BOPHUTHATSWANA

Bophuthatswana—one of ten areas called bantustans allocated for black occupation by the South African government—has become internationally known as the home of a casino resort complex, Sun City. Big name American performers and athletes earn rich rewards for appearances at the pleasure center, which caters mainly to visiting white South Africans. Diversions forbidden elsewhere in South Africa flourish at Sun City. Yet behind this luxurious facade, the people of Bophuthatswana live in terrible poverty and the bantustan itself plays a central role in South Africa’s apartheid system.

Bantustans, the fragmented areas designated for Africans, comprise only 13 percent of South Africa’s territory. Yet these areas are to be the “homelands” for all Africans, or 72 percent of the population. Already the government has declared four of these bantustans, including Bophuthatswana, “independent,” thus stripping 8 million people of their South African citizenship. The intention of the white minority government is to declare all ten bantustans independent, arriving at a time when, by the stroke of a white pen, every African will be a foreigner in South Africa. These pseudo-states are recognized by no government on earth except South Africa.

Land has always been at the center of racial exploitation in South Africa. The basic system of “native reserves,” as bantustans were originally called, was created long before the Nationalist Party came to power in 1948 under the slogan of apartheid. White seizure of the land was codified into law by the Land Acts of 1913 and 1936, which set aside a maximum of 13 percent of all the land for African occupation. Outside these areas it is still illegal for Africans to purchase land. Originally the land allotted for African occupation consisted of more than 100 separate scraps of territory. A proposed consolidation plan will reduce the number of pieces to 36. Out of this fragmented territory, the ten bantustans have been created.

History and Government

Bophuthatswana consists of seven pieces of land which are located in three different provinces of South Africa. The 1980 resident population is estimated at two million people with an annual growth rate of over 4 percent.

The South African government claims that each bantustan is the real homeland for a particular ethnic group, the Tswana in the case of Bophuthatswana. In fact, almost half of all Tswana live outside Bophuthatswana while one-third of Bophuthatswana residents are non-Tswana.

South Africa granted Bophuthatswana independence in December 1976. At that moment, every Tswana, whether living in the rest of South Africa or in Bophuthatswana, was stripped of South African citizenship and arbitrarily made a citizen of the new “country” even if they had never lived in, or visited the bantustan.

The white minority government justifies the complete absence of political rights for Africans in South Africa on the grounds that Africans will exercise these rights in the bantustans. The vast majority of Tswana reject this system. The government of Bophuthatswana consists of a national assembly of 72 elected members and 24 members nominated by local chiefs. In the first election for the national assembly in 1977, only 163,141 people or 12 percent of those eligible in Bophuthatswana cast a vote. Polling booths were set up in the urban areas outside the bantustans for Tswana residents to vote. Three hundred thousand Tswana live in Soweto, the black township outside Johannesburg. Only 600 voted in the 1977 election. In 1982, only 135 voted.

Since 1976 Chief Lucas Mangope has headed the government as President. If the vast majority of people in Bophuthatswana are poor, Mangope is not. In an area where the average income per capita is estimated between $339-$495, Chief Mangope receives a salary of $27,500 a year and runs an expense account.

Bophuthatswana is the showcase bantustan, and proudly boasts a bill of rights. On paper it guarantees equality before the law, the right to freedom from torture and inhuman and degrading punishment and the right to freedom and liberty. But in reality, opposition is curtailed. The government maintains the power of detention without trial and the right to declare any organization illegal. Local chiefs have considerable power, and can arrest and pass sentence for certain offenses. In 1982 three men died after being locked up by police on the orders of a local chief.

In spite of “independence,” the movement of Africans is still rigidly controlled. Instead of the hated “passbook,” Africans wishing to go to the white areas now carry a “passport,” but to seek work outside the bantustan it is still necessary to go through the labor bureau. No one can just go to the city to look for a job.

Economy

So-called independence has not changed the basic economic function of Bophuthatswana as a labor reservoir for white-owned mines, farms and industry. In 1982, 236,000 migrant workers from Bophuthatswana, or over 12 percent of the de facto population, worked in the white areas. Another 163,000 people who lived in Bophuthatswana “commuted” to work in the white areas because they were not allowed to live in those areas. The people of Bophuthatswana are overwhelmingly dependent on this outside employment. The bantustans are the poorest parts of South Africa, with only about 3
percent of South Africa’s Gross Domestic Product produced in all the bantustans combined. Bophuthatswana is the only bantustan with significant mineral wealth. In spite of this, as stated earlier, the annual average income in Bophuthatswana is between $339-$495 a year, and approximately 60 percent of the earnings come from those who work outside the bantustan.

Migrant Labor
There are few jobs in Bophuthatswana; unemployment was conservatively estimated at 19.4 percent in 1981. Only about one-third of those who enter the labor market each year can expect to find work in the bantustan. The South African policy of removals which dumps more people into already overcrowded areas makes matters worse. Because Africans have no free access to the places where jobs are, they have little choice but to join the ranks of migrant workers.

The migrant workers from Bophuthatswana and elsewhere are usually hired on one year contracts, and are not allowed to take their families with them. They spend most of their lives far from home, living in squalid, single-sex, barracks-style hostels in the white areas. They rarely see their wives and children more than once a year, during brief visits home between contracts. Women, children and the elderly are left in the bantustans to survive as best they can on the meager remittances sent by family members, sometimes supplemented by subsistence agriculture.

Migrant workers are not allowed to go out and seek work directly with an employer. Employers submit their labor needs to a central labor bureau, which then goes out and recruits in the bantustans. The damage done to family life under this system is incalculable, and the Africans are reduced in the eyes of both government and employers to “units of labor.”

Commuters
In addition to providing migrant workers, Bophuthatswana provides some 163,000 “commuter” workers. These workers actually live in Bophuthatswana but “commute” by bus or train on a daily basis to jobs in the white areas. Not permitted to live near their place of employment, they are forced to travel several hours to and from work. Commuters frequently have to leave as early as three a.m. and do not return until eight or nine in the evening.

To be as near as possible to their place of employment, people have built squatter settlements in Bophuthatswana, especially near the Pretoria-Witwatersrand industrial areas. Over 40 percent of the Bophuthatswana population now lives in these squatter camps. They provide much of the labor for the industries of the southern Transvaal.

Agriculture, Mining and Manufacturing
About 85 percent of the economically active population in Bophuthatswana is involved in some kind of agriculture, although the land has extremely limited rainfall. Thus there is almost no commercial agriculture, but the women and children in the families left behind by the migrants at work in the white areas struggle to grow a little food. This subsistence agriculture accounted for 5.6 percent of Bophuthatswana’s GDP in 1980, compared to 0.5 percent for commercial agriculture.

Bophuthatswana is the only homeland with any significant mineral deposits. Bophuthatswana’s mines, which are owned by South Africa’s large mining houses, provide the single largest amount—53 percent—of Bophuthatswana’s GDP. About 30 percent of all platinum produced worldwide comes from Bophuthatswana. The US firm Union Carbide owns a vanadium mine.

The mines, which employ some 40,000 people, impose many of the same restrictions on black advancement that exist in the rest of South Africa. For example, blacks are prohibited from obtaining blasting certificates. Wage statistics for the mines in Bophuthatswana are not available, but are probably comparable to the wage figures for other South African mines, where an average monthly income for Africans is $260 compared to $1,395 for whites.

Bophuthatswana has relatively little industrial development. Most significant industry is owned by South Africa’s large industrial companies which have been attracted by wages which are low, even by South African standards, and by significant tax incentives.
Labor

Bophuthatswana has taken a hostile attitude toward the black trade unions emerging in South Africa. The minister of manpower is Rowan Cronje, former Rhodesian minister of manpower in the white minority government of Ian Smith. A new labor law, based on Rhodesian legislation, took effect in March 1984. Under this legislation, unions based outside the bantustan are barred from operating. Three unions, the National Union of Mineworkers, the South African Allied Workers Union and the Commercial Catering and Allied Workers Union, have been thus affected. This directly affected the workers at a mine owned by Union Carbide, who were seeking company recognition for the National Union of Mineworkers. In contrast, the bantustan has made an exception in the case of the all-white Mine Workers’ Union, which will be allowed to continue to operate.

The legislation places other obstacles in the way of effective union activity. All unions are required to register with the government, which determines if a union is representative of the workers in an industry or category which the union is seeking to represent. It is illegal for a union to either support or be supported by a political party.

There is no minimum wage law in Bophuthatswana, and high unemployment keeps wages low. As the president of the Bophuthatswana Chamber of Mines and Industry put it, “Wages are determined by supply and demand.”

Housing

In the proclaimed towns (as opposed to the “informal” squatter settlements) 333,620 people live in 34,444 houses, an average of over 9.5 people per house. Few houses have waterborne sewerage, electricity or more than two rooms.

Instead of building homes for ordinary people, the Bophuthatswana government is spending $120 million on a capital city, Mmabatho. Four hundred new houses are included in the plans, but they will sell for a minimum of $13,000 and are out of reach for all but a tiny percentage of the population.

Health

The crowded living conditions in the towns and squatter settlements have had serious adverse effects on health. Africans suffer from the many diseases of poverty such as tuberculosis, gastroenteritis and malnutrition. In Bophuthatswana, there is only one doctor for every 16,000 people compared to one doctor for every 400 whites throughout South Africa. There is one hospital bed for every 224 people in Bophuthatswana compared to one for every 61 whites in South Africa.

Education

The Bophuthatswana administration claims to have greatly improved the educational system. The total number of secondary school pupils more than doubled between 1977 and 1981, from 64,650 to 143,168, but the number of primary school students has actually declined.

Bophuthatswana spends $111.55 per pupil per year. The South African government spends $1050 to educate each white pupil in South Africa.

Rejection and Resistance

Despite South African propaganda that the bantustans are an answer to African demands for political rights, the black majority has strongly resisted the imposition of phony “independence” for puppet states and continues to demand full citizenship in a united South Africa.

During the 1976 uprisings that began in Soweto, students in Bophuthatswana boycotted classes and burned down schools, government buildings and vehicles. On August 9, the students burned down the Legislative Assembly building to dramatize their rejection of bantustan independence. President Mangope’s son was one of the students arrested during the uprisings.

Fearing the challenge to his rule, Mangope has openly sided with the white minority government. He told a group of parents that the police had been too lenient when dealing with strikes, that they should shoot indiscriminately. “In fact, I have told the police to even shoot my own child,” Mangope said.

Africans have rejected the fraud of bantustan independence. They see it as an attempt to divide and disorganize the black majority in order to maintain white minority rule. They see it as a way to organize society so that the white economy has access to a regulated labor pool. They see it as part of South Africa’s image building, an attempt to convince the outside world that change is taking place.

The puppet leaders of the bantustans play their part, insisting that they are doing away with apartheid. The African majority knows better, understands that the bantustans are themselves apartheid. They will not be satisfied until they have equal access to the wealth of South Africa and full political rights in a unitary state.

Richard Knight September 1984

Literature Director

Special thanks to Karen Jolkovski for proof-reading and Jim Artis for lay-out.

FOOTNOTES

1. South African statistics, especially for the Bantustans, should be treated with great care. For example, many sources list the number of pieces of bophuthatswana as 6, the number scheduled to exist after consolidation. The official de facto population figure for 1980 is 1.3 million, as opposed to the 2 million used by the author. This means that many per capita figures cited in this paper, such as 1 doctor per 16,000 people, although bad, are worse in reality.


3. For the Africa Fund.


15. Financial Mail, March 6, 1981.

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REMOVALS
The Discarded People

Africans have for centuries lived across the face of their country, and not only in the small areas determined by apartheid. To carry through its policy, the white minority government has, since 1960, forcibly removed 3.5 million people from areas designated for whites to areas designated for Africans, and a further 1.7 million are threatened with removal. By 1983, approximately 11 million people or 54 percent of the African population lived in the bantustans and fewer than 10 million or 46 percent remained in so-called white areas.

Every month victims of this policy are dumped by government trucks into the bantustans. A recent example is the community of Mogopa.

For over 70 years, these people had lived on good land which their forefathers purchased before the 1913 Land Act made this impossible. Then their land was designated a "black spot" in a white area—and they were ordered to move to Pachsdraai, in Bophuthatswana. They refused to move. The government, confronted by organized and strong resistance, mounted a counterattack. It imposed a new corrupt chief whom the community refused to recognize. Bulldozers razed the school, the church, and some houses. It withdrew services—no pensions were paid out, no annual labor contracts were issued and the bus service was suspended. Still the people of Mogopa stood fast.

Then a removal squad arrived, complete with tractors, trucks and buses, and camped on their land. Challenged in court for trespass, the government backed down temporarily. But soon the people of Mogopa received an order to leave by November 29, 1983. Hundreds of supporters—black and white church people, students, political groups and the press arrived to wait with the Mogopa people for the government trucks. They did not come. The supporters returned home.

The Mogopa people began to rebuild their battered community. They raised money to buy a new water pump. The men rebuilt the school. The women repaired the roads.

But in the early hours of the morning of February 14, 1984, heavily armed police arrived in Mogopa and declared it an "operational zone"—a term usually reserved for the war zones of Namibia. No outsiders were allowed in. Lawyers, priests, diplomats and the press were all turned away at the entrance. The police, working with dogs, forcibly loaded people and belongings onto buses and trucks and took them to Pachsdraai. They arrived to a barren welcome, with their furniture broken, many belongings lost, their cattle sold at a pittance to white farmers, who were the only civilians allowed into the area. Pachsdraai offered little. It was far from towns and job opportunities. The depleted soil was unsuitable for the non-irrigated farming that was the basis of their subsistence agriculture, and the hated imposed headman was given complete control of the allocation of all resources.

The Mogopa people refused to stay, and moved to another area of Bophuthatswana, Bethanie, which is under the jurisdiction of their paramount chief. But their life is still painfully difficult; the strong community now lives, divided into three groups, without water, without permission to hold meetings, without grazing grounds, without plots to farm, a witness to the real meaning of the bantustan system.
Sun City
The Glitter of Apartheid

Sun City is a $90 million pleasure resort stuck into the vast rural poverty of Bophuthatswana. It plays a significant part in the South African effort to break out of its isolation and win back foreign favor. The large complex includes an artificial lake, a casino, soft porn movies, discoteques, and scantily clad chorus girls. Near by, the Pilanesberg game reserve was created for the tourists’ delight by evicting 100 families from their homes. And there is the Superbowl, a large auditorium that regularly features big name international entertainers.

The Superbowl was opened by Frank Sinatra, who was paid $1.6 million for a nine day stand. Performances by US entertainers and athletes anywhere in South Africa are very controversial. Anti-apartheid organizations and the United Nations have long advocated a cultural and sports boycott of South Africa. When Ray Charles went in 1981 he was forced to cancel his performance in the black township of Soweto because of strong opposition from the community. US performers who have defied the boycott have come home to criticism and picket lines.

Artists going to Sun City justify themselves by claiming on the one hand that they are not political and on the other that they are not performing in South Africa but in an independent country. They choose to ignore the fact that Bophuthatswana’s independence is entirely unrecognized outside South Africa and is rejected by the majority of South Africans.

The big bucks have drawn well-known American stars to Sun City. These include Millie Jackson, Cher, The Beach Boys, Glen Campbell and Linda Ronstadt.

Audiences are not officially segregated at Sun City. But the cost of the more expensive tickets often makes this the de facto reality. Liza Minelli performed her opening night to a crowd of 4,500 people, of which about 200 were black. There was only one black face in the most expensive seats—the rest were high up in the auditorium in seats that sold for $18.00. And Southern Sun, which owns the hotel, admitted to giving tickets to blacks free. It does this not out of generosity but so that artists do not perform to all-white audiences. "I don't mind about anything except that I'm playing in front of mixed audiences," said Liza Minelli, ignoring the fact that by performing there she was helping apartheid score propaganda points.

Sun City, sometimes called Sin City, exists as it does largely because of the apartheid fiction of independence. Laws in South Africa which make it illegal to gamble or for a black and white to have sex together do not apply in Bophuthatswana. It is not unusual for white men to come to Bophuthatswana to do what they cannot do in Johannesburg. This has led to a growth in prostitution. Apologists for Sun City suggest that this inter-race mixing will lead to changed attitudes of whites and thus to change in South Africa. But white men can go home to Johannesburg while black women must stay in the poverty of Bophuthatswana, and to suggest that casual integrated sex and black access to slot machines will break down the structures of apartheid is an insult to the long and costly struggle blacks have waged against the oppression of minority rule. Because Sun City helps camouflage the reality of that rule, it does far more damage than good to the people of Bophuthatswana.

The fact is that Sun City is controlled by political and economic interests that are part and parcel of apartheid. The Bophuthatswana government, which would not exist if it were not for apartheid, holds a minority interest in the resort, as do a number of South African companies.

Blacks who work in Sun City have complained that they are paid less than whites who do the same jobs, and that some jobs are reserved for whites only. Seven black employees who complained to management about these conditions in March 1983 were fired and evicted from their homes which were owned by Sun City.

Not all performers have succumbed to the large sums offered to perform at Sun City. There is a growing list of those who have refused lucrative contracts, including Tony Bennett, Ben Vereen, Gladys Knight and the Pips, Elton John, Roberta Flack, The Kool (Newport) Jazz Festival and the Harlem Globetrotters. John McEnroe has twice refused million dollar offers to play in Sun City. As protests mount against those who do go to Sun City, the ranks of those who choose conscience over dollars will also surely grow.