

# 40 YEARS ONWARDS: REAPPRAISING QWAQWA AFTER 20 YEARS OF DEMOCRACY IN SOUTH AFRICA

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## ABSTRACT

Archiving is a process that involves the carefully documented storage of historical objects and documents. History involves events that we choose to remember or forget, nevertheless, the year 2014 is no insignificant year. Not only did South Africans celebrate 20 years of democracy, it was also 100 years since the outbreak of the First World War (1914–1918), the Rebellion of South Africa, as well as the establishment of the National Party of South Africa. It also marked 40 years since the establishment of Qwaqwa, a former “homeland” of South Africa. This article critically reflects on the establishment of Qwaqwa by introducing its records and exploring the key questions: What is the main legacy of the establishment of Qwaqwa for South Africans? How was Qwaqwa managed and who were its influential leaders? Against this backdrop, this article will also discuss the role of the Dikwankwetla Party and the resettlement aspect.

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It is hoped that the introduction of these records will stimulate further research into the topic of the South African homeland system and cultivate greater insights into the country's contested history.

**Keywords:** apartheid, homelands, mopeli, mangope, archiving, multinational development

## INTRODUCTION

After two decades of democratic rule, the history of South Africa's "homeland system" continues to leave historians at odds as to how this painful part of our legacy should be interpreted. Apart from differences in the understanding of the homeland legacy, it is also safe to say that there is a deficiency in academic documentation regarding these self-governing states. Popular volumes on the history of South Africa mention the existence of these states during the apartheid era, however these lack scholarship with greater respect for their nuances.

In many ways the homeland system came about as a result of the decolonisation of Africa. In the years following World War II (1938–1945), ideas about power relations began to revolutionise worldwide. The 1960s was a golden decade for African independence, with many African states gaining independence from their former colonisers. Therefore, by implementing the homeland system, the South African government, under the leadership of Prime Minister H.F. Verwoerd, tried in vain to reposition itself and improve appearances to gain greater acceptance.<sup>3</sup>

The official policy of what was termed "multinational development", including the rationale behind it, is properly formulated in the annual *Yearbook of the Republic of South Africa* of that period. According to this, the ideas surrounding the homeland system were in circulation long before its official development. In

1917, Prime Minister J.C. Smuts, who was a co-author of the preamble of the United Nations, remarked during a speech in London that "in South Africa you will have in the long run large areas cultivated by Blacks and governed by Blacks, where they will look after themselves in all their forms of living and development, while in the rest of the country you will have your White communities which will govern themselves ...".<sup>4</sup>

The homeland system was clouded in controversy since its conception. The Tomlinson Commission studied the idea of homelands, and their report did not favour the system. Regardless, the South African government proceeded to pass the *Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act* in 1959. This act was the final nail in the coffin for any representation in the Union parliament. The act also provided guidelines for the establishment of the self-governing states that were to become known as the "homelands".<sup>5</sup>

The history of the politics during the establishment of these homelands is not extensively documented in history books. In some instances, in particular with regard to Qwaqwa, the small scale of the homeland may be one reason for this, since Qwaqwa represented only a small percentage of all the Basotho living in southern Africa. The trauma of resettlements that flowed from the homelands propelled a national resentment towards the system, which also had a detrimental effect on the documentation of their internal politics, with the leaders of these homelands often typified as puppets of the South African government. According to Dubow, “short-term gains for white supremacy were illusionary and brought at enormous human cost”.<sup>6</sup>

## THE SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE FREE STATE PROVINCIAL ARCHIVES AND QWAQWA

The Free State Provincial Archives currently preserves the collection of Qwaqwa authority from 1974 until 1994. The appraisal of the Qwaqwa records proved a challenge, leaving the archivists with much to contemplate. The classification systems of the records were approved, however the actual filing of records within files was not adhered to. This resulted in a much prolonged process of appraisal, since no information may simply be discarded or preserved at random.

Another critical problem was the file numbering. The records were not filed according to the approved file-plan. This meant that the archivist had to create an alternative method to identify the records, a process that is crucial to the researcher’s needs. During this appraisal process, records that detail “routine enquiries” in organisations are usually due for disposal. However, upon inspection, this was not the case with the Qwaqwa records, which contained valuable information, and so the archivists had to extensively check each routine enquiry for its preservation function.

In the process of archiving, the act of establishing an inventory is critical in contextualising records, by capturing important information regarding the provenance of the records, and the circumstances in which the records were created, as part of its introduction. The ideal in archiving is for the archivist to be involved in the complete life span of records, from the creation of the record to its permanent preservation, or its destruction, in the case of records of no historical significance. The *National Archives and Record Services Act* (No. 43 of 1996) makes provision for the role of records management.<sup>7</sup>

Despite provisions such as these, contextual information remains a challenge as archives are haunted by losses of institutional knowledge. In order for archivists to properly conduct appraisals, particularly in challenging examples such as the Qwaqwa records, a pre-appraisal contextualising of the records is even necessary.

Language provided a further challenge, as the records were written in three different languages: English, Sesotho and Afrikaans.

## THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF QWAQWA

The San were the first known inhabitants of the area that became known as Qwaqwa. This is portrayed by the numerous San paintings and carvings on cliffs and inside caves in the Qwaqwa area. After the Voortrekkers moved to the Orange Free State (OFS) in 1838, the area was no longer inhabited by San, but instead, by the Magolokwe/ Bakgolokwe, which was ruled by Chief Oetsi.

After being driven out by the Voortrekkers in 1856/7, mainly due to stock theft, the Makgolokwe relocated to different parts of the OFS and Lesotho, leaving Witsieshoek without any inhabitants. The Volksraad of the OFS decided to retain Witsieshoek as government property and this ruling was maintained until President Brand granted part of Witsieshoek to Chief Paulus Mopeli by treaty in 1867.

Chief Mopeli, a brother of Moshweshwe, the illustrious paramount chief of the Basotho, ruled the Bakwena. The Basotho were defeated during the Second Basotho War in 1866 between the OFS and Basotholand. At that stage Chief Mopeli, after having moved with his group from their previous home in Mabolela on the western side of the Caledon River, lived in the OFS. He then became an ally of the OFS after discussing peace terms with President Brand.

Chief Mopeli requested land from President Brand for his people, and was granted part of Witsieshoek. After the Bakwena had moved to Witsieshoek in 1868, the Batlokoa, led by Chief Mota, were also allowed in Witsieshoek by the OFS government in 1873. Chief Mota's nephew, Sekonyela, was awarded land to the east of the lands that belonged to the Bakwena, and a border was established between the two groups in 1878.

The current population of Qwaqwa consists mainly of members of the two old Bakwena and the Batlokwa groups, as well as certain groups from the Nguni people. The Nguni relocated to the area during the resettlement process, which occurred during the era of Dikwankwetla. Some of these groups moved around, without permission, solely due to employment opportunities and/or family matters. In 1953 the Tribal Authority was established for each group. This allowed each group to be ruled by a chief, who was responsible for traditional, administrative and executive matters. The chief was assisted by a council comprising other chiefs, headmen and older men.

In 1962 the homeland was declared a regional authority and in 1969 Qwaqwa became the Basotho baBorwa Territorial Authority. The territorial authority, in turn, was replaced by a legislative authority in 1971.

## THE ESTABLISHMENT OF QWAQWA

On 1 November 1974, Qwaqwa became the seventh self-governing territory in the Republic of South Africa. The Qwaqwa Legislative Assembly formed the Legislative Authority of the Qwaqwa government and comprised 60 members, of whom 40 were nominated from the Batlokwa and Bakwena, and another 20 elected. The name “Qwaqwa” is derived from the San language and it means “whiter than white”, referring to the sandstone hills of the area.<sup>8</sup>

The forced removals of Africans in South Africa did not only occur in certain parts where interests were solely economical. An example of such a scenario occurred when the South Sotho-speaking people were forced to leave the Kromdraai area and relocated to Onverwacht, which is situated 15 km south west of Thaba Nchu. The name Onverwacht was later changed to Botshabelo, which means “place of refuge”. According to the oral history conducted, political confrontation and turmoil constantly raged between Mangope<sup>9</sup> and Mopeli<sup>10</sup>. The government homelands of both Qwaqwa and Thaba Nchu wanted control over Botshabelo. However, Qwaqwa had an upper hand since the majority of Botshabelo residents were South Sotho-speakers, therefore, it was logical for the area to be administered by the Qwaqwa government.<sup>11</sup>

Mopeli and Mangope struggled to exert lasting influence on Botshabelo. The absence of constant traditional influence resulted in political maturity in the early 1980s. However, Botshabelo was a central, desolate area and Bloemfontein was an economic hub. This fact did not alleviate the poverty and other challenges faced in Botshabelo and instead worsened the situation. Qwaqwa supremacy in Botshabelo became more influential and members of Dikwankwetla grew tremendously. This did not sit well with the youth in the area who went through “*Mrabulo*”, or “the political education”.<sup>12</sup>

## A MIXTURE OF DEFIANCE AND COMPLIANCE: THE COMPLEX NATURE AND LEGACY OF THE HOMELAND SYSTEM

A typical feature of most homeland leaders is a strong focus on the economic development of their self-governing areas. Leaders such as Buthelezi of Kwazulu, Mangope of Bophuthatswana and Mopeli of Qwaqwa, were controversially opposed to international sanctions imposed on South Africa. The legacy of these leaders can only be accurately interpreted by studying the economic views that they shared, which seemingly to a large extent steered the political decisions they made.<sup>13</sup> In March 1980, Dr T.K. Mopeli was elected chief minister for a five-year period. The government of Qwaqwa had the responsibility to formulate policy, determine

strategy and create infrastructure within which operational activities were directed towards promoting tourism development.<sup>14</sup>

The homeland system and its leadership is worthy of historical study and scrutiny, since it has left a complex legacy in its wake. While at first glance their political leaders actively complied with the apartheid system, the refusal of many of these self-governing states to opt for full independence disparaged the apartheid theory. The most influential homeland leader, Mangosuthu Buthelezi, continuously refused independence for Kwazulu, and encouraged other homeland governments, such as Lebowa, Gazankulu and kaNgwane, to follow his example. Certain researchers even argue that Buthelezi's actions resulted in some of the main reasons why the process of "multinational development" failed.<sup>15</sup>

The Chief Minister of Qwaqwa, Dr. T.K. Mopeli was another homeland leader who became known for his fierce rejection of independence of Qwaqwa. Responding to questions on this matter at a press conference in 1984, Mopeli asked "why are you so eager to get us out of South Africa?"<sup>16</sup> The homeland system is therefore a challenging subject of study, and to label homeland leaders as apartheid "puppets" is a simplistic interpretation of their leadership. Miscommunication between the Qwaqwa administrations often existed on the matter of independence.

Despite the clear role that the homeland system played in destabilising the South African government's practical application of the "multinational development" theory, criticism on the legitimacy of the homelands persisted throughout the implementation of the system.

The homeland system fragmented societies because it set up artificial political boundaries between communities and it was further entrenched after the *Bantu Homelands Citizenship Act* was passed in 1970. This act was initiated to promote the apartheid system and ensure that South Africa no longer had any black citizens. According to Du Pisani, while acknowledging that the system was a big failure, an argument can, however, be made that the political leaders of the homelands were often very critical towards the South African government, and this provided a certain amount of credibility to the system. This illustrates how differently the homeland system is interpreted by current historians, after 20-odd years of democratic rule in South Africa.<sup>17</sup>

Despite the strong economic policy, the homeland system struggled to be economically viable. More than 80% of the gross national product of Qwaqwa was generated outside of its borders.<sup>18</sup> Tourism became an important political tool with which the credibility of Qwaqwa was promoted, but it was in vain.<sup>19</sup> According to Harvey, the complex level of South Africa's industrial society led to the downfall of the homeland system. A legacy of family disruptions also forms part of this system, as noted by Harvey: "To make it work, either the terrible separation of black urban workers from their families in the homelands would have to continue or the whites would increasingly have to take over unskilled jobs – which they were unwilling to

do. The whites could not continue to live off cheap black labour and yet be separated from the blacks.”<sup>20</sup>

The development of the homeland system was however not driven by economics, but was steeped in political ideology. In 1981, Piet Koornhof, the Minister of Co-operation and Development remarked: “If Gazankulu, Lebowa, Qwaqwa and KwaNdebele [homelands] became independent [in addition to the already

‘independent’ TBVC states] it means that there will be 13.5 million completely independent Blacks. Then only about 6.25 million Black citizens of Kwazulu and KwaNgwane will remain under the control of the South African Parliament. These 6.25 million Blacks will be fewer than the sum total of 7.8 million Whites, Coloureds and Asians in South Africa.”<sup>21</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

The transition process of South Africa from a minority-ruled government to a constitutional democracy left members and supporters of the Dikwankwetla Party divided between old and new loyalties. After the 27 April 1994 general elections, the self-governing territory of Qwaqwa ceased to exist, and was absorbed into the “new” South Africa. The Dikwankwetla Party of South Africa continued to contest elections at provincial and local level. Since the dawn of democracy, the party has ceased to contest the provincial elections. Recent elections have seen the Dikwankwetla Party rallying their supporters behind the ruling African National Congress (ANC).<sup>22</sup> The opening of a hall named after Dr T.K. Mopeli reflects the acknowledgement by the provincial ANC of the role of Mopeli. This indicates that the Dikwankwetla Party played a crucial educational role.

The homeland legacy continues to remain a controversial subject and a painful part of the South African history. Some South Africans saw the experiment as a policy of decentralisation, empowering themselves to make independent decisions and challenging the apartheid legislation. In contrast, others saw the implementation of the homeland system as a failed attempt at “multiple national development”, constituting social engineering.

The reappraisal of the records for the office of the Chief Minister of Qwaqwa left many questions unanswered. A large number of records that were mainly preserved by the National Party government could not be retrieved. It is however an established principle in the writing of history that, the more time that passes after the events being studied, the greater the perspective of the historian will become. Therefore, further research into these records of the history of Qwaqwa will lead to new insights in future.



## NOTES

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2. Tshitso Challa is the head of the Free State Provincial Archives.
3. R.W. Johnson, *South Africa: The first man, the last nation*, Johannesburg 2004, Jonathan Ball Publishers, pp. 145–146.
4. Anon., *South Africa 1980/1: Official yearbook of the Republic of South Africa*, Chris van Rensburg Publications (pty) Limited, Johannesburg 1981, p 182.
5. Johnson pp. 144–146.
6. S. Dubow, *Apartheid: 1948–1994*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2014, p 117.
7. National Archives and Records Services Act No. 43 of 1996.
8. South African History Online, “Qwaqwa”, <http://.sahistory.org.za/print/places/qwaqwa>, s.a., retrieved on 2014-09-05.
9. Lucas Lawrence Manyane Mangope (1923 - ), founding member of the Bophuthatswana National Party, became the chief minister Bophuthatswana, the second of the self-governing territories of South Africa, on 1 June 1972. Champion, H., *Bophuthatswana: where the Tswanas meet*, Valiant Publishers, Sandton, 1977, p 121.
10. Dr. TK Mopeli (1930–2014) was a founding member of the Dikwankwetla Party



- of South Africa. He became the Chief Minister of Qwaqwa after its establishment in 1974, Masopha, M., Dr. TK a true leader, <http://152.111.11.6/argief/berigte/volksblad/2010/09/22/QQ/7/QQTDPSA.html>, published 2010/09/25, retrieved on 2014/10/08.
11. Twala, C. and Barnard, L., “The incorporation of Botshabelo into the former Qwaqwa homeland: a logical consequence of the apartheid system?” in *Journal for Contemporary History*: Department of History – University of Free State, Volume 31, Number 1, June 2006, p. 163.
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  16. *The Friend*, Independence for Qwa Qwa rejected, 7 May 1984.
  17. K. Du Pisani, “B.J. Vorster en Afsonderlike ontwikkeling”, in Pretorius, F. (ed), *Geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika van voortye tot vandag*, Tafelberg, Cape Town, 2012, p 350–351.
  18. D. Welsh, *The rise and fall of apartheid*, Jonathan, Jeppestown, 2009, p. 91.
  19. N.J. Roodie et. al., *Tuislande: Die rol van die Korporasies/Homelands/ The role of the Corporations*, Chris van Resnburg Publishers, Johannesburg, 1973, p. 11.
  20. R. Harvey, *The fall of apartheid: The inside story from Smuts to Mbeki*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2001, p. 54.
  21. Welsh, p. 213.
  22. Free State Provincial Archives: Interview with M.P. Lebesa on 12 September 2014.

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