its

• Soldiers are arrested by the SADF after the abortive coup attempt in Bop in 1988



tactics slightly. At the local level, Mangope continues to use the iron fist. He went as far as trumping up charges of an ANC plot to overthrow his government and assassinate him, to justify detaining more than 50 local ANC activists and obstructing the ANC's organisational drive in the region.

Mangope also embarked on a propaganda campaign against the ANC, which he describes as a 'Xhosa-dominated' organisation which is committed to the violent overthrow of his 'constitutional government'. He further warned that his 'peace-loving' Bophuthatswana citizens won't be intimidated nor distracted by foreign-based agitators and organisations (meaning the South African democratic movement) who indulge in 'illegal' activities in Bop.

...and Mangope polishes his image

However, at national level, Mangope has adopted a slightly more sophisticated stance. He uses the rhetoric of a reasonable national leader committed to negotiation and democracy. Since October, his government has held relatively inconclusive political talks with the South Africa government, the ANC and Inkatha. It has reasserted its political sovereignty and independence.

In March this year, under pressure, Mangope decided to polish his politically tolerant image and abolished the one-year old State of Emergency, and promised to amend its Internal Security Act (which, *inter alia*, obliges any group to apply for permission to hold public meetings). At face value, his announcement appear as a step towards liberalising political activities. However, a closer examination reveals that, as Mangope himself said, 'the Bophuthatswana government wants to remain the master of its own destiny'.

Political activities will be more tightly circumscribed than before: any political party or group will have to register under the Electoral Act, political participation will be confined to Bop citizens only and political changes in Bop will have to go through the Bop ballot box. The ANC-Bop branches have condemned this intensification 'of Verwoed-type political repression disguised in the sheep's clothing of Mangope's so-called Democratic Party', as it effectively bans from the political arena the many residents which do not recognise Bop citizenship.

Regional manoeuvres

The Bop government remains intran-

sigient about the negotiation talks. As an 'independent state', it wants to await the outcome of the negotiated constitutional arrangements in South Africa before considering future economic cooperation with a new non-racial government.

In the meanwhile, Mangope is investigating forms of regional socio-economic cooperation between Bop and the Western and Northern Transvaal, the Northern Cape and the South-Western Orange Free State, in order 'to join the constitutional debate with greater bargaining power'.

Mangope has also commissioned various studies to look into the implications of reincorporation along regional/federal lines which would protect and preserve his present administration. Many white parties from the CP to the DP support the idea of regional/federal government as a means to protect their 'minority interests', and prevent the development of a strong black-dominated centralised government. This is to be distinguished from the idea of a decentralised unitary state coming from within the liberation movement. (see previous article, p 14).

Apart from challenging Bop's sovereignty, the idea of reincorporation poses problems for many Bop interest groups.

For example, on the issue of regional development, Bop strongly disagreed with the recommendations of a panel of experts of the evaluation of the 1982 Regional Industrial Development Programme (RIDP). It rejects the restructuring of the industrial incentive package along more market-related lines, as it (rightly) fears that this will result in the deproclamation of a few Bop industrial growth centres that are judged economically unviable by the report.

Bop has also complained that the report ignores the existing political problems of regional cooperation, and undermines its political sovereignty by not treating Bop as an equal political partner.

Other economic groups worried about the prospects of a new regional political and economic dispensation, include the overinflated bureaucracy and the many South African, Taiwanese and Israeli companies, which depend for their survival on the generous incentives and the favourable political and labour conditions of Bop.

The more productive and profitable companies don't feel as threatened as they know they can survive a post-Bop era. These companies have already shown that when caught between the demands of a rigid Bop government and a Cosatu

threat of industrial instability, they decided to disregard the Bop government and respect the Cosatu stayaway. Other major companies operating in Bop (like Impala and Rustenburg Platinum, Sun International, AECI) are also busy repositioning themselves more favourably towards the new South Africa by talking to the ANC and the South Africa government about political changes.

The South African government remains ambivalent about Bop. While the Bop government has been useful in keeping the opposition movement at bay and in maintaining an appearance of political and economic stability, it has also become a thorn in Pretoria's flesh by being involved in large-scale financial mismanagement and by adopting an inflexible attitude towards the constitutional talks.

ANC on the defensive

The ANC appears to have gone on the defensive in Bop: not only is it slowing down its campaign against 'hostile' homeland leaders and their structures, but it is also neglecting the popular mobilisation of the people in these areas (even though it has recently said that it was the people of these areas, and not the homeland leaders that matter in deciding the future of homeland areas).

The ANC seems to feel that these homeland areas don't offer a politically important constituency, or that the ANC is organisationally and politically so overstretched that homeland issues will be resolved at the negotiation table.

But isn't this a shortsighted tactic? Won't the ANC's poor organisational presence in homeland areas weigh heavily when the struggle enters the stage of electoral politics?

Given this balance of forces, one can only wonder how much longer Mangope is going to last before South Africa puts the final squeeze to get him or a successor to admit the inevitability of reincorporation. The pressures to retain some form of regional government are there and should not be overlooked. But one thing is certain: no future regional or local authority will have as much power and autonomy as these apartheid structures, and Mangope in particular, did.

It remains to be seen to what extent the negotiations process will cater for the needs of this rather unorganised and badly neglected homeland population.

*Francine De Clercq is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Bophuthatswana (Unibo), and is presently conducting research on regional development policy.