

# The Rise and Fall of the Ciskei Homeland and Bantustan Leadership, 1972–1994

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## Abstract

In this article, I grapple with notions of celebration, commemoration, and leadership as narratives of memory, in the Ciskei Bantustan in particular. The aim of the article is to get readers to remember and reflect on our past, in order to understand the present. The article also focuses on the history of the Ciskei homeland, its leadership values, and role of traditional leaders, rural development, legislative imperatives, and the impact of the policy of separate development, as well as the coups, suppression, torture and killings that happened between 1972 and 1994.

**Keywords:** Bantustan; Ciskei; homeland; leadership

## Introduction

I am not afraid of an army of lions led by a sheep, I am afraid of an army of sheep led by a lion. (Alexander the Great)

In this article, I grapple with notions of celebration, commemoration, and leadership as narratives of memory, in the Ciskei Bantustan in particular. The aim of the article is to get readers to remember and reflect on our past in order to understand the present. The article also focuses on the history of the Ciskei homeland and its leadership values, and it touches on the role of traditional leaders, rural development, legislative imperatives, the policy of separate development, as well as the coups, torture, oppression, and killings that happened between 1972 and 1994.

The Ciskei Bantustan in the Eastern Cape was formed to serve as an enclave for Xhosa-speaking people in South Africa, as part of the policy of racial segregation, following the constitution of the Republic of South Africa in May 1961. The area was relatively small (only 9 182 square kilometres) for the number of people it was expected to provide for.



“Ciskei” is composed of the Latin prefix “Cis,” indicating that it lies on the Cape Colony side of the Kei River; and “kei” is a Khoisan word meaning “clear or shiny.”

In the early 1920s, under the government of the Union of South Africa, the area was administered by the *Bunga*, or indigenous council, comprising traditional authorities and the educated elite, which had been put in place under British colonial rule. The *Bunga* local unit consisted of a headman, or the traditional *inkundla* (“open assembly”) system. Before colonial rule, these *inkundla* were autonomous and took decisions collectively. As an advisory council, the *Bunga* held little power. Within the *Bunga* system, local assembly authorities were subject to the Magistrates’ Court. The Bantu Authorities Act of 1951 withdrew what remaining power they had had, bringing them under direct control of the government. The purpose of the Act was to pave the way for the creation of Bantustans and racial segregation.

The Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act of 1959 was probably the most important legislation in the implementation of this official policy. The Act provided for the gradual development of self-governing Bantu national units, and for the direct consultation between the government of the Union and these national units in matters affecting their interests. It also provided for the hierarchy of Bantu authorities, leading to self-government.

In 1970, the Homeland Citizenship Act was enacted by Parliament. The Act bestowed on the government of each homeland the right to issue a certificate of citizenship to all its citizens, a measure intended both to enhance the status and prestige of the various homeland governments and to strengthen the ties of black citizens with their respective homelands, which in terms of government policy, were independent states in the making.

The government of Ciskei was formed in 1961 after the South African government declared it a separate administrative territory. In 1972 its status was elevated to a self-governing territory. This coincided with stronger efforts to forcibly remove Xhosa speakers to the Ciskei. Zwelitsha Township near King William’s Town was declared the capital of the Ciskei.

Zwelitsha today forms part of the Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality. In his research, Grootboom (1992) draws our attention to the socio-political underpinnings that necessitated the establishment of this township. Zwelitsha means a new place or new country in Xhosa. Zwelitsha was established in 1947 as a corridor township to King William’s Town to provide a place of residence for labour at the Good Hope Textile Factory (later Da Gama Textiles)—two initiatives that can truly be referred to as twins projects, developing simultaneously—with each having a direct bearing and influence on the growth of the other. As a vestige or mark of the liberal United Party government, the township had “middle-class” pretensions in terms of neat schools, clinics, shopping centres, a dairy, in-house plumbing, and toilets. With the entrenchment of apartheid in the early 1960s, a further five zones were added to the original five zones. As the declared “capital,” from

1972 to 1981 it served as the seat of the Ciskei Government, and is currently the seat of the Eastern Cape Government.

Under the Ciskei Constitution (Proclamation 187 of 1972), the Ciskei was declared a self-governing territory within the Republic of South Africa. In terms of the proclamation, its territory comprised the districts of Mdantsane, Zwelitsha, Hewu, Herschel, Glen Grey, Victoria East, Keiskammahoek, Peddie and Middledrift. The districts of Herschel and Glen Grey were transferred from the Ciskei to the Transkei in 1976.

On January 1, 1968, Chief Justice Thandathu Jongilizwe Mabandla (born on August 16, 1926), became the first chief executive councillor of the Ciskei Territorial Authority (CTA). He had been Chief of AmaBhele *aseTyhume* since 1957. He convened the first meeting of the newly established CTA at Zwelitsha in November 1968. On August 1, 1972, he assumed the newly created position of Chief Minister (1969–1973) of the Ciskei.

Parliamentary elections were held in the Ciskei between February 19 and 23, 1973. The Legislative Assembly had a total of 50 seats, 20 of which were elected, and 30 of which were reserved for appointed chiefs. In addition to its other executive powers, the Legislative Assembly was empowered to alter or repeal Acts of the Parliament of South Africa on matters over which it had power to legislate. Provision was made for a national flag, a coat of arms and a national anthem for the Ciskei.

In 1972, Lennox Leslie Wongama Sebe, a member of Mabandla's Cabinet, broke with Mabandla and formed his own party, the Ciskei National Independence Party (CNIP). The CNIP won the elections in 1973, and Sebe became the new Chief Minister of the Ciskei from May 21, 1973 until December 4, 1990. Lennox Sebe, born on June 26, 1926, completed his matric at Lovedale College and went on to complete a teacher's diploma. Sebe was a sports enthusiast, as demonstrated when he captained rugby and cricket teams while at Lovedale. He also managed to complete a diploma in agriculture. In 1968, he assumed headship of the education portfolio in the CTA. In 1971, he moved to take on the agricultural portfolio. He made the biggest political move when he became a member of the Ciskei Legislative Assembly and Chief Minister in 1973. He enjoyed support mainly from government-appointed chiefs. Because of the high esteem in which chiefs were held in the Ciskei, Lennox Sebe appointed himself a chief, and in 1976 was installed as Chief of the Khambashe, a junior house of the Gqunukhwebe.

However, in June 1975, the High Court of Ciskei annulled the election of four members to the Cabinet, including Chief Minister Lennox Sebe, due to elections irregularities in Zwelitsha, thus making Sebe ineligible to hold the post of Chief Minister. He was subsequently re-elected in a by-election on October 24, 1975 and resumed office. In 1978, Mabandla and other members of his party crossed floors to the CNIP and thus the Ciskei became a one-party state.

Sebe ruled the Ciskei with an iron fist and ruthlessly crushed his opponents. In May 1979, Sebe announced the establishment of the Ciskei Police Force and the Central Ciskei Intelligence Services. People, such as Chief Burns Ncamashe, who were regarded as threats to Sebe's position, were expelled. Trade unions, students, members of communities and his family members were not spared the expulsion, to the extent that, in 1983, members of the Sebe family, together with Vice President Xaba, were detained.

In 1981, the Ciskei obtained independence from the South African Government. This independence was endorsed by the referendum on December 4, 1980. The South African flag was lowered and everyone waited animatedly for the Ciskeian flag to be raised to the top of the flagpole. As it started its upward journey, heaven forbid, the flag slipped down, twice it fell, thrice it fell; only on the fourth attempt, after the flag had been secured by South African soldiers, did the flag reach its rightful position at the top of the pole. It was not to be: *icamagu alivumanga*. On December 5, Sebe became the President of the Ciskei, with the Reverend W. M. Xaba as his Vice-President. In 1983, the Ciskei National Assembly bestowed the title of "President for Life" on Sebe.

## **The Role of Traditional Leaders**

In his address to the Ciskei National Independence Party on March 14, 1979, Lennox Sebe expressed his patriotism as follows:

For myself, I find my strength, my courage, my inspiration, my total commitment to our national goal in the stirring life examples of our warrior leaders of the past; those forefathers whose spiritual strength still anoints the nation today. We have the mighty Ngqika, father of us all, the mighty warrior Maqoma, other prophets and warriors; our Ntinde, Mdange, Mbalo, Sandile, Kama and many more. Our history shows that for over a hundred years these valiant chiefs fought with courage against overwhelming odds to defend our sovereign right for survival as a free and independent people.

The Ciskei Chiefs were being rewarded as a result of what their forefathers had done in terms of leadership and bravery, and were appointed as Members of Parliament representing their constituencies, and also in the Cabinet. They were seen as agents of development in the rural areas, the vanguard of rural development. They were also seen as those who would promote heritage, culture, customs, and moral regeneration. They promised to promote peace, justice and social cohesion.

## **Ciskei Economy**

As part of development policy, there was a blueprint known as The Ten Points for Achieving Development in the Republic of Ciskei. My favourite clause, number 7, reads:

To provide each Ciskeian with a meal a day.

The Xhosa Development Cooperation (XDC) was started in 1965 to develop the economy of the Ciskei. Its mandate was to establish, plan, finance, coordinate and promote industrial, commercial, financial, business and other undertakings and projects. The XDC aimed to attract established industries to the Ciskei to provide more work opportunities for black people and train them as managers in all aspects of business, industry and agriculture, to provide technical and financial assistance to black entrepreneurs, and to provide the necessary infrastructure with all the required amenities at industrial growth points.

The XDC's function was to increase the number of workers in the Ciskei, and to provide them with increased income through in-service training and advice. This meant developing all available natural resources in the homeland and motivating and assisting all bodies involved in the development of the Ciskei. The Ciskei had the advantage of a very favourable position in relation to the growing border industrial areas of the Eastern Cape province. It was here that secondary industries offered much for Ciskeians.

Dimbaza Township was the Ciskei's major industrial centre. Some 50 factories provided industrial facilities. Other townships with industrial potential were Zwelitsha, Berlin, Keiskammahoek, and Sada. At the end of 1974, there were more than 100 industrial undertakings in the Ciskei.

Agriculture and agricultural training were very important aspects of the Ciskei economy: 74 per cent of the Ciskei's surface area was planned for agriculture. About 304 ha of the planned area is grazed rotationally. In March 1975 there were 176 agricultural societies and 12 corporations. Crops grown in the Ciskei included maize, wheat, sorghum, cotton, soya beans, sisal, lucerne, sunflower seeds, and tea. Fruit was grown on a small scale. During 1974/75, 3 400 fruit trees, mainly peaches and oranges, were planted. During 1976 there were more than 46 500 fruit trees in the Ciskei, and in the Peddie area pineapples were planted and produced on a large scale.

Animal produce from the Ciskei included meat, milk, butter, cream, skins, mohair, and eggs. In 1975 there were 147 174 cattle, 193 500 sheep, and 144 040 goats. At the end of 1974 there were 1 223 ha of woodlot plantations, the largest plantations being near Keiskammahoek and Victoria East. A further 2 544 ha were committed to commercial and non-commercial use. Indigenous bush covered 18 703 ha of land. Tobacco was grown successfully for the first time in the Ciskei in the Lante-Mbinzana scheme. The Xhosa Development Corporation expanded the Ciskei's agriculture to the point where she could export her produce. The Ciskei Agricultural Corporation advanced loans to black farmers and loaned tractors during the ploughing season.

The XDC trained black farmers on the various projects in all aspects of farming, including farm management. Fresh vegetables were grown for sale at especially low prices in the rural areas, and work opportunities were created for as many blacks as possible through the cultivation of labour-intensive crops.

Secondary industries were started near the irrigation schemes to make use of nearby farm produce. Agricultural cooperatives were started and blacks were trained to run them. Surpluses were exported and everything was done with the help of the Ciskeian government to stimulate this section of the economy.

A very important aspect of the Ciskei's agricultural development was to provide training in modern farming methods to individuals, students, and groups of farmers, in conjunction with the Ciskei's agricultural and educational authorities. Both the South African and Ciskeian governments attached great importance to agricultural training and expansion, and formal agricultural training was offered at the University of Fort Hare, Fort Cox College, and Phandulwazi Agricultural School.

## **Political Repression**

A number of repressive laws and proclamations were passed in the Ciskei. These included:

- 1977 – Proclamation R252, which gave the government of the Ciskei powers to declare a state of emergency.
- 1982 – National Security Act No. 13. This replaced proclamation R252 of 1977, and provided for detention without trial, banning of individuals and outlawing of organisations and publications.
- 1983 – National Security Amendment Act No. 35. This empowered the police to detain and interrogate persons suspected of having committed or intending to commit an offence.

Sebe maintained political power by banning or suppressing all opposition political parties, including the African National Congress (ANC), Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (PAC), South African Communist Party (SACP), and United Democratic Front (UDF), and by imprisoning their officials and members. Anyone who wished to start an opposition party, or to stand in an election as an independent candidate, was summarily arrested and detained.

Sebe adopted an iron-fist approach to the trade unions operating in the Ciskei. Numerous trade unionists were detained, including Gqwetha and Mntonga. The South African Allied Workers Union (SAAWU) was banned in August 1983 under section 91(b) of the Ciskei National Security Act. The government accused the union of being involved in a bus boycott.

In 1983, Mdantsane and East London communities embarked on a boycott to protest a five-cent increase in bus fares. The boycott against the bus service of the then Lennox Sebe's Ciskei regime (the so-called *Zezeam Ciskei Amahle*), which was established on July 18, 1983, culminated on August 4 in the Egerton massacre, which—according to eyewitness Ndala (2017)—besides those injured, also claimed 11 lives at the Egerton railway station in Mdantsane, where Ciskei homeland government police officers and green berets beat and shot commuters.

In 1985, Oliver Tambo made a call on all people of South Africa (including the “homelands”) to make the country ungovernable and the system unworkable. The Ciskei homeland was part of an oppressive system. On Tuesday, July 23, 1985, a student meeting was held at the Nompandolo High School in Zwelitsha. Students, under the banner of Cosas, protested for a free, non-racial and quality education. The Ciskei police responded with violent action, resulting in the killing of four students, and hundreds were injured and subsequently arrested.

Eyewitness Sinxo (2017) (who was a student at that time) related that a memorial had been erected at the school as part of a community heritage project to give recognition to marginalised aspects of our history and promote nation-building. The memorial gives recognition to the role played by these students in their fight for a democratic, free, quality and non-racial education system, men and women who were fine revolutionaries, and who were never afraid to speak the truth about power.

Oupa Gqozo, born on March 10, 1952, became a colonel in the Ciskei Defence Force, an armed force established in the Ciskei in March 1981 from the 141 Battalion of the South African Defence Force (SADF). Gqozo was a military attaché of the Ciskei Government, and was posted to Pretoria. He became a brigadier on April 1, 1988, and returned to the Ciskei as Chief of Staff of Intelligence in 1989. On March 4, 1990, he staged a coup in the Ciskei in the absence of Lennox Sebe, who was on a state visit to Hong Kong (White 2009).

In an interview, Fana (2017) said that Gqozo formed his own political party, the African Democratic Movement (ADM), in 1991 to counter the influence of the African National Congress in the region. In 1992, Gqozo, who himself was believed to be obsessed with power, accused the African National Congress of planning to remove him from power in the Ciskei. During 1992 Gqozo’s resistance to the ANC was brought to an end when, on September 7, 1992, the ANC organised a march—of more than 80 000 people led by Chris Hani, Cyril Ramaphosa, Ronnie Kasrils and other leaders of the Border region—into Bhisho, forcing Gqozo to resign.

When Ronnie Kasrils’ group was attempting to break through the Ciskei Defence Force lines to enter the Bhisho stadium, soldiers opened fire on marchers, killing 28 people and injuring over 200. On March 22, 1994, under massive pressure, Gqozo formally resigned as leader of the Ciskei. In terms of Decree No. 5, the Transitional Executive Council appointed joint administrators to govern the Ciskei until the inclusive first democratic South African elections were held.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, I would like to quote Jim Yong Kim, President of the World Bank:

No matter how good you think you are as a leader, my goodness, the people around you will have all kinds of ideas for how you can get better. So for me the most fundamental

thing about leadership is to have the humility to continue to get feedback and to try to get better – because your job is to try to help everybody else to get better. (Cunningham 2014)

Or, in the words of Peter Drucker (2003): “management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things.”

How true were the words of Oliver Tambo when he said:

Learn from the enemy also. The enemy is not necessarily doing everything wrongly. You may take his right tactics and use them to your advantage. At the same time, avoid repeating the enemy’s mistakes. (Department of Arts and Culture 2017)

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