

Botswana-Bophuthatswana relations in the context of Lucas Mangope's quest for international diplomatic recognition, 1977-1994

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If Botswana cannot change its foreign policy on Bophuthatswana, and continues with its mud-slinging, then Bophuthatswana will have no choice but to retaliate – Lucas Mangope (1986).

Abstract

This article is an account of the relations between independent Botswana and her South African Black homeland neighbour of Bophuthatswana, whom Botswana steadfastly refused to recognise as a sovereign state. Bophuthatswana was used by South Africa to punish Botswana for assisting liberation movement groups such as the African National Congress (ANC) in their struggle against apartheid. Lucas Mangope, president of Bophuthatswana, tried to pressurize Botswana into recognising Bophuthatswana through diplomatic relations. Initially, he tried to capitalise on the common Tswana cultural heritage between Botswana and Bophuthatswana and their long common border to achieve his objective. The paper also looks at how Mangope sought to use Pan-Tswana links and soft power on the main opposition party, Botswana National Front (BNF), to get the international recognition for Bophuthatswana. The focus then shifts to how a failed military coup that sought to oust Mangope in 1988 further strained the relations between Botswana and Bophuthatswana. Finally, the article discusses Botswana's response to the demise of apartheid and Bophuthatswana in 1994. The paper adds to the corpus of literature on the contribution of Botswana to the liberation of South Africa and the Southern African region generally which President Mokgweetsi Masisi of Botswana rather mistakenly lamented in late June 2021 that it has been neglected in terms of documentation. This points to the need for teaching of the history of Botswana in the country's education system which is currently very limited.

Keywords: International diplomacy; Botswana; Bophuthatswana; Lucas Mangope; Relations.

Introduction

Whereas Botswana was a small democratic and militarily weak state that overwhelmingly depended on apartheid South Africa for economic development and infrastructure, Botswana was however an open critic of South Africa's apartheid system. Botswana also gave support to the South African liberation movement groups,

which included the African National Congress (ANC), that sought to dislodge the apartheid government.¹ By the 1980s South Africa had intensified her pursuit of the liberation movement combatants into the neighbouring Southern African countries. The ANC received military assistance from the Soviet Union, and South African government perceived this as an existential threat to its statehood as well as the interests of the Western world led by the United States in their global ideological and military competition against the Soviet Union or the Cold War. This threat was labelled Communist “Total Onslaught”² by the South African government during the presidency of PW Botha. South Africa capitalised on the Cold War milieu by supporting the Western powers which in turn tolerated the apartheid system and even invested in the South African economy.³ South Africa labelled the ANC and other liberation groups “Communists” and influenced the American and British governments of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher respectively to classify the ANC as a “terrorist organisation”.⁴ Like South Africa, Mangopé’s Bophuthatswana was intolerant of the ANC, which strongly opposed the Bantustan system, and dealt with its combatants and other members as terrorists. The ANC was never formally banned in Bophuthatswana⁵ but operated underground sometimes with sympathetic taxi drivers ferrying ANC combatants to the Botswana border to cross illegally.⁶ Therefore, the apartheid regime responded with a policy it called “Total Strategy”.⁷ This included military raids in the neighbouring countries with ANC activists and others as targets.

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- 1 CJ Makgala and B Seabo, “‘Very brave or very foolish?’ ‘Gallant little’ Botswana’s defiance of ‘apartheid’s golden age’, 1966-1980”, *The Round Table*, 106(3), 2017, pp. 303-311; L Cantwell, “Chiefly power in a frontline state: Kgosi Linchwe II, the Bakgatla and Botswana in the South African liberation struggle, 1948-1994”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 41(2), 2015, pp. 255-272; PT Mgadla and BT Mokopakgosi, “Botswana and the liberation of South Africa: An evolving story of sacrifice”, *South African Democracy Education: The Road to Democracy in South Africa*, 5, *African Solidarity Part I* (Pretoria, Unisa Press, 2013), pp. 393-440.
 - 2 DW Potgeiter, *Total onslaught: Apartheid’s dirty tricks exposed* (Cape Town, Penguin Random House South Africa, 2012).
 - 3 R Nixon, *Selling apartheid: South Africa’s global propaganda war* (Auckland Park, Jacana, 2015).
 - 4 A McSmith, “Margaret Thatcher branded ANC ‘terrorist’ while urging Nelson Mandela’s release”, *Independent*, 9 December 2013 (available at <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/margaret-thatcher-branded-anc-terrorist-while-urging-nelson-mandela-s-release-8994191.html>, as accessed on 3 May 2020); B Little, “Why Nelson Mandela was viewed as a ‘terrorist’ by the U.S. Until 2008”, *Biography*, 28 December 2018 (available at <https://www.biography.com/news/nelson-mandela-terrorist-reagan-thatcher>, as accessed on 3 May 2020).
 - 5 D Welsh, *The rise and fall of apartheid* (Johannesburg and Cape Town, Jonathan Ball, 2009), p. 512.
 - 6 JR Moreti, “A taxi operator from Morwa in the ANC struggle against Mangopé’s Bophuthatswana”, *Botswana Notes and Records*, 44, 2012, pp. 224-228.
 - 7 Among other works see P Johnson and D Martin, *Destructive engagement: Southern Africa at war* (Harare, Zimbabwe Publishing House for the Southern African Research and Documentation, 1986); J Smith and B Tromp, *Hani: A life too short* (Johannesburg and Cape Town, Jonathan Ball); R Davies and D O’meara, “Total strategy in Southern Africa: An analysis of South African regional policy since 1978”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 11(2), 1985, pp. 183-211; J Hanlop, *Beggar your neighbours: Apartheid power in Southern Africa* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1986); M Coleman (ed.), *A crime against humanity: Analysing the repression of the apartheid state* (Cape Town, University of Western Cape, 1998).

Whereas, Botswana also suffered from raids by the South African Defence Force (SADF) such as 14 June 1985 and 19 May 1986 attacks on Gaborone,⁸ the Pretoria regime also tried a strategy of using Bophuthatswana to harass and humiliate Botswana.⁹ Bophuthatswana's relentless pursuit of the elusive international diplomatic recognition was targeted at the unwilling Botswana because of the two territories' common Tswana ethnic heritage and a long international border. Since Bophuthatswana gained her "independence" from South Africa in 1977 it pursued this goal with vigour but Botswana was unrelenting. Bophuthatswana resorted to several acts of intimidating Botswana as well as sabotaging the country's economy. Whereas this hard power approach was indirect manoeuvre by South Africa and part of its "Total Strategy" against Botswana, the latter declined to deal with Bophuthatswana and insisted on negotiating with the South African regime directly much to the chagrin of Bophuthatswana. Nonetheless, there were instances when Botswana leadership was pragmatic and had secret deals with Mangope.

The article uses the designation "Tswana" to refer to ethnic Tswana-speakers in order to avoid confusing them with Batswana who are citizens of post-colonial Botswana,¹⁰ and South Africa. The relations between Botswana and Bophuthatswana has not been studied comprehensively, hence this ambitious paper. There are some works that do touch briefly on aspects of this relations but their focus is on other issues.¹¹ BKM Molokoe's PhD thesis submitted at the University of North West in 2000 is the most informative on Bophuthatswana's quest for international recognition and the 1988 military coup that briefly ousted Mangope. M Lawrence and A Manson in their journal article on the "Rise and fall of Bophuthatswana" provide helpful insights on Mangope's notion of "Pan-Tswanaism" and his engineered railway crisis with Botswana. The second president of Botswana, Sir Ketumile Masire (1980-1998) in his memoirs devotes a small section to relations with Bophuthatswana¹² and this is used as a primary source because it reflects Botswana's official position. Former South

8 R Dale, "Not always so placid a place: Botswana under attack", *African Affairs*, 86(342), 1987, pp. 73-91.

9 M Dingake, *The politics of confusion: The BNF Saga, 1984-1988* (Gaborone, Bay Publishing), p.47.

10 It should be noted that Botswana is not an ethnically homogenous society as it is comprised of numerous non-Tswana speakers who have for a long time campaigned for promotion of their linguistic and cultural rights at the constitutional level. Among several works on this subject there is R Werbner, *Reasonable radicals and citizenship in Botswana: The public anthropology of Kalanga Elites* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2004); R Werbner, "Cosmopolitan ethnicity, entrepreneurship and the nation: Minority elites in Botswana", *Journal of Southern African Studies: Special Issue on Minorities and Citizenship in Botswana*, 28(4), 2002, pp. 731-753; I Mazonde (ed.), *Minorities in the millennium: Perspectives from Botswana* (Gaborone, Lentswe La Lesedi, 2002).

11 J Drummond, and AH Manson, "The evolution and contemporary significance of the Bophuthatswana-Botswana landscape", D Rumley and JV Minghi (eds.), *The geography of border landscapes* (London and New York, Routledge, 1991), pp. 217-242; M Lawrence and A Manson, "The 'dogs of the boers': The rise and fall of Mangope's Bophuthatswana", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 20(3), 1994, p. 447-461; BKM Molokoe, "Bophuthatswana and its impact on the North West province, 1974-1998" (PhD thesis, University of North West, 2000); CJ Makgala, *History of Bakgatla-baga-Kgafela in Botswana and South Africa* (Crink, Pretoria, 2009).

12 QKJ Masire, *Very brave or very foolish? Memoirs of an African democrat* (Gaborone, Macmillan, 2006).

African President FW de Klerk (1989-1994) in memoirs, which is also treated as a primary source, discusses the Bantustans and does touch on Lucas Mangope but he does not discuss Botswana-Bophuthatswana relations at all.¹³

The article also adds to the corpus of literature on Botswana's contribution to the liberation struggle of South Africa and the Southern African region which recently the president of Botswana, Mokgweetsi Masisi, rather mistakenly lamented that it has been neglected in terms of documentation.¹⁴ He said this at the Office of the President in late June 2021 during a valedictory call by outgoing South African high commissioner to Botswana, Rosemary Mashaba. Contrary to Masisi's protestation a lot has been done in the documentation of Botswana's role in the liberation of the region including in the massive 10-volume Hashim Mbita Project funded by the Southern African Development Community (SADC).¹⁵ The Hashim Mbita publications were formally handed the African Union (AU) leadership by the then chairperson of SADC President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe on 20 January 2016.¹⁶ The project and publication was named after the retired late Brigadier General

13 FW de Klerk, *The autobiography: The last trek a new beginning* (London, Pan Books, 1999).

14 K More, "Botswana's liberation struggle role neglected", *Botswana Daily News*, 28 June 2021.

15 T Tlou and P Mgadla, "Botswana", AJ Temu and JDN Tembe (eds.), *Southern African National Liberation Struggles, 1960-1994: Contemporary Documents 10 Volumes* (Dar es Salaam, Mkuki No Nyoto Publishers, 2014) (available at https://www.sadc.int/files/5914/0871/4326/HASHIM_MBITA_FLYER.PDF, as accessed on 29 June 2021; CJ Makgala, G Goitsewang and D Norris, "In an hour, I could be shot over Angola: The geopolitical dynamics and experience of the 1988 shooting of president Masire's Jet", *Botswana Notes and Records: A Special Issue on Botswana Notes and Records' Golden Jubilee Volume in Honour of Sir Ketumile Masire*, 50, (2018), pp. 153-165; CJ Makgala and B Seabo, "Very brave or very foolish?... ", pp. 303-311; L Cantwell, "Chiefly power in a frontline state...", pp. 255-272; PT Mgadla and BT Mokopakgosi, "Botswana and the liberation of South Africa...", pp. 393-440; QKJ Masire, *Very brave or very foolish? ...*; R Dale, "Not always so placid a place", pp. 73-91; MS Merafhe, *The general: In the service of my country* (Gaborone, Diamond Educational Books, 2015); N Parsons, W Henderson and T Tlou, *Setsetse Khama, 1921-1980* (Gaborone, Botswana Society and Macmillan, 1995); W Edge, *The autobiography of Mpho Motsamai* (Gaborone, Lobopo Publishers, 1996); N Parsons, "The pipeline: Botswana's reception of refugees, 1956-68", *Social Dynamics*, 34(1), 2008, pp. 17-32; F Keitseng (edited by J Ramsay and B Morton), *Comrade fish: Memories of a Motswana in the ANC underground* (Gaborone, Pula Press, 1999); BZ Osei-Hwendie, "The role of Botswana in the liberation of Southern Africa Since 1966", WA Edge and MH, Lekorwe (eds.), *Botswana politics and society* (Pretoria, JL van Schaik, 1998), p. 425-439; M Dingake, *Better to die on one's feet: One man's journey in the struggle for freedom* (Cape Town, South Africa's History Online, 2015); CJ Makgala, and LM Fisher, "The impact of the Zimbabwean liberation struggle on Botswana: The case of Lesoma Ambush, 1978", *New Contree*, 57, 2009, pp. 158-178; P Mgadla, "A good measure of sacrifice: Botswana and the liberation struggles of Southern Africa (1965-1985)", *Social Dynamics: A Journal of African Studies*, 34(1), 2008, pp. 5-16; MMM Bolaane, "Cross-border lives, warfare and rape in independence-era Botswana", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 39(3), 2013, pp. 557-576; BT Mokopakgosi, "The University in Botswana and the liberation struggle in Southern Africa (1973-1980)", *Social Dynamics: A Journal of African Studies*, 34(1), 2008, pp. 39-42; WG Morapedi, "The dilemmas of liberation in Southern Africa: The case of Zimbabwean liberation movements and Botswana, 1960-1979", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 38(1), 2012, pp. 73-90; BG Gumbo, "Southern African liberation wars: The halting development of tourism in Botswana, 1960s-1990s", *South African Historical Journal*, 66(3), 2014, pp. 572-587; JA Muller, *The inevitable pipeline: Botswana's role in the Namibian liberation struggle* (Basel, Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2012); JH Polhemus, "Botswana's role in the liberation of southern Africa", LA Picard (ed.), *Evolution of modern Botswana* (London, Rex Collins, 1985).

16 Southern African Development Community, "SADC presents Hashim Mbita publication to the African Union" (available at <https://www.sadc.int/news-events/news/sadc-presents-hashim-mbita-publication-african-union/>, as accessed on 29 June 2021).

Hashim Mbita of Tanzania who had served as the executive secretary of the AU's forerunner the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) from 1974 to 1992. The pervasive ignorance of the Botswana's role and sacrifice in the liberation of the region can be attributed to very limited or non-teaching of the history of Botswana in the country's education system.¹⁷ This is not helped by the fact that in some influential government and corporate quarters the necessity of teaching history in the country's schools has even been questioned.¹⁸

Common Botswana-Bophuthatswana historical heritage

Botswana and Bophuthatswana shared a longstanding and common historical, cultural and ethnic linkages. The Tswana of Botswana originate from South Africa where they had split from others owing to succession disputes, conflicts and inter-tribal warfare over generations. Starting in the mid-nineteenth century some Tswana groups from South Africa, including Bahurutshe boo Manyane to which Mangope belonged, left for territory of Bakwena of Kgosi Sechele in what would later become Botswana. As Andrew Manson notes: "Persistent demands for labor, however, eventually forced Mangope to lead the rest of his community out of the Transvaal in 1858".¹⁹ Nonetheless, the Bahurutshe boo Manyane returned to the area in 1881 and settled at Motswedi near Mangope Siding under the Bahurutshe booGopane.²⁰ Communities of Bahurutshe related to the booManyane are found in the small villages of Manyana and Mankgodini in the Ngwaketse and Kweneng tribal territories of Botswana. In 1885 the British colonialists split the territory of the Tswana states into two parts along the Molopo River which became a boundary between the two territories. They named the area to the south of the river British Bechuanaland while the northern part became Bechuanaland Protectorate (called Botswana after Independence in September 1966). In 1895 British Bechuanaland became part of the Cape Colony and with the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910, different Tswana groups in what would later become Bophuthatswana became part of South Africa (see Image 1). It was this historical development that Lucas Mangope tried to exploit in his spurious "Pan-Tswanaism".²¹

17 CJ Makgala, "Collapsing under the weight of bureaucratic red tape: The challenges of combating the crisis of low student numbers at the University of Botswana", *Lonaka Journal of Teaching and Learning*, 11(2), 2020, pp. 117-125.

18 CJ Makgala, "Botswana government and corporate elites' denunciation of South African empire builder Shaka Zulu and the scapegoating of Arts and Social Sciences for unemployment" (paper in preparation at the time of submission, July 2021).

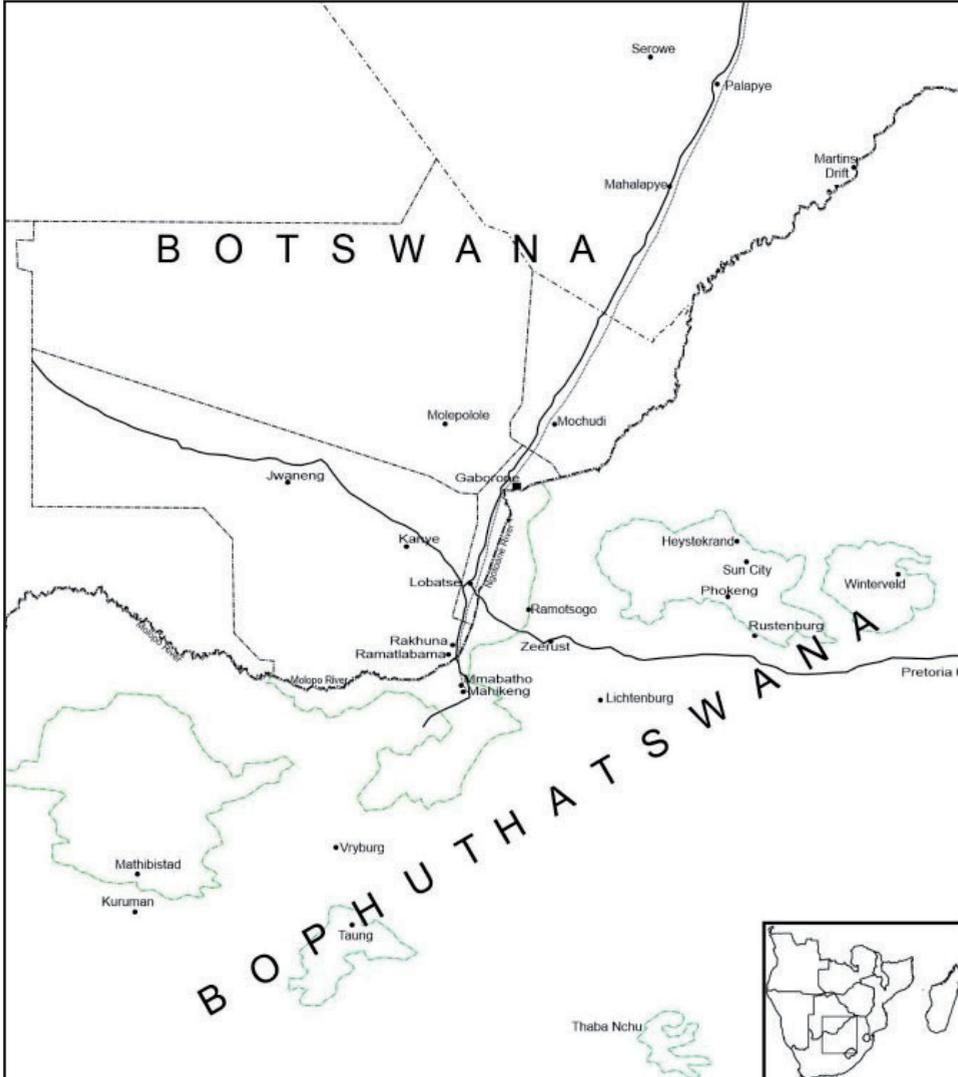
19 A Manson, "The Hurutshe and the formation of the Transvaal state, 1835-1875", *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 25(1), 1992, p. 92.

20 P-L Breutz, *The tribes of the Marico district* (Pretoria, Native Affairs Department, Government Printer, 1957); B Mbenga and A Manson, *People of the dew: A history of the Bafokeng-Rustenburg region, South Africa, from times to 2000* (Auckland Park, Jacana, 2010); A Manson and B Mbenga, *Land chiefs and mining: South Africa's North West province since 1840* (Johannesburg, Wits University Press, 2014).

21 M Lawrence and A Manson, "The 'dogs of the boers'...", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 20(3), 1994, pp. 454-455.

While it is true, of course, that the British had laid down an arbitrary border, they had not in fact divided a ‘nation’ – though they certainly did divide certain chiefdoms, such as the Hurutshe and Rolong, from their kinsfolk. However, Mangope’s interpretation of this event shifted the debate back to the colonial era, and exonerated the proponents and executors of segregation and apartheid.

Image 1: Map of South Africa showing Bophuthatswana “islands” and its geographic positioning in Southern Africa (see insert)



Source: Drawn by M Sedimo, *University of Botswana*, ca 2020.

The constitution of South Africa had a provision for eventual incorporation of Bechuanaland Protectorate into South Africa. For generations the Tswana in Bechuanaland Protectorate depended on migrant labour to South Africa for their livelihoods. For much of the colonial period until just before independence in 1966 the Bechuanaland Protectorate was also administered from Mahikeng (previously written Mafikeng) in the Cape Province of South Africa. The *Dikgosi* (Chiefs) in Botswana campaigned vigorously and successfully against the attempts to incorporate the territory into South Africa because they were aware that it meant loss of their land and economic exploitation as well as racism at the hands of the white minority.²² The threat of incorporation into South Africa faded away with the introduction of apartheid in 1948 and South Africa's withdrawal from the British Commonwealth in 1961.

In a bid to stem the tide of Black or African nationalist struggle against apartheid, the South African government established Bantustans (later renamed Bantu homelands) along ethnic lines for Africans to exercise their political rights there. Transkei was the first Bantustan to gain "independence" in 1976 for the Xhosa people. However, President Seretse Khama of Botswana dismissed Transkei's "independence" as "constituting the crystallization of apartheid". He further said that:²³

... black leaders who participate in the inhuman and unjust homeland policies deny their people the right to live in a united South Africa, as well as the right to wealth which they created together with their white compatriots.

Bantustans were not recognised by the international community as independent states but only South Africa. The apartheid regime also tried to use its lobbyists in the United States to influence the American government to recognise Transkei as an independent state, but this was unsuccessful.²⁴ Bantustans were too poor and heavily dependent on South Africa for employment even for their budgets.

22 R Hyam, *The failure of South African expansion, 1908-1948* (London and Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1972); T Khama, *A statement to the British parliament and people* (London, Author, 1935.); T Khama, *Bechuanaland and South Africa* (London, African Bureau, 1955); T Khama, *The proposed inclusion of Bechuanaland into the Union of South Africa* (London, Author, 1955); T Khama, and D Buchanan, *The case for Bechuanaland*, Paper by Tshekedi Khama on behalf of Bechuanaland Chiefs, 29 April 1946 (available at http://www.historicalpapers.wits.ac.za/inventories/inv_pdfo/AD843/AD843-S40-5-001-jpeg.pdf, as accessed on 1 March 2021).

23 "Bogus independence of Apartheid Republic", *Botswana Daily News*, 26 October 1976.

24 R Nixon, *Selling apartheid...*, p. 72.

Bophuthatswana, which means collection of Tswana or gathering together of Tswana, became the second Bantustan to gain independence on 6 December 1977 under Lucas Mangope and his Bophuthatswana Democratic Party (BDP). At any rate, there were many non-Tswana communities in Bophuthatswana some of whom became “citizens” through coercion as they resisted losing their South African citizenship. Some Tswana communities, such as twin Bahurutshe villages of Braklaagte and Leeuwfontein, also put up spirited resistance against forced incorporation into Bophuthatswana.²⁵ Under Mangope, the “Republic” of Bophuthatswana became a non-racial society with a relatively well managed economy that attracted professionals from South Africa, United States, Europe and even Botswana among other countries. Botswana’s nation-building project in the form of a non-racial and a liberal democratic society influenced Mangope who tried to follow it.²⁶

Central to this attempt was the use of key ideological mechanisms, in particular formal education, to provide for the social and cultural reproduction of a form of Tswana identity and history similar to the Botswana nation-building Kagiso [Kagisano] Education Commission.

It is important to note that Botswana’s national philosophy of *Kagisano* or peaceful coexistence, which is made up of principles of democracy, development, self-reliance and unity, also forms the bedrock of the country’s foreign policy.²⁷

In 1984 Bophuthatswana established a television station (Bop TV) which became quite popular in Botswana alongside English-medium Radio Bop and its Tswana-medium counterpart Radio Mmabatho (reconstituted as Motswedding FM after 1994 following the collapse of Bophuthatswana and the end of apartheid). Botswana did not have a television station until much later in 2000. Furthermore, people in Botswana often travelled to Mahikeng for various goods and services. Many shopkeepers in Botswana got stock for their businesses in Mahikeng. When a big modern-shopping centre, “Mega City”, was opened in Mmabatho in the 1980s people from Botswana became some of its most important clients. Most of the shops at Mega City were South African franchises.

Southern African Customs Union (SACU) was formed in 1910 between South Africa, Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland (now eSwatini) for purposes of sharing profits calculated on a formula agreed by member states. After Botswana’s independence the country renegotiated the deal and obtained a significantly higher share of the revenue which contributed substantially to her national budget. The increase was so significant that the country was able to balance its budget and stopped

25 A Manson, and BK Mbenga, *Land, chiefs, mining...*, p. 127.

26 M Lawrence and A Manson, “The ‘dogs of the boers’...”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 20(3), 1994, p. 453.

27 GA Sekgoma, “New dimensions in Botswana’s foreign policy”, WA Edge and MH Lekorwe (eds.), *Botswana: Politics and society* (Pretoria, JL van Schaik, 1998), pp. 477-486; C Lekoa, “Botswana and multilateral foreign policy”, *Botswana Notes and Records*, 51, 2019, pp. 118-122.

depending on aid from Britain.²⁸ Following the creation of the Bantustans, South Africa made them members of SACU.²⁹

Nonetheless, there were instances whereby Botswana had no choice but to be pragmatic and accept Bophuthatswana travel documents for cross-border travel. Furthermore, former president of Botswana, Sir Ketumile Masire (1980-1998) writes that As Gaborone grew, we needed to increase the capacity of the Gaborone dam. The World Bank refused to help us finance the dam until we had consulted with the other riparian users. This posed a problem, since the territory of Bophuthatswana included areas both upstream and downstream of the dam. When we went to the South Africans, they said:³⁰

Well, that area belongs to Bophuthatswana, not to South Africa, so you have to talk to them. We initially refused to accept their position, but the World Bank insisted, so we eventually had to swallow our pride. Mr Mogwe (Botswana minister for foreign affairs) did the groundwork with their so-called foreign minister. Without anybody knowing I met Lucas Mangope... at the Martins Drift border, and we clinched the deal.

It was also reported in December 1986 that Mangope demanded that Bophuthatswana be given a railway customs post at Lobatse, Botswana³¹ but Botswana declined. So annoyed was Mangope with Botswana that during Bophuthatswana “independence” celebrations in 1986 he declared that:³²

If Botswana cannot change its foreign policy on Bophuthatswana, and continues with its mud-slinging, then Bophuthatswana will have no choice but to retaliate.

Mangope also disparaged the people of Botswana for watching his Bop TV whilst they did not like him which he saw as inconsistent and hypocritical.

The limits of Pan-Tswanaism in Mangope's Campaign for international recognition

Unlike other Bantustans, Mangope's Bophuthatswana was the most ambitious and aggressive in her “independence” and made attempts for diplomatic relations with the international community. Because of historical and ethnic ties between Bophuthatswana and Botswana or “pan-Tswanaism” Mangope looked to Botswana

28 QKJ Masire, *Very brave or very foolish?*; Q Hermans, “Towards budgetary independence: A review of Botswana's financial history, 1900-1973”, *Botswana Notes and Records*, 6, 1974, pp. 89-115.

29 QKJ Masire, *Very brave or very foolish?*, p. 261.

30 QKJ Masire, *Very brave or very foolish?*, p. 264.

31 S Schmemmann, “Gaborone Journal: Pretoria turns up heat and Botswana sweats”, *New York Times*, 9 February 1987 (available at <https://www.nytimes.com/1987/02/09/world/gaborone-journal-pretoria-turns-up-heat-and-botswana-sweats.html>, as accessed on 21 January 2020).

32 M Lawrence and A Manson, “The ‘dogs of the boers’...”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 20(3), 1994, p. 455.

for diplomatic relations. He had expected Botswana to be the first country to welcome Bophuthatswana and use that as a springboard for establishing diplomatic relations with the rest of the international community.³³ According to Masire: “The South African government talked of how there could be a greater Tswana nation if we were to unite with Bophuthatswana”.³⁴ Despite Botswana’s heavy economic dependence on South Africa, President Seretse Khama had in 1977 dismissed the Bophuthatswana project labelling it the “apartheid’s child”.³⁵ Mangope tried to pursue an even more ambitious plan of a merger with Botswana and Bophuthatswana but his repeated overtures to Botswana leadership were routinely dismissed or ignored.³⁶

With his diplomatic overtures to Botswana rebuffed Mangope resorted to a hard-line approach. Some of his tactics amounted to sabotage of Botswana’s economic wellbeing. For instance, in 1979 his government built Notwane (Ngotoane) Dam in Bophuthatswana’s Lehurutshe District to reduce the water flowing across the border into Gaborone Dam –the lifeline of the Botswana’s capital. There was also construction of a dam on the Molopo River meant to reduce water flowing across the border into Botswana where it was used for domestic and agricultural activities. The building of the two dams coincided with a period of severe drought in Botswana in the early 1980s. Cunningly.³⁷

... the Bophuthatswana government offered Botswana the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process which led to the construction of the dams. Botswana rejected these overtures but chose to negotiate with South Africa on the basis that the construction of the Ngotoane Dam would violate a previous agreement between South Africa, Botswana, Zimbabwe and Mozambique not to build dams on the Limpopo River or its headwaters.

In 1984 a rapprochement between South African and Mozambique led to the two neighbouring states signing Nkomati Peace Accord whereby South Africa pledged to cease assisting Renamo rebels in Mozambique and Mozambique was to cease hosting the ANC in that country. Although the influential Zambian president, Kenneth Kaunda, defended the Nkomati Accord,³⁸ which was also commended by Mobutu sese Seko³⁹ of Zaire (Now Democratic Republic of Congo) Botswana flatly rejected a similar arrangement when South Africa approached Botswana about it. Botswana argued that the end of apartheid and freedom for Black majority in South Africa was the only sure way to bring about peace. While Mozambique did honour its pledge South Africa did not.

33 BKM Molokoe, “Bophuthatswana and its impact...” (PhD thesis, University of North West, 2000), p. 147.

34 QKJ Masire, *Very brave or very foolish?*, p. 270.

35 “Botswana won’t recognise apartheid’s child –President Khama”, *Botswana Daily News*, 23 June 1977.

36 BKM Molokoe, “Bophuthatswana and its impact...” (PhD thesis, University of North West, p. 147.

37 J Drummond, and AH Manson, “The evolution and contemporary significance...”, D Rumley and JV Minghi (eds.), *The geography of border landscapes*, p. 235.

38 “Kaunda Defends Nkomati Accord”, *Daily News*, 2 May 1984.

39 “Zaire Commends Nkomati Accord”, *Daily News*, 12 April 1984.

On 22 February 1985 Botswana's minister for foreign affairs, Gaositwe Chiepe, met her South African counterpart, Pik Botha, in Pretoria for discussion on common security. She informed Botha that in January 1985 the "foreign affairs" minister of Bophuthatswana, TM Molatlhwa, arranged to have an urgent meeting with Chiepe on 22 January. During that meeting Molatlhwa unveiled Bophuthatswana's threats to invade Botswana for ostensibly failing to stop the ANC from infiltrating Bophuthatswana from Botswana. Chiepe said:⁴⁰

What surprised her at the meeting with Mr Molatlhwa was the fact that Bophuthatswana had never complained to Botswana before about ANC infiltration from her territory.

For his part Botha stated that South Africa was concerned that ANC "terrorists" had increased their infiltration into Botswana from Zambia and Zimbabwe and then from Botswana the terrorists had found their way into South Africa and Boputhatswana. Botha also alleged that South African whites who left South Africa to escape compulsory military service spread false propaganda against South Africa from Botswana with impunity. Interestingly, Botswana's secretary for foreign affairs, GG Garebamo, reported that:⁴¹

The Botswana delegation at the meeting of 22 February 1985 had expected a tough meeting as usual. It was therefore with a sense of relief when the South African side for the first time adopted a conciliatory approach throughout the meeting to be followed by announcement by Mr. Botha to the Press waiting outside that South Africa no longer wanted Botswana to sign a non-aggression accord with her. Speculation on why South Africa decided to abandon her insistence on the need to sign an accord with Botswana will continue to rage on for some time to come but one thing is clear: the Nkomati Accord blueprint has been discredited and therefore no one can be fooled into thinking that we were wrong in refusing to sign a similar pact. All along our arguments against signing were strong, cogent, consistent and unbending. Anything less than this would have led us into compromises which we would have found impossible to live with.

However, hardly three months later On 14 June 1985 South African commandos raided Gaborone and killed about twelve people among whom were South African refugees.⁴² South Africa also resorted to other acts of intimidation and bombings in different places such as Gaborone and Kgatleng District in which people were killed.⁴³ Such acts happened right up to the late 1980s. The *New York Times* correspondent in Botswana, Serge Schmemann,

⁴⁰ See next footnote.

⁴¹ Botswana National Archives, Gaborone, SPS OP/13/113, "Minutes on meeting held on 22 February 1985 between Honourable RF (Pik) Botha and Honourable GKT Chiepe in Pretoria to discuss Security".

⁴² MS Merafhe, *The general*, pp. 69-71; R Dale, "Not always a placid place", *African Affairs*, 86(342), 1987, pp. 73-91.

⁴³ CJ Makgala, *History of Bakgatla бага Kgafela in Botswana and South Africa* (Pretoria, Crink, 2009), pp. 278-280.

wrote that the people in Botswana lived:⁴⁴

... under the threatening shadow of what some here call ‘demonstration sanctions’ by its looming southern neighbor, South Africa.

It seems South Africa carried out the sanctions by allowing Bophuthatswana to cause the “railway impasse” and demanded visas from Botswana citizens entering the Bantustan as we demonstrate shortly.

The railway transport in Botswana was owned and operated by the National Railway of Zimbabwe (NRZ). However, at the end of 1984 the government of Botswana established the Department of Railways for takeover of the railway from NRZ planned for 1 January 1987. The establishment of the Department of Railways and the takeover of the railway system by Botswana was a special moment of pride in the country’s history. While the nation was still excited by the arrangement of the takeover of the railways system from Zimbabwe, the Bophuthatswana government tried to frustrate the process. On short notice the Bophuthatswana government declared that no Botswana train crew or the country’s rolling –stock was allowed to cross the Ramatlabama border into Bophuthatswana starting on 1 January 1987.⁴⁵ This extremely inconvenient measure forced Botswana to negotiate with the NRZ and agreed that the railway would continue to operate as NRZ while the border issue was still being attended to. In the meantime, Botswana relied on crews of seconded Zimbabweans for every cross-border train. The Mangope regime responded by demanding visas from Botswana citizens and Zimbabweans entering Bophuthatswana.

In negotiations with the South African government officials on 26 January 1987 Botswana indicated that the visa requirement violated SACU agreements but South Africa responded by claiming that Bophuthatswana was needed in resolving the gridlock. However, it seems that South Africa was using the willing Bophuthatswana against Botswana. On 12 February 1987 the Mangope regime stiffened its position by imposing total ban on train crew movement and locomotives south of the border even for a very short distance. In addition to demanding visas from Botswana citizens and Zimbabweans, Mangope insisted on opening an embassy in Gaborone. Schmemann further wrote that:⁴⁶

44 S Schmemann, “Gaborone Journal: Pretoria turns up heat and Botswana sweats”, *New York Times*, 9 February 1987 (available at <https://www.nytimes.com/1987/02/09/world/gaborone-journal-pretoria-turns-up-heat-and-botswana-sweats.html>, as accessed on 21 January 2020).

45 Republic of Botswana, *Ministry of Works, Transport and Communications Annual Report for the Period 1 April 1986 to 31 March 1987 Including 21 Years of Progress, 1986-1987* (Gaborone, Gaborone Printer, 1987).

46 S Schmemann, “Gaborone Journal...”, *New York Times*, 9 February 1987 (available at <https://www.nytimes.com/1987/02/09/world/gaborone-journal-pretoria-turns-up-heat-and-botswana-sweats.html>, as accessed on 21 January 2020).

Western diplomats in Gaborone think South Africa will back off, probably by having South African crews take over the trains at the border.

For some time the government of Botswana had engaged Chinese railway builders to re-lay the railway tracks in the country. Hence, the government of Botswana responded to the Bophuthatswana antics by coming up with a contingency plan for provision of train exchange facility at Rakhuna site which was the nearest feasible location north of the Ramatlabama (Bophuthatswana-Botswana) border.⁴⁷

The government sent a delegation to Pretoria led by Dr Gaositwe Chiepe, minister for foreign affairs, to negotiate with President PW Botha of South Africa. Chiepe made it clear to the South African hierarchy that Botswana was never going to bend to the dictates of South Africa through Bophuthatswana. The Botswana delegation asked the South African government to ensure that locomotives from South African Transport Services with South African crew operated the trains into Botswana. The South African government accepted the proposal perhaps because the railway impasse was beginning to have a negative impact on goods movement some of which were destined to countries such as Zimbabwe and Zambia among others beyond Botswana. Moreover, the South African government had not ceded the railway to Bophuthatswana when it granted her "independence" in 1977. Therefore, the railway in Bophuthatswana was not under the direct control of the homeland regime. When the government of Botswana built the Rakhuna site, this may have influenced the South African authorities to cooperate.

The ban on Botswana trains from entering Bophuthatswana and the imposition of visas on Botswana and Zimbabwean train crew seemed to be a knee-jerk reaction from Mangope. He had not considered or he disregarded the implication and impact of his action on the Bophuthatswana and South African economy. That was the time when it was popular for many Botswana to cross the border to do shopping in predominantly South African owned shops in Mmabatho/Mahikeng among other activities. Therefore, South African-owned businesses patronised by people from Botswana began to suffer as a result of the ban and visa requirements as most Botswana did not bother to apply for the Bophuthatswana visa.

Moreover, there were instances whereby pressure groups such as University of Botswana students and trade unions when protesting against the government of Botswana had their grievances aired on Radio Mmabatho. Perhaps, Mangope welcomed this development in a bid to undermine the government of Botswana.

In refusing to recognise and establish diplomatic relations with Bophuthatswana, Botswana was also following the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and the

⁴⁷ Republic of Botswana, *Ministry of Works, Transport and Communications Annual Report for the Period 1 April 1986 to 31 March 1987 Including 21 Years of Progress, 1986-1987* (Gaborone, Gaborone Printer, 1987).

United Nations undertaking of not recognizing the “independence” of Bantustans created by apartheid South Africa to deny that country’s Black majority full political and economic rights in South Africa. Molokoe states that despite the OAU and UN not recognising Bophuthatswana’s “independence”, the relentless Mangope engineered a meeting with the UN officials amongst whom was Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali and even had the honour of addressing the UN General Assembly in July 1992.⁴⁸ However, former long serving Botswana’s permanent representative at the UN, Ambassador Legwaila Joseph Legwaila says that Mangope did not address the 1992 General Assembly because the African Group at the UN would not have allowed that to happen. Ambassador Legwaila says that Mangope, who was in the company of Bishop Desmond Tutu and some Bantustan leaders, addressed the Security Council meeting.⁴⁹

The ambitious Bophuthatswana was not only looking to its neighbour Botswana for diplomatic relations but also major Western powers. For instance, on 16 May 1983 the influential *New York Times* featured a lengthy special coverage of Bophuthatswana entitled ‘A Success of Sorts’ written by Joseph Lelyveld.⁵⁰ Furthermore, in the 1980s South Africa enlisted the assistance of the lobbying company Strategic Network International (SNI) to strengthen the apartheid regime’s resistance against sanctions that were demanded on South Africa by the international anti-apartheid movement. Bophuthatswana also relied on SNI in her futile campaign for international diplomatic recognition.⁵¹

Bophuthatswana had relations with conservative parties and organisations in European countries such as Bavaria, Italy, Israel, Latvia, Britain, France, Germany and United States (sic). The support she got from some prominent British and West German members of parliament were very encouraging to the homeland government and brought hope that they would win more friends for Bophuthatswana and aid her quest for international recognition.⁵²

On 12 December 1986 there was a spirited argument by some members of the House of Commons for recognition of Bophuthatswana by the government of the United Kingdom.⁵³ The following year.⁵⁴

48 BKM Molokoe, “Bophuthatswana and its impact...”, p. 149.

49 CJ Makgala (Personal collection), E-mail: J Legwaila (Ambassador of Legwaila)/CJ Makgala (Researcher), 20 January 2020; M Lawrence and A Manson, “The ‘dogs of the boers’...”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 20(3), 1994, p. 450.

50 J Lelyveld, “South Africa ‘Homeland’: A success of sorts”, *New York Times*, 16 May 1983 (available at <https://www.nytimes.com/1983/05/16/world/south-africa-homeland-a-success-of-sorts.html>, as accessed on 15 June 2021).

51 R Nixon, *Selling apartheid...*, p. 112.

52 BKM Molokoe, “Bophuthatswana and its impact...”, p. 150.

53 United Kingdom’s House of Commons, “Bophuthatswana”, 12 December 1986 (available at <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1986/nov/12/bophuthatswana>, as accessed on 15 June 2021).

54 BKM Molokoe, “Bophuthatswana and its impact...”, p. 150.

... 1987, Mangope addressed the British House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee and used the opportunity to state his view about his country, providing Britons with first-hand information. This was arranged by Bophuthatswana supporters in Britain, among them the six Conservative members of Parliament who had visited Bophuthatswana during the year led by Andrew Hunt. The same MPs stated the Bophuthatswana case to the British parliament.

Molokoe also observes that:⁵⁵

Bophuthatswana had done almost everything in its power to buy or force international recognition but in the end achieved little. She had sponsored costly trips for European MPs and business people to visit the country. What came out of those state sponsored visitations were promises, hopes and trade missions in various European countries. Bophuthatswana spent millions of rands to maintain representatives in Washington, Paris, Rome and London and trade missions in Israel, West Germany, Italy and Thailand.

One of the Britain's Conservative Party politicians who visited Bophuthatswana was the then 23-year old David Cameron⁵⁶ who would serve as prime minister of the United Kingdom from 2010 to 2016.

Mangope's association with the Main Opposition Party in Botswana

Having failed to woo the Botswana government into diplomatic relations with Bophuthatswana, Mangope would turn his hand to the country's main opposition party, Botswana National Front (BNF). Some BNF activists believe that party vice president, Bathoen Gaseitsiwe (Kgosi Bathon II) who had tutored Mangope in tribal administration at his office in Kanye when he was still Kgosi (Chief) of Bangwaketse in 1946, may have sought financial and material assistance from Mangope to which Mangope agreed on the condition that the cash-strapped BNF adopted a pro-Bophuthatswana posture.⁵⁷ A perception was also that Mangope may had insisted that in the event the BNF came to power its government established diplomatic relations with Bophuthatswana or even accept a merger with Botswana.

In the campaign for the 1984 general election in Botswana the BNF promised to sign a Nkomati-Accord type of agreement with South Africa.⁵⁸ Hence, Peter Mmusi, who was vice president and the ruling Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) candidate for Gaborone South constituency against BNF president, Kenneth Koma, alleged

55 BKM Molokoe, "Bophuthatswana and its impact...", p. 150.

56 R Nixon, *Selling apartheid...*, p. 114.

57 CJ Makgala (Personal Collection - Hereafter CJM), Mobile communication: M Mohwasa (BNF secretary general) and J Olesitse (former BNF member), 22 February 2020.

58 BZ Osei-Hwendie, "The role of Botswana in the liberation of Southern Africa", WA Edge and MH Lekorwe (eds.), *Botswana politics and society* (Pretoria, JL van Schaik, 1998), p. 435.

that Koma failed to submit his presidential nomination forms to the High Court because “he was busy holding a meeting with a white South African agent behind a bottle store in Boatile [near Gaborone]”. Mmusi framed this not only unpatriotic but an act of betrayal to the South African liberation movement by the BNF leader. In late 1984 there was a bye-election in Gaborone South (previously won by Mmusi), and Mmusi faced Koma again after a sealed ballot box from Tshiamo Primary School ward in Gaborone South had been discovered and the High Court nullified Mmusi’s victory. On 7 November 1984 the BNF held a press conference at the mayor of Gaborone, Paul Rantao’s mayoral house to rebut Mmusi’s claims that Koma and the BNF were colluding with the apartheid regime:⁵⁹

Last Friday, 7 November, the opposition Botswana National Front called a press conference at the Gaborone Mayors house to counter allegations made by the BDP candidate for Gaborone South, Mr Peter Mmusi, of the BNF’s collusion with South Africa. Present at the Press Conference were BNF leader Dr Koma, Secretary General MM Giddie and Mayor Paul Rantao. In uncompromising language, the BNF officials dismissed Mr Mmusi’s allegations as an ‘incriminating and ill-conceived statement... a mere political ploy from a panic-stricken man, who realising he is facing heavy defeat in the forthcoming election is trying to fabricate character-smearing stories hoping to hoodwink the electorate from burning local issues’. They added that Mmusi’s allegations would not fool anybody as Batswana have ‘reached a satisfactory level of political consciousness to be able to distinguish fiction from facts’.

Dr Koma’s response was quite interesting because it showed his recognition of Bophuthatswana. He said that:⁶⁰

Mr Mmusi was risking national security in his anxiety to win the by election. South Africa’s reaction could have far-reaching results... He said that he and Mareledi Giddie had visited Bophuthatswana, but not South Africa.

For his part the BNF Mayor “Rantao accused Mr Mmusi of turning the facts around”. Rantao was cited as saying:⁶¹

The history of the BDP is the history of affinity and collaboration with foreign and South African interests, whilst that of the BNF is of constant opposition to neo-colonial domination.

Incidentally, Rantao was originally from Lehurutshe (Bophuthatswana) in South Africa. A few days later Koma addressed a press conference and indicated that the BNF would not seek permission from the BDP government if President Botha of South Africa or President Mangope in Bophuthatswana expressed the desire to

59 “Mmusi drops bombshell on BNF Camp!”, *Botswana Daily News*, 7 September 1984.

60 See next footnote.

61 “BNF refutes allegations of SA ties”, *Mmegi*, 12 November 1984.

meet with him.⁶² However, he said that the BNF would not accept any financial assistance from South Africa. The government-owned *Daily News*, which reported on the matter, did not indicate whether Koma would accept any financial help from Bophuthatswana. Koma and Giddie had previously been declared prohibited immigrants in South Africa but such status had recently been lifted by the apartheid regime which Mmusi said was quite suspicious.⁶³

The BNF surfaced again in 1986 when Bophuthatswana demanded visas from Botswana citizens entering its territory and the Botswana government was unflinching in its resistance. According to Michael Dingake, former ANC activist in South Africa and later BNF vice president:⁶⁴

Dr Koma, however, tried to negotiate a compromising secret deal. While the ruling party continued to resist the pressure of visas, Dr Koma clandestinely went to see Mangope, honouring him and trying to play the common Tswana ethnic card to mollify Mangope's induced hostility.

When this was exposed it received strong condemnation even from some quarters in the BNF with some of its cadres writing that:⁶⁵

We consider that the Botswana Government's stand in refusing to bow to these pressures was correct in the circumstances. On the other hand Koma's writing to Mangope was highly unprincipled and totally without justification. His addressing Mangope as 'His Excellency the President of Bophuthatswana' and his reference to the occasion marking the Bophuthatswana's 'Tenth Anniversary of Independence' celebrations verged on *de facto* recognition of Bophuthatswana as a sovereign state. The fallacy that this was done in pursuit of a foreign policy of national survival has already been exposed by the BDP Government's explicit denial of that policy.

BNF activists indicated that Koma and Bathoen Gaseitsiwe's relations with Mangope was a very controversial issue in the party pitting anti-Bophuthatswana Young Turks against pro-Bophuthatswana old guard in the leadership. Lenyeletse Koma, BNF's secretary for international affairs at the time, was so strongly opposed to the idea of embracing Bophuthatswana that the conflict almost turned the party's congress at Kanye into chaos.⁶⁶ Eventually, the party leadership relented and the idea of supporting Bophuthatswana ended. Bathoen Gaseitsiwe retired from active politics in 1986.

62 "BNF won't accept SA help – Koma", *Daily News*, 13 November 1984.

63 "Koma's relationship with SA causes a concern – Mmusi", *Daily News*, 9 November 1984.

64 M Dingake, *The politics of confusion...*, p. 47.

65 "Koma's political blunder", *Clarion Call: Botswana's Socialist Journal for the Labour and Youth*, December 1987-February 1988, pp. 8-10.

66 CJM, Mobile communication: M Mohwasa (BNF secretary general) and J Olesitse (former BNF member), 22 February 2020.

The 1988 Bophuthatswana coup and the Botswana factor

On 10 April 1988 Mangope was briefly toppled from power in a coup led and organised by Rocky Malebane-Metsing, leader of opposition Peoples Progressive Party (PPP), in connivance with some Bophuthatswana army officers. Malebane-Metsing had routinely lost the elections which he claimed were always massively rigged to keep Mangope's party in power. Mangope and his cabinet ministers as well as top army generals and police chiefs were held hostage at Mmabatho sports stadium while Malebane-Metsing was declared new president by his fellow coup plotters. However, very soon a contingent of South African army was despatched by President Botha to Mmabatho to free and reinstate Mangope in power. Mangope's captors put up no resistance and Malebane-Metsing fled through Botswana to Zambia where he joined the ANC in exile. This was the only instance of a military coup in one of South Africa's Bantustans that the apartheid government intervened in. It was believed at the time that South Africa intervened because "Bophuthatswana was South Africa's favoured homeland that promoted the best image of all homelands, and the intervention was in order to restore Bophuthatswana's image and position".⁶⁷ "I felt sorry for Mangope", writes PW Botha's successor FW De Klerk, "He had done a better job than any of the other leaders of the independent states in trying to improve the lot of his people".⁶⁸

Botswana's geographical position in relation to Bophuthatswana was important to South Africa's concerns, as Malebane-Metsing's escape through Botswana indicates. Malebane-Metsing was the latest among many refugees or escapees from South Africa, including top ANC leaders such as Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki among others, who had previously escaped through Botswana to Zambia, Tanzania and overseas. The Botswana escape route was called "the Pipeline" and opened in the 1950s before Botswana's independence.⁶⁹ In Botswana there was little if no sympathy for Mangope when he was ousted. South African's intervention in the coup confirmed that Bophuthatswana's independence was a sham.

As would be expected, many people suffered as a result of the coup and further strained Botswana-Bophuthatswana relations. The supporters of Malebane-Metsing's PPP in his hometown and stronghold of Phokeng, near Rustenburg, were harassed and victimized by Mangope's police. Others suspected of disloyalty and sympathy to the conspirators were also persecuted in other parts of Bophuthatswana.

Some of the most significant victims were members of the Bafokeng royal family who also happened to be Malebane-Metsing's *dikgosi*. Here Kgosi Lebone Molotlegi in Phokeng had for some time been at loggerheads with Mangope who was trying

67 BKM Molokoe, "Bophuthatswana and its impact...", p. 134.

68 FW De Klerk, *The autobiography...*, p. 284.

69 N Parsons, "The pipeline...", pp. 17-32; F Keitseng, *Comrade fish...*

to expropriate the mineral wealth (mainly platinum) in Phokeng even before the coup.⁷⁰ Kgosi Molotlegi was also against the Bantustan system and had even tried to secede from Bophuthatswana in 1983, hence becoming a natural enemy of Mangope.⁷¹ While there was no evidence linking to the coup, Mangope used it as a pretext to launch a campaign of terror against him until he fled to Botswana where he became a refugee in Gaborone. His wife, Mohumagadi Semane Molotlegi, who was a Mongwato royal in Botswana, was detained in prison for some days and faced intensified harassment. Her harassment was also due to her having a Botswana passport which the Mangope regime felt it nullified her Bophuthatswana citizenship. The bad treatment of the Molotlegi family at the hands of the Mangope regime worsened the tension between Botswana and Bophuthatswana,⁷² and “helped to paint a negative picture of Bophuthatswana to the outside world”.⁷³

While in exile Malebane-Metsing continued to taunt the Bophuthatswana government, and instigated its opponents back home to rebel against Mangope. “He continually threatened Bophuthatswana with another coup, causing a lot of panic within government circles”, writes Molokoe. Malebane-Metseng also:⁷⁴

... toured a number of countries (such as Botswana, Swaziland, Zambia and Britain) influencing these states to harden their attitude towards Bophuthatswana, and closing all avenues which might have been explored by Bophuthatswana in its quest for international recognition.

The fall of Bophuthatswana and Mangope

Political developments in South Africa after the release of Nelson Mandela and the unbanning of the ANC and other liberation movement groups in 1990 severely undermined Bophuthatswana’s “independence”. The heavy and widespread repression that followed the 1988 coup had led to intense unpopularity of Mangope and his government. Alongside other Bantustan leaders such as Prince Mangosuthu Buthelezi of Kwazulu and General Oupa Gqozo of Ciskei, Mangope had formed an unlikely alliance with right-wing Afrikaners in 1993 called Concerned South African Groups (COSAG) in a bid to face the ANC and the apartheid government in negotiations for transition to a new political order.

Sir Ketumile Masire, writes in his memoirs that his government had advised the ANC leadership to embrace the Bantustan leaders in order to prevent the apartheid government from using them against the ANC in the elections.⁷⁵ The ANC acted

70 B Mbenga and A Manson, *People of the dew...*, pp. 129-137.

71 B Mbenga and A Manson, *People of the dew...*, p. 130.

72 B Mbenga and A Manson, *People of the dew...*, p. 139.

73 BKM Molokoe, “Bophuthatswana and its impact...”, p. 138.

74 BKM Molokoe, “Bophuthatswana and its impact...”, p. 145.

75 QKJ Masire, *Very brave or very foolish...*, p. 272.

accordingly so much that the president of the apartheid government, FW De Klerk, says in his memoirs that they were surprised at how Mandela and other ANC leaders wooed and welcomed the Bantustan leaders like long lost friends.⁷⁶ While most Bantustan leaders embraced the ANC and later became part of its government, according to Masire:⁷⁷

In the end the only, Bantustan leader who did not behave sensibly was Lucas Mangope.... We had planned that I should meet him at a farm in the Molopo to urge him to help in facilitating the transition to majority rule. But every time we were close to arranging a meeting, he would take some outrageous action, and we would have to put it off.

Masire, goes on to say Mangope:⁷⁸

... once referred to Nelson Mandela as a 'bandit', for example, and we did not want to be associated with such behaviour. Mangope cut himself out of the post-'apartheid' order by claiming too much for his own abilities and popularity.

In March 1994 the people in Bophuthatswana revolted against the Mangope regime and overthrew it. Mangope fled from his Mmabatho capital. Kgosi Molotlegi of Bafokeng also returned to Phokeng in 1994. As Mangope's fiefdom of Bophuthatswana experienced mayhem, an ill-disciplined far-right Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging (AWB) militia rampaged in hoping to restore Mangope to power.⁷⁹ Nonetheless, the Bophuthatswana army mutinied and fought the intruding desperadoes a few of whom were dramatically shot and killed. This brought to an end Mangope's Bophuthatswana. Much of the territory that had constituted Bophuthatswana was reincorporated into South Africa and became part of the North West Province. The ANC led by Mandela won the country's first democratic elections in 1994 and formed a new government. The new democratic South Africa became friendly state to Botswana, and the two nations established diplomatic ties with high commissioners resident in each capital.

Conclusion

This article demonstrates an aspect of Botswana's contribution to the liberation struggle of the Southern African region more generally and that of South Africa in particular. It discusses the dynamics of a strange phenomenon whereby a determined South African Bantustan of Bophuthatswana sought international recognition and establishment of diplomatic ties with the "outside world". Botswana became a critical

76 FW de Klerk, *The autobiography*, ..., p. 269.

77 QKJ Masire, *Very brave or very foolish*..., pp. 272-273.

78 QKJ Masire, *Very brave or very foolish*..., p. 272.

79 D Welsh, *The rise and fall of apartheid*..., p. 513.

player in this equation owing to its long common border with Bophuthatswana, and Mangope sought to exploit the two entities' common ethnic Tswana background which failed. Botswana stood her ground and avoided at all costs any closer relations with Bophuthatswana. However, pragmatism sometimes forced Botswana to relent and cooperate with Bophuthatswana for survival.

The article also raises awareness about the marginalisation of the history of Botswana in the country's school system. One of the consequences of this being incorrect and misleading information and advice given to the country's national leadership when delivering speeches in local and international fora.⁸⁰

80 I greatly appreciate the incisive feedback from the anonymous reviewers of earlier drafts of this paper and the work put in by the Journal editors and Editor-in-Chief. The paper is dedicated to Professor Maitseo Bolaane on her completion of six years as Head of the Department of History at the University of Botswana in May 2021. It is also written in memory of the late Her Royal Majesty, Queen Mother of the Bafokeng Nation in South Africa, Mmemogolo Dr Semane Bonolo Molotlegi.