



# The authoritarian force, the Bafokeng conflict and the Bophuthatswana donkey massacre: An historic–agricultural perspective

Anis Mahomed Karodia \*

## Abstract

The paper explores over time the authoritative force that the former homeland of apartheid South Africa was engaged in. Bophuthatswana maintained power by the use of the authoritative force over the people and resorted to violence to maintain the status quo. It explores briefly, the Bafokeng conflict, which today (post - apartheid) falls into the new North West Province of democratic South Africa, post 1994 and, within the platinum mining belt that is experiencing unrest in today's South Africa. Further exploration of the title of the paper will outline the great donkey massacre under this former repressive regime and show the devastating consequences that the massacre has had upon agriculture in the former homeland. The paper attempts to explore these issues from a historio – agricultural perspective, in order to recall the events that led to the donkey massacre and to record some of these devastating incidents for purposes of record and history. The paper does not pretend to capture all of the nuances that permeate this part of the former homelands repressive history.

**Keywords:** Conflict; Authoritarian; Totalitarian; Massacre; History; Repression; Agriculture; Donkey; Nationalism; Traditional Authorities

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## **1. Introduction**

Bophuthatswana was accorded independence by its colonial master apartheid South Africa in 1977. It operated in spite of non - recognition by the world as an independent sovereign state for nearly two decades. It was a homeland that was accorded independence together with three other South African homelands, to be known as the TBVC states (Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda, and Ciskei). South Africa accorded these pseudo states independence in order to prop up apartheid and independence was granted to these states on different dates.

The post 1977 assault on tradition and rhetoric of Batswana nationalism and the United Christian Democratic Party (UCDP), although very important, remained hemmed in by a them versus us framework. There was no human message, just the same old suffocating parochialism. To challenge the language and categories of the UCDP on a terrain so well-trodden by them was bound to be futile. By itself, ideology as mythmaking is powerless to fashion reality in its own image, married to this kind of organization, however, it acquires that capability by squeezing out of the social organism, remaining vestiges of its pseudo independence and repressive authority of an irreverent and non – ideological mode of thought. Even when its control over people was far from completed, the magic that had been injected between experience and reality on the one hand and concepts and discourse on the other, still remain operative, in spite of two decades of South African democracy. This was the hallmark of the UCDP that was in power that greatly accentuated the general degradation of Batswana thought in politics and culture in the erstwhile Bophuthatswana and this still perpetuates itself even today, in democratic South Africa.

## **2. The purpose and significance of the study**

The purpose of this study was to evaluate and assess some of the parameters of uneven development, the fiscal, administrative, discontinuity and legitimacy crisis within the erstwhile Bophuthatswana state over time. In so doing an emphasis was placed on the agrarian and legitimacy questions including the impact of some political factors. The problems, which the study attempted to investigate, are located within a socio – historical context. What was apparent in the context of this nominal state was the reality of authoritarian force and, that it, lacked credibility and support of the overwhelming majority of people in governance. This affected the capacity to bring about effective public management and administration which was characterized by oppression and repression. The significance of the study is that it could contribute to agricultural debate in terms of development, extension and training in the new North West Province of the Republic of South Africa. In addition it captured an important aspect of history in relationship to agriculture, as a whole in the area that was defined as Bophuthatswana and which is now incorporated into the North West Province of the Republic.

### **2.1. Research hypothesis**

The central theoretical statement of the study was as follows: Efficient and effective management of agriculture and veterinary services in the erstwhile state of Bophuthatswana was flawed due to legitimacy

crisis in state power; lessons from poor utilization in functional areas of agricultural extension and training can be learned for agricultural improvement in the New North West Province of South Africa.

## 2.2. Research methods

An in depth literature study was conducted in respect to agricultural discourse, oppression and the authoritative force that characterized the erstwhile Bophuthatswana. Examination of reports, agricultural policy statements and agricultural bulletins issued by agricultural institutions were utilized. A pilot study previously undertaken by the researcher was utilized for extrapolation purposes to prove a number of assertions made within the dissertation. In addition the use of electronic sources together with applicable literature that was available was utilized. Quantitative structured questions were constructed and field work was conducted and, the collection of statistical data made available through government institutions at that time was analyzed and used. In addition the researcher for emphasis adds his own observations and critical thought processes in the assembling of this paper.

## 2.3. Results

The results of the specific research in this paper are captured at the end of the article under some conclusions. It does not capture the conclusions and recommendations of the entire thesis for obvious reasons, as this paper only deals with the authoritative force, the Bafokeng conflict and the Great Donkey Massacre in the erstwhile Bophuthatswana.

## 3. The authoritative force

The corrupt politics of ethnicity and economics together with the issues in respect of social and cultural aspects of the Bophuthatswana regime assumes significance in the context of South African history. What then were some of the dynamics that permeated these issues? The linkage in respect to the economic dimension, as it pertains to the conflict with the Bafokeng tribe (Settled near the town of Rustenburg and in the mining belt of the North West Province). The idea that political authority should reside in the agency that best embodies the national will ties in with the notion in reform law, that authority is always unitary, never fractured, mediated or conditioned. In this regard Samir – al Khalil (1990: 138) states that “because authority in the state is one, this means the negation of the idea of multiplicity of powers, legislative, executive and judicial.” The size of the agency acting on behalf of the ‘national will’ does not matter. By definition this agency has already established that the people have objectives, corresponding to its own. On the other hand the Legal Reform Law text (1877: 28) indicates that “Power is not exercised for its own sake but for achieving objectives, the method of practicing the power which is defined by the constitution, is itself influenced by the economic, social, cultural and political reality of the country over which power is exercised. Owing to the importance that these foundations enjoy, they have to be stressed and declared in the constitutional document. Yet, the social, economic and political principles included, may not be in part data but an objective

or aim to be realized.” Therefore, in this meaning, the constitution shall also be a guide of action for the political leadership and a programme for a future policy the political leadership intends to realize through exercising the power.

Tyrannies and dictatorships resort to violence when their authority is placed in jeopardy. But for President Lucas Manyane Mangope and his UCDP, violence was no longer merely the ultimate sanitation used periodically against a genuine opposition. The UCDP invented their enemies; violence, not a threat of it was institutionalized, reproducing and intensifying that all pervasive climate of suspicion, fear, and complicity so characteristic of their polity. Violence generates the fear that creates the complicity that constitutes the power, which was first passed to the UCDP and then to the President (Mangope) in the form of his authority. Fear, which under other conditions can tear authority asunder, (for instance, soldiers and police refusing to fight as was seen in Bophuthatswana prior to its collapse or as was observed in the dramatic collapse of central power in the homeland in some situations), drove authority in Bophuthatswana to collapse inwards, into the bottomless black hole of absolutist leadership.

On a smaller scale, the experience of Bophuthatswana’s UCDP, established yet again the radical separation of the question of legitimacy from that of autonomous consent. The UCDP turned fear into the precondition for their legitimacy. By presupposing, for instance, that torture is immoral, later generations of Batswana will certainly try to unite and unravel repression and oppression of the UCDP and President Mangope’s legitimacy. The world of political facts is less kind than that of human rights. It has to be understood however, that the legitimizing measures undertaken by the UCDP in Bophuthatswana were prerequisites for the regime of terror that followed.

The explosion in the size of the repressive apparatus in Bophuthatswana and the ascendancy of a police state over the army also followed the end of politics, which can be dated roughly around 1980. The peculiar feature of the Bophuthatswana regime, is that it developed unmistakable signs of a real social base (as measured by party growth, public support for Lucas Mangope, more armed men and stratification) after all politics had ended and in an atmosphere of rampant violence no longer directed at real enemies, but at everyone. To understand the phenomenon of Lucas Mangope in relation to ‘his’ citizens, one must look beyond personal motivations into the broader societal preconditions and genuine authority that made it possible for a man like this to act out his dreams.

In respect to the degradation of thought in Bophuthatswana, how do barrages of myths coming from every direction; newspapers, the media, workplace, public meetings, street, and family, affect people, especially those once illiterate? What does the administration of lies do to people’s judgment, especially when they are afraid? No one knows. A society like Bophuthatswana had choked off all the avenues by which anything other than mediocrity could flourish. Culture is defined not as “the spiritual outgrowth of an elite, but the scientific outlook understands that the material production of needs is the basis and origin of all spiritual culture, which in other words means that it is the product of the activity of the masses” (Samir – al Khalil, 1990: 99). It is therefore obvious that, the real experience of politics and culture in a country like Bophuthatswana degraded the language of public discourse that the whole population, including those in opposition, lacked the barest rudiments of a conceptual apparatus with which to comprehend their reality.

#### **4. Bafokeng conflict**

In continuing the discussion in respect of the authoritative force and repression in Bophuthatswana, an attempt will be very briefly made to place in context the political consequences of Bafokeng incorporation into the apartheid homeland of Bophuthatswana under Lucas Mangope. These injustices of the Mangope era endured by the Bafokeng are detailed extensively by Manson and Mbenga in their research paper of March, 2003 'The Richest Tribe in Africa.' : 'Platinum Mining and the Bafokeng in South Africa's North West Province, 1965 – 1999' (2003: 25 – 43). This is the very same platinum belt in the North West Province that culminated only two years ago (2013), in the massacre of over 36 mineworkers in the village of Marikana by the police of democratic South Africa in collusion with Lonmin. A capitalist international employer refusing to give the mineworker a basic salary of R12 500 per month (about US \$1000) as a livable wage, and the strike by these mineworkers continued unabated for over 5 months. African National Congress politicians are involved in short changing the mineworkers in collusion with mine bosses. The Minister of Minerals was unable to solve the problem and withdrew from negotiations. The situation is reminiscent of the old order repressive Bophuthatswana, and is an indictment to democracy under the ruling ANC led democratic government.

The Bafokeng are a Setswana speaking community settled near present day Rustenburg (A fairly large city in the North West Province and is the hub of the mining enterprises) from the end of the seventeenth century. They began to acquire land which was purchased in trust. The Bafokeng tried to secede in 1980 rather than enduring the vicissitudes of oppression and repression under the guise of ethnicity and so – called legitimacy of the Bophuthatswana regime. Such an act by the Bafokeng was considered to be treason and they bore the wrath of Mangope and his illegitimate government, propped by the apartheid state of South Africa in order to repatriate black South African citizens into the four ethnic homelands and affording them citizenship in these homelands based on ethnicity. Conflict began with the Bophuthatswana regime in respect of mining rights that lent itself to protracted litigation (See Manson and Mbenga).

Inevitably when the matter came before the Bophuthatswana Supreme Court, Judge Smith ruled that the Bafokeng could not terminate the contract and went on to dismiss the action on the ground that the Bafokeng did not own the land, but the trustee, Mangope, in fact did so. What followed after the judgment is important in the context of repression, in that even the royalty of the Bafokeng were not immune to the violation of their dignity which was impinged upon by the Bophuthatswana regime. Owing to the fact that the six opposition seats in parliament derived from the Bafokeng area, by implication Mangope interpreted this as an opportunity to directly link the Bafokeng and its king to the attempted coup. The Bafokeng monarch was interrogated by the police in connection with his alliance with the opposition political party. Such interrogation was held at the Rooigrond prison near the city of Mafikeng, despite the king's poor health. Subsequently the king was released and he went into exile in neighbouring Botswana. This served to worsen relations between Bophuthatswana and Botswana, already strained by border disputes and wrangles over water rights.

Overt intimidation, repression and oppression continued against the Bafokeng tribe by the Mangope regime. The king's wife, together with 51 other women were arrested and imprisoned. The struggle for leadership of the Bafokeng became a major tussle between the Bophuthatswana government and the

Bafokeng tribe. With the departure into exile of the king, his position became vacant and, it offered his opponents an opportunity to interfere in Bafokeng affairs. During this period further intrigue and oppression to the extreme was perpetuated upon the Royal House of the Bafokeng. The entire process of appointing an acting chief (king) and councillors was manipulated by the Bophuthatswana government. The king's brother was appointed to the acting position despite the Bafokeng tribe's insistence that the king's uncle be appointed. The tribal authority of seven individuals was also packed with Mangope loyalists.

In March 1989 Bafokeng lawyers brought an urgent application to have Mangope's appointment of the king's brother set aside. The court rejected the application and found that the Traditional Authorities Act empowered Mangope to appoint and that this was done with the due observance of the law and customs of the Bafokeng. The Bafokeng appealed the judgment and the result was a stunning legal victory for the Bafokeng. The significance of the entire episode and saga in respect to the Bophuthatswana governments conflict with the Bafokeng, does not only exemplify oppression, repression and manipulation but, underscores the totalitarian state's desire to have suppressed any opposition within the homeland. The more important facet of the conflict was to subjugate the Bafokeng tribe economically and control the platinum reserves and revenue that accrued to the Bafokeng, in respect to the royalties that multinational corporations had to pay to the tribe by virtue of agreements reached between them. In fact, the regime wanted entire control of the rich platinum reserves, for obvious reasons. (The different tribes in the area who are "suffering in respect of employment opportunities and revenue have now instituted court action against Lonmin the multinational mining company and the unions to bring the protracted 5 month long strike to an end in terms of agreements reached between these tribes and Lonmin" (SABC News, 2014).

## **5. The donkey massacre**

The Bophuthatswana government extended its cruelty and tyranny upon animals also and against the tide of environmental and socio – economic issues and considerations. The state promoted a discourse that the animals were destructive. In 1983 the Great Donkey Massacre occurred as a result of the Bophuthatswana government's policy with particular reference to the districts of Kuruman and Tlhaping Tlharo. Other areas were also targeted and Jacobs (2004: 485) states that "the 'independent' Batswana 'Homeland' of Bophuthatswana destroyed perhaps 20 000 of the animals."

Since 1990, historians, natural scientists and social scientists have effectively refuted well – entrenched positions about environmental change in Africa. McCann (1997: 138 – 159) points out "that drawing on indigenous knowledge, documentary sources, and non – climate ecology, they have disapproved assertions that desertification, deforestation, soil erosion, vegetation change, or wildlife eradication are occurring as inexorable linear processes of decline or even occurring at all." This nullifies the contention of the Bophuthatswana government's explanation by the Minister of Agriculture in the National Assembly "stating the received wisdom on the destructiveness of donkeys, claimed that since 1978 the state had attempted to reduce numbers, and referred to the seriousness of the drought" (Jacobs, 2001: 499). The word on the street, recalled W.J. Seramane, a Bophuthatswana dissident was that, "President Mangope had nearly collided with

donkeys on the highway, and this turned him against the entire species” (Jacobs, 2001: 499). Increasing repression by the central government (Pretoria, South Africa) must have given the Bophuthatswana regime confidence to act brutally. Perhaps the savageness of the massacre was politically motivated, intended to terrorize people, destroy and stifle any opposition. Whatever was the immediate cause, the difference between donkey controls in 1983 and earlier years was not due to change in the donkey population or their environmental impact; it was due to changes in the state and economy.

The researcher being a veterinarian and having worked in these areas categorically indicates through observation that donkeys and ruminants do compete for food, but their relationship is not a zero – sum equation. Donkeys consume large quantities of low – quality forage that cattle and goats avoid. Hence, in environments where low quality forage is predominant, the sustainable donkey biomass may outweigh that of cattle and goats. In Kuruman, donkeys even had advantages over their equine cousins, horses which suffered diseases and were expensive. Although cattle prefer grass, bushes sustain them when grass withers during the very frequent droughts. “Raising small stock and donkeys could not remedy poverty, but it could mitigate it because, donkeys had many uses ‘such as transportation, a requirement for peoples’ subsistence; the use of donkeys as draft animals and the benefit of donkeys that were slaughtered for meat; donkey dung mixed with sand was used for construction; a final dividend was that their milk was considered medicinal for sick children” (Jacobs, 2001: 492). It is therefore obvious that, the arguments put forward by the Bophuthatswana government was not based on any empirical evidence in respect of degradation of land and that donkeys were in direct competition for grass with cattle; in fact the power of the state to implement programmes, conservation included was generally against the will of the people and was contingent on the populations lack of political rights.

These Bantustan Homelands created by apartheid South Africa were not independent of the administrative capital, Pretoria. Thus Bophuthatswana had the trappings of a modern state, a well – endowed bureaucracy, and a weak parliament was superimposed on colonial institutions. Indirect rule and communal tenure had long since exposed people to intervention by the state. However, at this point, state intervention was unfettered through the ideology of self – determination in an ethnically based state. The state was undemocratic and the governing elite competed directly with the governed for resources. Therefore, donkey control under Bophuthatswana became extremely virulent. According to Jacobs (2001: 500) “members of the Bophuthatswana Police Force and Defense Force arrived in trucks or in ‘Hippos’ and people who had gathered their animals for counting, saw the immediate shooting of most donkeys. The shooting was extremely traumatic and that people were threatened by police for offering resistance. The shootings provoked revulsion and that the animals were shot anywhere on the body and as often as it took to kill them.”

This sad episode of repression and massacre was in many ways due to class divisions motivated by the killing of animals, but in contrast to Parisian cats, Bophuthatswana donkeys were more than symbols of social position. Testimony about donkeys and their environmental impact reveal that the alternative to the received wisdom is also social production, subject to political forces, in this case populism. Consequently, the subject of donkeys became thoroughly politicized and today in the Kuruman area, a strong pro – donkey populism extols their moral significance and democracy itself. The memorialized donkeys aided those who

had power, and did so on terms set by the powerful. Donkeys have inspired monuments while only a song of revolution commemorates their history in the erstwhile Bophuthatswana” (Jacobs, 2002: 506).

There is virtually no mention or there is a scarcity of published material or sources of the donkey massacre. It must be noted that “most of the slaughtered donkeys were in under populated and remote areas that received little media or scholarly attention” (Cooper, 1984: 376 – 377). On the other hand colonial constructions of tribal government and communal tenure according to Cooper (1994: 517) “made the donkey massacre possible, because these institutions were reinvented without community accountability. This case reveals that even in South Africa an observation made in other parts of the continent holds true, a binary representation of colonizer / colonized, oppressor / resister, and white / black is not appropriate.” At the same time, this case provides a further argument for broadening the scope of the field beyond ‘nature.’ By the same token Leah and Mearns (1996: 1 – 33) point out that “Bophuthatswana donkeys were more than symbols of social position, in that this history illustrates a major recent development in Africanist environmental studies.” In its discussion of the official assessment of donkeys, it exposes processes in the creation of knowledge and demonstrates the importance of questioning the ‘received wisdom’ about farming and agricultural practices, degradation, and the proper state of the environment, and its best uses. In this regard environmental historians have made the point that non – human forces are actors in human history.

Disease, bushes, and poverty hampered cattle keeping and promoted the herding of goats and especially of donkeys. These animals were more cheaply purchased than cattle and Brock (1982: 62 – 66) indicates that “donkeys in frequent droughts around Kuruman were the hardiest of all four – footed creatures. Hence, in environments where low – quality forage is predominant, the sustainable donkey biomass may outweigh that of cattle and goats.” Jacobs (2006: 4) states that “The London Missionary Society personnel brought donkeys to the Tlhaping and Tlharo territory by 1858 to serve as pack animals for a postal service.” Donkeys are not indigenous to South Africa and arrived through European expansion, for it is fundamentally a history of colonial rule. The balance of donkey ownership shifted from whites to blacks owing to mechanization by tractors and transport coupled with the desire on the part of whites to raise cattle for obvious economic reasons and thus less need for trek animals. “Even in the context of South Africa, people in the Kalahari were particularly poor and raising small stock and donkeys could not remedy poverty, but it could mitigate it” (Simkins, 1981: 267 – 268).

Jacobs (2006: 9) clearly indicates that “two recent South African studies differ on whether rural black people who use donkeys also perceive that they can be destructive.” It found no negative assessments of donkeys among rural people. Vital to the discussion is the all-encompassing observation made by Rich (1996: 1912 – 51) that “the South African ‘homelands’ remind us, that an actor’s position in colonial structures often carries stronger explanatory power than his or her race. The most drastic action against donkeys, the 1983 Bophuthatswana donkey massacre, occurred after the anti – donkey position transcended race. Ironically, apartheid promoted this development by giving powers of government to the indigenous elite.” On the other hand Jacobs (2006: 9) further points out that “unfortunately, it is now probably impossible to determine to what extent people in the 1950’s believed that donkeys were capable of environmental degradation. Colonial control over the documentary record and the politicization of memory after the donkey killings in 1983 has obscured voices from that period.”



It is therefore, obvious from the above discussion that the trappings of a modern state, namely, a well-endowed bureaucracy, and a weak parliament were super imposed on colonial institutions. The state was undemocratic, ethnically based and coupled with the ideology of self – determination, imposed by its colonial master apartheid South Africa. The governing elite competed directly with the governed for resources. Although it transcended race, the anti – donkey tendency remained embodied in class and according to Jacobs (2006: 10) “compared with the colonial elite elsewhere in Africa, officials who acted against donkeys have relatively great power and material benefits. Therefore donkey control in Bophuthatswana became extremely virulent.” The researcher therefore posits that:

- That an assessment of their current environmental impact and economic costs and benefits would be possible through experimental investigation by researchers who understand that both the received wisdom and the alternative populism are historical productions.
- That cruelty of this type upon animals has not been experienced elsewhere in the world.
- In reality, the donkey massacre of Bophuthatswana disturbed the livelihoods of poor people for ever; it devastated the ecology of the affected areas and in many instances destroyed subsistence agriculture of a large number of people.
- It would be difficult for many small – holder and subsistence farmers to replace their donkeys and therefore will be unable to farm productively. They will also not be in a position to travel nor do transport people orb their goods within the village economy.
- This great donkey massacre is an indictment to apartheid legacy and a monument to oppression and repression not only against humans but to animals in a fragile economy of the rural periphery.

## 6. Results of the study

- Although violence is always instrumental, requiring armies, police, weapons and networks of informers, it has to be justified and legitimated by the ends it pursues. In this regard the tyrant Lucas Manyane Mangope’s violence in its origins was no different from the policies of other rulers.
- In societies throughout the world there must be people out there willing and prepared to implement the policies on behalf of those who are telling them what to do.
- No normal human being can kill or maim another without some way of rationalizing the act. This is precisely what happened in Bophuthatswana under Lucas Mangope.
- On the other hand, the separation between organization and the generation of ideology taking place in the emergence of the leader corresponds to a growing loss of identity on the part of the public. The original distinction of the public service in reality and definitionally between any public and those who rule over it was being erased in Bophuthatswana, as it had been erased in many other countries globally in the past and even today.
- Pervasive fear and insecurity resulted in a collapse of self – confidence. To the extent that the erstwhile Bophuthatswana society was successfully organized along UCDP lines (and only to the extent), this

fundamental boundary between ruler and ruled was torn down, and the Batswana public lost its most important safeguard against the vagaries of authority. The masses need for a leader correspondingly intensified as it took the form of a longing for that which they had allowed to be taken away from them.

- That authority is not exercised for itself or in itself by man for the sake of man. Thus the exercise of authority must be carried out with the peoples' consent and only then can it be legitimacy of authority. This will determine the kind or nature of the political system. In other words the way of exercising authority in the society
- It is the concerted view and opinion of the researcher that the apartheid government of South Africa's largely hands – off policy in relationship to the TBVC states – the South African government would have been better off not to have become involved in the first place in granting dubious independence or at least to have seen the TBVC states through in the proper colonial way (No justification of colonialism).

### 6.1. The futility of the apartheid experiment

- The smallness of the governing class (I do not suppose there is in the whole of history another example of a state with a representative government of a modern type, in which the only people who counted were less than a few hundred at the most or less).
- The 'complete' absence of any true patriotism.
- The laxity of even religious morality (much less civil or national values) amongst the educated Batswana and all of the other population groups, at that time, in Bophuthatswana. The moral "incompleteness" that arose placed a premium on mental dishonesty.
- The underlying cause of the Bophuthatswana crisis was the abject failure of Batswana political culture within Bophuthatswana even to formulate, much less solve in practice, questions of legitimacy, freedom and the nature of citizenship.

## 7. Conclusion

The paper concentrated on legitimacy issues, ethnicity and state repression as a means of power within the erstwhile Bophuthatswana. It encompassed in brief the Bafokeng conflict and outlined the great tragedy of the Donkey massacre. A massacre that highlighted the agony of apartheid inflicted upon people and humans. The agony of the masses of people and animals that had to endure pain and suffering brought, upon them by tyrants that were imposed upon them by the illegitimate rulers of the Bantustan Homelands in the form of the TBVC states that, was only recognized by their colonial master, apartheid White South Africa. The paper therefore captures in part a sad episode in the history of South Africa and hopes that this history is not lost or buried in the annals of political history.

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