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The Mass Action Campaign of 1992: The Ciskei Crisis and the African National Congress in Transition.

(Part 1)

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Abstract

The politics of South Africa's transition to democracy played out beyond the negotiating rooms. In the Eastern Cape's Border region, where democratic mobilisation faced violent repression by the Ciskei bantustan regime throughout the transition years (1990-4), a confrontation escalated which cast national politics into stark relief. By 1992, this developing crisis came to expose the uneasy compromises being made at CODESA; the complex politics of homeland reincorporation; and the disconnection between national negotiations and social realities on the ground. The dramatic and fatal march on the Ciskei's capital of Bisho on 7th September, often understood as a pivotal moment of the transition, had a long backstory. No isolated flashpoint, this march marked the culmination of a long local campaign to oust the Ciskei's repressive military ruler, a struggle which was belatedly supported by the ANC's national leadership to clarify its own mass action campaign and to evidence the organisation's mandate to negotiate. The politics surrounding the crisis in Ciskei, and the ANC national leadership's efforts first to rein in and then to harness the local campaign, reveal the tensions at play as leaders sought to transform the organisation from its disparate strands into a party prepared for multiparty elections.

Keywords: transition; apartheid; CODESA; bantustans; violence; Ciskei; Bisho (Bisho).

Introduction

1992 was the most turbulent, uncertain and critical year of South Africa's transition to democracy. Hopes that were pinned on the success of the negotiations at CODESA (Congress for a Democratic South Africa) were dashed in May, as the African National Congress (ANC) withdrew from the talks in the face of widespread criticism from among its own support base. Escalating political violence and evidence of the National Party (NP) government's use of covert repression fuelled a growing distrust between the main negotiating parties. The Boipatong massacre, which the ANC blamed on De Klerk's regime, further undermined this relationship and sealed a new focus within the Tripartite Alliance: the winter of 1992 was dominated by the contested politics of mass action. A dominant narrative emerges from various accounts of this period: that negotiations were shelved by the Alliance in mid-1992 following the Boipatong massacre in June, only to be resumed once again after the massacre at

Bhisho in September. According to this narrative, these tragedies interrupted the principal frame of national politics, the violence apparently serving to caution and remind national politicians of their goals and responsibilities.¹ This story rests on a narrow perspective on the political contours of the transition and negates the dynamics of the mass action campaign. More than cautionary tale, political violence was a defining dynamic of the negotiations and their possibilities, no more so than in the middle months of 1992.² Widespread suspicion among the democratic movement that the government was pursuing a dual agenda, became, after Boipatong, a defining element of its political discourse. With absolute loss in the good faith of National Party politicians, *realpolitik* now governed the transitional strategy of the Alliance, making room for the argument to renew pressure through mass action.

This article draws on diverse archival, published and oral primary sources to examine the escalating political crisis that emerged in the Border region during 1991-2; the problems that this created for emerging agreements at CODESA; its role in crystallising the issues around which the negotiations collapsed in May 1992; and its influence on the ANC's mass action campaign. It argues that the escalating situation in Ciskei forced ANC negotiators to change their conciliatory position towards the 'TBVC' states ('independent homelands' of Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda and Ciskei) and instead to confront the 'hostile' bantustan regimes through 'rolling mass action'. The latter offered an opportunity for the ANC executive, anxious amid popular unrest and criticism of their aloof negotiating style, to renew their links with 'the masses' through visible association with the signs and symbols of people's power. The article is the first of two papers that together reassess the transition 'from below' and develop an understanding of the context, political dynamics and significance of the Bhisho march and massacre. While this first paper examines the escalating crisis in the Border, providing a backstory to the tragic massacre on 7th September 1992, the second paper examines the September march itself: the consequences of local political violence for the possibilities and outcomes of the march; the multiple meanings of mass action within the Alliance; the tragic pattern of events that unfolded at the Ciskei's border; and the political consequences and manoeuvrings that followed in the wake of the tragedy.

The emerging crisis in the Ciskei bantustan and Border region, which escalated throughout the early years of the transition, became an issue of growing national importance in 1992, as it exposed the uneasy compromises being made at CODESA, the complex politics of homeland reincorporation and the disconnection between national negotiations and social realities 'on the ground'. In keeping with tradition, the ANC sought to keep the disagreement that existed between national and regional leaders quiet, for it challenged the legitimacy of its leadership. Alongside pressure from COSATU, and the NP's white-only referendum called to legitimate the government's role in negotiations, the unfolding political crisis in Ciskei informed the decision by the NEC to launch a mass action campaign. In doing so, they were ceding to escalating demands from across the left wing of the alliance: COSATU had for many months been calling for a general strike; young comrades and MK cadres rallied for further military support and a renewal of the armed struggle; and the civic movement pressed for rent and bond boycotts. In the Ciskei, these dynamics were given political focus in a broad-based campaign against Brigadier Gqozo's hated military regime.

¹ A. Sparks, *Tomorrow is Another Country: The Inside Story of South Africa's Road to Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 133-152; M. Murray, *The Revolution Deferred: The Painful Birth of Post-Apartheid South Africa* (London: Verso, 1994), 182-184; P. Waldmeir, *Anatomy of a Miracle: The End of Apartheid and the Birth of the New South Africa* (London: W.W. Norton, 1997), 216.

² L. Evans, 'Violence in the South African Transition', *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History* (forthcoming 2023.)

While violent, repressive and tragic, the outcome of the September demonstration was not the great surprise that many claimed: for months, politicians and commentators across the political spectrum had feared the use of large-scale state violence against demonstrators, as the campaign to oust Brigadier Gqozo grew in intensity. The large march on 7th September 1992 was not an initiative of the ANC's national executive, nor a project of SACP insurrectionists as some critics claimed: it was the consequence of a longstanding campaign by local civic organisations, churches, unions and then the regional ANC leadership. The national ANC leadership, aggrieved that this campaign threatened negotiating strategy at CODESA as well as their approach towards the bantustans, made repeated attempts to rein in the local campaign. Organisers nevertheless continued to mobilise against escalating state violence in the Ciskei, demanding Gqozo's removal.

There remain few accounts of the mass action campaign of August- September 1992. Those that do exist describe the campaign as a national response to COSATU's lobby, SACP 'insurrectionists' and young militants. Steven Friedman focuses his account at the national level: the ANC faced pressure for mass action from COSATU and a minority of 'Leipzig way' radicals, while ANC negotiators looked to substantiate their position through popular action.³ Patti Waldmeir, meanwhile, describes how Mandela was forced into adopting mass action by SACP militants, who 'captured ANC strategy' and who 'cherished dreams of insurrection, fantasizing about million-strong crowds in the streets, à la Eastern Europe.'⁴ If Friedman's national lens misses local and regional dynamics, Waldmeir's anti-communist trope simplifies and misrepresents the realities. In many other accounts, the Bhisho march constitutes a shorthand for the mass action campaign and is depicted as an initiative of national ANC and SACP leaders influenced by the Leipzig comparison.⁵

Contrary to dominant explanations of the Bhisho march that foreground the Leipzig imaginary, in the Border few among the civic movement, who were at the heart of the local campaign, employed this discourse, focused as they were on the practical realities of bringing about a democratic interim administration in the Ciskei.⁶ Their points of reference were the UDF's discourses of 'people's power' and the 'one city' campaigns for participatory democracy that had precipitated negotiations to deracialise government in a number of urban municipalities.⁷ Since 1988, 'open city' campaigns in Cape Town, Johannesburg, and Port Elizabeth had called for desegregation of state provision and local government: 'One City, One Tax Base' became the popular slogan.⁸ In East London, Gqozo's regime stood in the way of such a forum, since Mdantsane, the city's large township, fell within the Ciskei and Gqozo refused to recognise the authority of the region's most powerful civic, the Mdantsane Residents' Association (MDARA). Resistance to the Ciskei regime, and to the bantustans in general, was not only a rural concern, but involved densely populated urban areas too.

³ S. Friedman, 'Back to the Streets', in S. Friedman, ed., *The Long Journey: South Africa's Quest for a Negotiated Settlement* (Braamfontein: Ravan Press, 1993), 139- 160.

⁴ Waldmeir, *Anatomy of a Miracle*, 207.

⁵ Sparks, *Tomorrow is Another Country*, 147-151; W. Beinart, *Twentieth Century South Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 278-279; S. Dubow, *Apartheid, 1948-1994* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 261, 273; N. Worden, *The Making of Modern South Africa: Conquest, Apartheid, Democracy*, 5th Edition (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2012), 172.

⁶ Interview with Lucille Meyer, Cape Town (3 May 2019); Interview with Lulamile Nazo, East London (2 July 2019).

⁷ For a discussion of the diverse influential and political heritage of 'people's power', see Heidi Brooks, 'Differential Interpretations in the Discourse of "People's Power": Unveiling Intellectual Heritage and Normative Democratic Thought,' *African Studies*, 77, 3 (2018), 453- 455; 465- 467.

⁸ Thozamile Botha, 'Civic Associations as Autonomous Organs of Grassroots' Participation,' *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory*, May 1992, No. 79 (May 1992), 57.

The principal and practice of a People's Assembly, a 'relatively new idea in South African community politics', was central to the Border campaign, shaped by the ongoing struggles of civic organisations and their political cultures.⁹ If Gqozo would not enter local negotiations over interim government, and the ANC would not address this in national negotiations, change would have to be brought about through local initiative. Elsewhere in the bantustans, People's Assemblies were also planned to effect local interim government through direct democracy following the collapse of CODESA.¹⁰

This paper argues that the escalating campaign against Gqozo in the Border played a major role in clarifying the ANC's political strategy and had significant consequences for the shape of the transition. The campaign revealed the leadership's poorly conceived position on the homelands and forced a more strategic approach, long advocated by the UDF, to pursue alliances with 'friendly' bantustans and to confront those 'hostile' to democratic change. Throughout the winter of 1992, the ANC national leadership lacked strategy and direction in their mass action campaign and faced criticism for its poor momentum. The intensifying popular campaign in the Border was at first considered a nuisance to be tempered, for it challenged the national leadership's approach in negotiations. Yet by August 1992, with the ANC national leadership needing a resolution to mass action - for its confrontational approach challenged possible conciliation in negotiations - the Border campaign against Gqozo presented new opportunities to resolve this impasse. If it promised to pressure the government into conceding to the ANC's renewed demands by threatening the government's homeland allies, the planned September march would make visible the 'organic' connection between national leaders and 'the people', renewing their claim to speak for the UDF and cementing these strained ties within the Alliance.

The ANC and the Bantustans: National Negotiations, Local Contradictions

In 1990-1991, ANC negotiators underestimated the thorny politics of the 'homelands'. Dominated by senior politicians from exile and Robben Island, the NEC was focused on national issues and over-confident that the organisation could build alliances with bantustan elites, underestimating both resistance to reincorporation and the government's enduring support for the bantustans.¹¹ This was linked to a neglect of their own caucus in the broad social movement fostered by the UDF, not least in the Border.

In the early 1990s ANC politicians, facing the reality of their limited institutional strength and poor caucus in the rural areas, hoped that alliances with bantustan leaders would offer them the opportunity to expand the reaches of their leadership through established political and social networks in the bantustans.¹² This strategy found some limited success, but did not rest easy with

⁹ *Ibid.*, 71. The dispute between headmen and the civic in Alice, and that by MDARA in Mdantsane, had become key elements in the campaign against Gqozo. Botha argued that Alice was one of the very few localities in the country where civic organisation had completely displaced state authority, and in its place operated an effective 'people's assembly'.

¹⁰ In the northern and eastern Transvaal, assemblies promised to address disputes with traditional authorities. 'Peoples Assemblies Plan Mooted by Civic Body', *New Nation*, 22-28 May 1992.

¹¹ 'ANC NEC Extended Meeting 12 and 14 September: Main Points of Discussion' and 'ANC Extended National Executive Committee Meeting, 17 May 1991', Mac Maharaj Papers, Pádraig O'Malley Heart of Hope Archive, accessed at <https://omalley.nelsonmandela.org/index.php/site/q/03lv03445/04lv04015/05lv04051.htm> on 1 March 2022.

¹² T. Lodge, 'Neo-patrimonial politics in the ANC', *African Affairs*, 113, 450 (2014), 11-12; J. Robinson, 'Fragments of the Past: Homeland Politics and the South African Transition, 1990-2014', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 41, 5 (2015), 966. Bantu Holomisa had become a firm ally in Transkei.

UDF activists whose struggles against repressive bantustan regimes continued. In August 1990, the UDF held a conference to develop a common approach with the ANC towards the bantustans. The conference made compacts designed to subject the ANC's negotiating practices to local structures of accountability, agreeing that national leaders should not meet with bantustan leaders without consulting local UDF structures. Partnerships with bantustan leaders should only be established if committed to free political activity and 'a non-racial, democratic South Africa free of bantustans.'¹³ But tensions remained: Mandela spoke of the ANC's role in forging black unity by talking with bantustan leaders, while the UDF's Titus Mafolo cautioned that the conference should not be interpreted as a shift towards a politics of cooperation with 'homelands'.¹⁴ Strategy should be amended according to distinction between regimes that were sympathetic, ambivalent and hostile, the UDF maintained.¹⁵

In practice, the ANC's developing position on interim arrangements in the run up to CODESA breached these agreements. Less than two months after the August conference, Mandela hosted leaders of the 'self-governing' bantustans for a meeting at his home in Soweto, declaring that bantustan leaders and the ANC would 'speak with one voice' as a united front in developing strategies for talks with the government.¹⁶ By November 1990, three of the nominally independent 'TBVC' states had agreed to back the ANC, all except Bophuthatswana, the most powerful of the four.¹⁷ All had indicated they would be amenable to reincorporation.¹⁸ It might thus have appeared that bantustan leaders were falling into line, but the Popular Front alliance that ANC leaders hoped for remained uneasy and illusive: unlike Transkei's Holomisa, Gqozo's hand of friendship to the liberation movement was to be only fleeting.

After the organisation's unbanning in February 1990, the Border ANC enjoyed an unusual level of success in establishing its local structures, partnering in concrete campaigns with local organisations. The UDF formed the bedrock of the ANC's formal revival in the region after its unbanning in 1990, but the two organisations had long been tightly and organically linked.¹⁹ Under a new leadership from 1990, the Border ANC rapidly developed its branch membership, the region soon becoming one of the organisation's largest, its membership second only to the Transvaal.²⁰ Working with local unions, churches, students, and civic, sport and community organisations, and focusing on concrete local grievances, under the leadership of UDF stalwart and ANC underground leader Rev. Arnold Stofile, the Border ANC became the political umbrella for a dynamic social movement focused on the

¹³ UDF Conference Report, cited in J. Seekings, *The UDF: A History of the United Democratic Front in South Africa, 1983-1991* (Oxford: James Currey, 2000), 274.

¹⁴ Lance Nawa, *South*, 16- 22 August 1990.

¹⁵ 'The UDF, ANC Discuss Homeland Issue,' *The Citizen*, 14 August 1990.

¹⁶ Kwenosi Modisani, 'Leaders Speak with One Voice,' *Sowetan*, 8 October 1990.

¹⁷ '3 Homelands Back ANC- Mandela,' *Sowetan*, 12 November 1990.

¹⁸ 'SA May Soon Foot R2bn TBVC Bill,' *Business Day*, 21 November 1990.

¹⁹ The Border UDF had from its inception been tightly connected to the ANC and its underground networks, through Hani's Lesotho network. J. Cherry and P. Gibbs, 'The Liberation Struggle in the Eastern Cape', in South African Democracy Education Trust, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, 1970-1980*, Volume 2 (Pretoria: UNISA Press, 2006), 569- 614. At the formation of the UDF, its constitution retained a so-called 'Border clause', underlining loyalty to the ANC as the principal liberation organisation. Seekings, *The UDF*, 56. By the late 1980s, the UDF was effectively 'an internal wing of the proscribed ANC' in the Border, Wotshela argues. L. Wotshela, 'The Fate of Ciskei and Adjacent Border Towns: Political Transitions in a Democratic South Africa, 1985- 1995,' South African Democracy Education Trust, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa*, Volume 4, Part 3 (Austin Texas: Pan African University Press, 2019), 1869.

²⁰ J. Peires, 'The Implosion of Ciskei and Transkei,' *African Affairs* 91, 364 (1992), 377.

multiple oppressions of the Ciskei 'homeland', the principal apartheid structure in the region.²¹ Civic associations remained outside the organisation's leadership and in some localities the methods of selection for local ANC representation were thrown into question by the appointment of some who possessed dubious political affiliations.²² Nevertheless, while elsewhere the ANC lamented the abstract nature of ANC branch politics against the enduring importance of civic meetings to address concrete issues,²³ in the Border the organisation had, with some success, transformed the social movement into a political machinery whose agenda was strongly influenced by its broad base. If Ciskei was often dismissed as politically irrelevant as among the weakest of the bantustans, the growing confrontation in this region was nevertheless influential in national politics. For while the Ciskei regime lacked the military capacity of Bophuthatswana and the popular support for the KwaZulu chieftaincy, political and military support from Pretoria provided the necessary clout to repress the well organised local campaign.

Repression Continues in Ciskei: 1991

The security state had long employed the Ciskei regime - as many others - as a military bulwark to repress opposition.²⁴ In March 1990, a military coup was staged by CDF leaders sympathetic to the ANC to oust Lennox Sebe, replacing him with Brigadier Gqozo. Briefly, Gqozo enabled political expression, tolerating the political organisations and permitting the ANC to stage a huge rally of c.100,000 at the Bhisho stadium on 1st April. But if Gqozo made overtures to the liberation movement, he soon turned coat. The security state responded with a 'silent coup' to resume dominance over government and military positions: under the guise of the 'International Researchers' front company, SADF-MI officers (including Anton Niewoudt, Clive Brink, Ted Brassell) resolved to turn Gqozo's regime against the ANC. Turning against the civic associations, Gqozo reintroduced the hated system of headmen and bolstered this through the development of a vigilante organisation, the so-called African Democratic Movement (ADM).²⁵ Throughout 1991 and 1992, ADM vigilantes staged brutal night attacks, targeting activists and their families with automatic firearms, firebombs and grenades. In Alice, Peddie, Whittlesea, Zwelitsha and Dimbaza units of the ADM operated with intensity.²⁶ The perpetrators of this violence were not apprehended: it seemed clear to local communities that they were known to the regime; indeed, the ADM had been developed in the mould of Inkatha, through covert SADF operations. Meanwhile, Ciskei police engaged in the sustained harassment and intimidation of activists and employed increasingly

²¹ Interview with Lucille Meyer.

²² Personal communication with Patrick Mangashe.

²³ T. Lodge, 'The African National Congress Comes Home', African Studies Seminar Paper 317, African Studies Institute, University of the Witwatersrand, 8 June 1992, 16.

²⁴ C. Cooper, 'The Militarisation of the Bantustans: Control and Contradictions' in J. Cock and L. Nathan, eds, *War and Society: The Militarisation of South Africa* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1989), 174- 187.

²⁵ R. Southall and Z. de Sas Kroppinicki, 'Containing the Chiefs: The ANC and Traditional Leaders in the Eastern Cape, South Africa,' *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 37, 1 (2003), 57-58; Wotshela, 'The Fate of Ciskei', 1876- 1885; Peires, 'The Implosion', 379-381.

²⁶ 'The Politics of Hope and Terror: South African in Transition', Report on Violence in South Africa by an American Friends Service Committee Study Team, November 1992, 13. Accessed at <https://projects.kora.matrix.msu.edu/files/210-808-3471/AFSCSATransition11-92opt.pdf> on 23 March 2022.

repressive measures to prevent political meetings including the use of teargas, rubber bullets and live ammunition to disperse protesters.²⁷

The experience of brutality and repression - first under Sebe, and then under Gqozo's regime - only served to further politicise and harden the resolve of local communities against this illegitimate bantustan regime. The new leadership of the Border regional ANC were picked as representatives of the broad alliance as well as for their radical politics.²⁸ In office, they were pushed further into confrontation, since the local branches, formed from the structures of the UDF, were militantly opposed to Gqozo's regime.²⁹ Branches were unable to carry out meetings and activities without continual harassment, intimidation and police violence. Branch members and their families were being targeted by the ADM hit squads, with elderly people and children also subject to violent attacks; comrades were being abducted and killed.³⁰

From late 1990 the deteriorating situation in the Border led to discord among the Alliance's regional structures and its national negotiators. While local UDF leaders foregrounded the need for a response to the growing levels of violence in the Ciskei, at a rally in Mdantsane, Wilton Mkwayi - a contemporary of Mandela, recently released from Robben Island - declared that the ANC would support and protect the homeland military regimes as allies of the ANC. It seems unlikely that his position would have found much sympathy among local activists.³¹ In February 1991 a deal was struck between the South African government and Ciskei: the government would provide financial assistance and 'support for law and order' in Ciskei, while sending South African personnel to fill Ciskei ministerial positions.³² Gqozo proclaimed the treaty was 'the first step on the road to incorporation in a new, non-racial, democratic South Africa' and the press echoed this representation.³³ Yet it was clear that Gqozo wished for further military support to oppose democratic mobilisation and prevent what he referred to as the expansion of Hani's MK 'fiefdom' in the region.³⁴ In practice, the intervention signified South African support to stabilise the territorial power of the Ciskei bantustan state.

As violence escalated, mobilisation in the Border hardened into a focused campaign against the Ciskei, despite efforts by the ANC executive to rein in the challenge. The campaign had three principle demands: an end to repression, the creation of an environment for free political activity, and Gqozo's resignation. Bhisho, Gqozo's seat of power, became the focus of demonstrations. In January 1991, Stofile criticised the government for using negotiations to stall change, while employing repression to weaken the ANC.³⁵ His assertion might also have been intended for the ears of ANC negotiators who still hoped to win over Gqozo. On 1st March 1991 the local Alliance

²⁷ Wotshela, 'The Fate of Ciskei'; L. Evans, 'The Bantustan State and the South African Transition: Militarisation, Patrimonialism and the Collapse of the Ciskei Regime, 1986–1994,' *African Historical Review*, 50, 1-2 (2018), 101-129.

²⁸ Members of the regional ANC leadership included: Smuts Ngonyama; Silumko 'Soks' Sokupa; Crispian (Chippy) Olver; Lucille Meyer; Rev Arnold Stofile; Andrew Hendricks; Marion Sparg; Donée Cooney (Nicol).

²⁹ Interview with Lucille Meyer; Interview with Crispian 'Chippy' Olver, Johannesburg (11 July 2019).

³⁰ Interview with Lucille Meyer.

³¹ 'Mkwayi: ANC Will Protect Ciskei, T'kei', *Daily Dispatch*, 10 December 1990; 'ANC Plans Rally in Mdantsane', *Daily Dispatch*, 5 December 1990.

³² These included Economic Affairs, Finance and Administration; Justice; Transport and Public Works; and Agriculture. 'Ciskei Opts for Reincorporation', *Business Day*, 28 February 1991.

³³ 'Ciskei to Return to SA Fold', *Cape Times*, 28 February 1991; 'Ciskei First to Start Move Back into SA', *Star*, 28 February 1991.

³⁴ Arthur Maimane, 'Crossing the Kei to End Chaos- and Halt Hani', *Weekly Mail*, 1 -7 March 1991.

³⁵ 'Govt using talks to delay black freedom- Stofile', *Daily Dispatch*, 21 January 1991.

organised a march of 3000 people to the Ciskei Council of State buildings, where they issued a memorandum of demands (fig. 1).³⁶ In response, a national ANC delegation met with the Ciskei regime and committed its ranks not to attack Gqozo in public.³⁷ Yet in June 1991, the Border ANC launched a consumer boycott in the region, demanding the resignation of Gqozo and the reincorporation of Ciskei 'through a proper process of consultation with mass-based organisations and with the popular mandate of the Ciskei people.'³⁸ In July, a broad representation of political, church, civic and business organisations convened at the Border Peace Conference to address the situation of enduring and escalating violence in the region. The political statement that emerged from this conference identified Gqozo and the Ciskei regime as the prime obstacles to peace and free political activity in the region: the only solution would be to remove Gqozo, they concluded.³⁹ By late 1991 the situation in Ciskei had deteriorated badly: repression was intense and violence was escalating. Under a State of Emergency, imposed in late October, hundreds of activists had been arrested.⁴⁰ Marches took place in Alice, Dimbaza, Mdantsane, Zwelitsha, and Whittlesea amid increasingly repressive and violent policing by the Ciskei regime, who attempted to intimidate and disperse protests.⁴¹ Rev. Arnold Stofile and Maguza Sigabi of the Whittlesea ANC branch, launched an application to challenge the Ciskei National Security Act in its supreme court.⁴²



Figure 1: Bhishe, 1st March 1991: Demonstrators return to Bhishe from the Ciskei Council of State Buildings (*Daily Dispatch*, 2nd March 1991). With permission: Daily Dispatch.

³⁶ 'Thousands Join Bisho March on Govt Offices', *Daily Dispatch*, 2 March 1991.

³⁷ 'No Let up on Gqozo', *City Press*, 31 March 1991.

³⁸ 'Ciskei Confrontation Looms', *City Press*, 9 June 1991; 'Tensions Rise in Ciskei', *Weekly Mail*, 7-13 June 1991.

³⁹ Interview with 'Soks' Sokupa in 'Focus: Ciskei- The State Wants to Start a Cycle of Violence,' *Mayibuye* 3, 9 (October 1992), 13.

⁴⁰ 'Hundreds Arrested Under Ciskei's Draconian State of Emergency Laws,' *New Nation*, 8-14 November 1991.

⁴¹ 'Protesters Dispersed?' *Daily Dispatch*, 30 November 1991.

⁴² 'Ciskei Regime to Stay- Govt', *Star*, 13 November 1991.

Marginalised from national negotiations, local organisers pressed national negotiators on the necessity of meaningful local reform to enable free and fair elections. To coincide with the start of the CODESA meetings, the Border Civic Congress (BOCCO) and the regional Tripartite Alliance again renewed their campaign to highlight ongoing violence. In November 1991, MDARA planned to march against the Ciskei government's refusal to address their grievances.⁴³ Refused permission by the Ciskei, the ANC national leadership intervened, pledging that they would manage local negotiations and urging that the campaign be tempered. BOCCO duly conceded and called off the march.⁴⁴ On 17 November 1991 Mandela went to meet with Gqozo in East London: Gqozo agreed to lift the State of Emergency that had been in place since October on the understanding that the ANC would cease its 'war of words'. At a rally in Duncan Village, East London, Mandela urged protesters to maintain peace and discipline in the planned marches across Ciskei, revealing concern about militancy in the Border.⁴⁵

With the State of Emergency lifted, the Border ANC would nevertheless proceed with intensified mass action.⁴⁶ Disregarding the NEC's efforts to rein in the campaign, demonstrations proceeded: on 1st December 1991, the Tripartite Alliance and BOCCO marched to Bhisho to demand an interim administration in Ciskei; the reinstatement of civil service workers; and an end to the harassment of pensioners. They appealed to Ciskei police and soldiers to join the march for freedom. Led by Stofile and the SACP Border President M. Makalima, the demonstrators were heavily policed on their journey from the Bhisho stadium to the Council of State Buildings, where Gqozo refused to meet the marchers or to receive their memorandum of demands. Finding the gates to the council complex closed, the marchers sat outside and sang. They tried to force the gates, which were quickly secured by police (fig. 2). The march leaders made speeches, left their memorandum and the demonstrators returned to the stadium.⁴⁷

At the end of December, the alleged murder by ANC comrades of three people in Masele, one of whom was a headman, led to the dispatch of a further national ANC delegation to the region: Govan Mbeki and Raymond Mhlaba were sent to talk with Gqozo. In an interview after the talks Mhlaba confirmed that the ANC was committed to working with Gqozo to 'restore peace' and recommended that the National Peace Accord be invited to intervene. He reported that '[a]lthough the exact cause of the conflict is not yet known, it appears that there has been a misunderstanding between our supporters and members of the newly-formed African Democratic Movement in the area.'⁴⁸ Likely aimed to smooth over the evidence of ANC aggression, Mhlaba's vagueness regarding the conflict over headmen and the ADM's repression in the region would surely have rankled with local activists and leaders who suffered the realities of the ADM's violent night raids and hit squad murders.⁴⁹

⁴³ Human Rights Watch, 'Ciskei: Ten Years On- Human Rights and the Fiction of "Independence"', Human Rights Watch Reports 3, 16 (1991), accessed at <https://www.hrw.org/reports/1991/southafrica3/#5> on 10 March 2022.

⁴⁴ Interview with Lulamile Nazo.

⁴⁵ 'Mandela Urges 7,000 Rally to March Peacefully', *Daily Dispatch*, 18 November 1991; 'Whittlesea Protest March Planned', *Daily Dispatch*, 28 November 1991; 'ANC, BOCCO Apply for Ciskei March', *Daily Dispatch*, 28 November 1991; 'Ciskei to Lift State of Emergency', *Star*, 18 November 1991.

⁴⁶ 'Mass Action Threat to Force Gqozo Out,' *Cape Argus*, 19 November 1991.

⁴⁷ 'ANC Members March in Ciskei', *Daily Dispatch*, 3 December 1991. The march was cancelled and then belatedly reinstated, likely due to the Ciskei's refusal to grant permission and disapproval from the ANC executive. 'Alliance Cancels March in Bisho', *Daily Dispatch*, 23 November 1991.

⁴⁸ 'ANC, Ciskei Hold Talks After 3 Slain,' *Star*, 30 December 1991.

⁴⁹ In Dimbaza, the house of Smuts Ngonyama, Vice-Chairman of the Border ANC and organising secretary for the Border Council of Churches, was attacked on 28 May 1991 by a gunman with an R5 rifle, the latter



Figure 2: Demonstrators from the Alliance and BOCCO are prevented from presenting their demands to Gqozo at the Ciskei Council of State Offices, Bhisho, 1st December 1991 (*Daily Dispatch*, 2 Dec 1991). With permission: Daily Dispatch.

The Campaign for Peace and Democracy and the CODESA Crisis of March-April 1992

The ANC's constitutional proposals had during 1991 suggested provision for an interim administration in the Ciskei, however as the CODESA working groups got down to business in early 1992, it became clear that national issues trumped regional: no democratic interim council would replace Gqozo's regime. The ANC negotiators in Working Group Three proposed an interim government with two phases: the first would involve the appointment of an Interim Government Council, which would include all parties represented at CODESA (and therefore the TBVC states), and would oversee the Tricameral Parliament, the NP Cabinet and the structures of the TBVC states and self-governing bantustans. Preparation for elections to a Constituent Assembly, responsible for drawing up a new constitution, would proceed directly under these arrangements.⁵⁰ This proposal found broad agreement within Working Group Three: it was outside the negotiating rooms that real discord emerged. Within the proposal for an Interim Government Council was the acceptance by ANC negotiators that the TBVC states would play a role in the transitional arrangements before eventual reincorporation. While for the ANC leadership this accommodated the wishes of their ally in Transkei, for the residents of Bophuthatswana and Ciskei, whose regimes were uncompromisingly hostile towards political opposition, this was deeply problematic. The negotiators underestimated resistance to reincorporation; its multiple meanings and changeable politics. As negotiations on the

suggesting vigilante violence, which, Ngonyama argued, was being introduced to the region to 'neutralise' the impact of the ANC. Stofile had also been threatened. 'Ciskei Blamed for Attacks on ANC,' *Sowetan*, 29 May 1991; Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*, Volume 3 (London: Macmillan, 1999), 136.

⁵⁰ M. Sparg, 'Gqozo Must Go!', *Mayibuye* 3, 3 (April 1992), 18; J. Rantete and H. Giliomee, 'Transition to Democracy through Transaction?: Bilateral Negotiations between the ANC and NP in South Africa', *African Affairs* 91, 365 (1992), 533-536; L. Stack and K. Shubane, 'Phoney Peace in a Phoney War: Working Group 3', in Friedman, *The Long Journey*, 92.

homelands failed to reach agreement in Working Group Four, it became clear that reincorporation would be neither speedy nor straightforward: failure to carve out plans for reincorporation cut to the heart of the agreements already reached in Working Group Three regarding interim structures.⁵¹ In the Border, where an escalating campaign demanded the removal of the Ciskei military regime and the immediate implementation of a locally-accountable interim administration, these proposals were roundly rejected, exposing the negotiators as out of touch with popular sentiment and reality.

The ANC's approach to the homelands was thus ambivalent, as the organisation struggled to weigh up its alliance with Holomisa and other supportive homeland leaders against the hostile homeland regimes of Ciskei and Bophuthatswana: dealing with the TBVC as a bloc revealed inescapable contradictions. The intensifying violence of the Ciskei regime was neglected by the national leadership, who prioritised the integrity of constitutional deals at CODESA that would see the TBVC states included in interim arrangements. Furious that the despised and illegitimate Ciskei regime should continue to represent the people of the Border region in arrangements for interim governance, and that preparations for an election would be compromised by continued rule under the repressive bantustan regime, local organisers made their own strategy for interim government in the region.⁵²

In March 1992 the Border ANC launched its Campaign for Peace and Democracy, intensifying efforts to oust Brigadier Gqozo for an interim regime. At the beginning of March, their plans for mass action were leaked to the press, causing furore. Gqozo accused the ANC of mounting a plot against him. This was no secret conspiracy, the Border leadership maintained, but a legitimate campaign to 'symbolically oust' him through mass action, with support from more than 100 regional branches.⁵³ The campaign planned intensified action to destabilise the Ciskei regime and isolate Gqozo politically; to weaken Gqozo's position at CODESA and thereby the government's; to expose the involvement of SADF Military Intelligence in Ciskei, and ultimately, to bring about a local interim administration.⁵⁴ Yet, planned without sanction from the ANC executive, the campaign exposed the tensions between a leadership engaged in national negotiations and the movement for democracy in the Border facing the realities of violent repression. A national ANC delegation – including Thabo Mbeki, Joe Slovo and Cyril Ramaphosa – met with Gqozo in early March, but the regional leadership, who might ordinarily have accompanied such a national delegation, did not attend.⁵⁵ An impasse emerged: the regional leadership would not call off the campaign and the national leadership could not force them to do so, while Gqozo vowed to repress it violently. Ramaphosa, faced with little alternative, eventually came out in public support for the campaign,⁵⁶ but, he cautioned, 'our commitment to the negotiations process is unchallengeable.'⁵⁷

A crisis emerged which shook CODESA and, many argued, threatened its very future. In response to revelations about the planned action, the Ciskei pulled out of the regional peace body, the Border-Ciskei Regional Dispute Committee, arguing that the ANC had displayed contempt for the principles

⁵¹ R. Humphries, 'Rescrambling the Egg: Working Group 4' in Friedman, *The Long Journey*, 106-128; Stack and Shubane, 'Phoney Peace', 86-105.

⁵² Tanya Woker and Sue Clarke, 'Homelands', *South African Human Rights Yearbook* 4 (1993), 141; Interviews with Lucille Meyer; Chippy Olver; Lulamile Nazo.

⁵³ Claire Keeton, 'Softly Softly versus the Big Stick,' *Weekly Mail*, 6-12 March 1992.

⁵⁴ 'ANC "Coup" is "Symbolic"', *Cape Times*, 2 March 1992.

⁵⁵ Claire Keeton, 'Softly Softly Versus the Big Stick,' *Weekly Mail*, 6-12 March 1992.

⁵⁶ 'Ciskei, ANC Fail to Settle Differences,' *Cape Times*, 9 March 1992,

⁵⁷ 'Call for Codesa Suspension Over ANC Drive in Ciskei', *Star*, 10 March 1992.

of the National Peace Accord.⁵⁸ On 9th March a lobby of homeland leaders from Ciskei, KwaZulu, Qwaqwa and Gazankulu demanded that the negotiations be suspended until the ANC abandoned its campaign against Gqozo. Their call was supported by Bophuthatswana.⁵⁹ After initial efforts to intervene, caught in a dispute that threatened the cohering consensus, on 10th March the CODESA Management Committee withdrew, leaving the ANC and Ciskei to devise a resolution.⁶⁰ The following day, national ANC leaders met with representatives from both the Ciskei and South African governments. In return for a commitment by the Ciskei regime to review repressive security legislation, the ANC national leadership committed to review the campaign against Gqozo.⁶¹ Having made this commitment, on 13th March the ANC sent a further delegation - including Ramaphosa; Thabo Mbeki; Joe Slovo; Steve Tshwete; Terror Lekota; Chris Hani; Govan Mbeki and Raymond Mhlaba - to discuss the situation with Alliance leaders in the Border.⁶² While many among this delegation later attended major marches in the Border - especially the September march - Mbeki was notable in his absence from later demonstrations. It is telling of the emerging priorities, and was surely a slight felt by local organisers, that the national leadership chose to make quick assurances to the Ciskei government before they moved to consult regional structures of their own organisation. In the wake of these discussions, the regional leadership duly agreed to amend its campaign, toning down its challenge to Gqozo through defiance of security legislation and stepping back from its plans to occupy Bhisho.⁶³ While keeping Gqozo onside, the ANC national leadership were also surely concerned to prevent the possibility, widely reported, that the campaign's spectacle of radicalism might undermine the government's success in its forthcoming referendum on the negotiations.⁶⁴ The ANC needed the white electorate to concede to negotiations, and COSATU had duly delayed a long-proposed mass action campaign in advance of the referendum.⁶⁵

The Ciskei government quickly demonstrated what organisers in the Border already knew: that it was an unreliable negotiator, determined to prevent political freedoms. No sooner had agreements been traded than the Ciskei Government declared that the security legislation in question, Section 43 of the National Security Act, would not be abolished.⁶⁶ The People's Assembly, which was to be the centrepiece of the Campaign for Peace and Democracy, had been proposed as an occupation of Bhisho; instead, it was held at the Victoria Grounds in King William's Town on 6 April. Many national leaders turned out to address the crowd of 25,000, including Ramaphosa, who addressed the demonstrators and assured them that an agreement on an interim constitution was in close reach.⁶⁷

⁵⁸ Conveniently, this came just as the regime was called to answer to the Peace Accord as to why its Section 43 security legislation, used to ban meetings and rallies, had not yet been repealed. 'Ciskei Pulls Out of Peace Body', *Sowetan*, 4 March 1992.

⁵⁹ 'Row Over Ciskei Rocks Codesa', *Business Day*, 10 March 1992.

⁶⁰ 'Codesa committee pulls out of Ciskei, ANC dispute', *Citizen*, 10 March 1992.

⁶¹ The Ciskei government would review Section 43 of the Ciskei National Security Act (1982). 'Pact Averts Codesa Crisis Over Ciskei', *Business Day*, 11 March 1992; 'Ciskei to Review Security Laws', *Pretoria News*, 11 March 1992; 'ANC, Ciskei Truce', *Sowetan*, 11 March 1992; 'Ciskei and ANC Shake Hands and Look to the Future', *Star*, 11 March 1992; Woker and Clarke, 'Homelands', 148.

⁶² 'Ciskei Row: ANC Sends Top Brass', *Daily Dispatch*, 13 March 1992.

⁶³ 'ANC's Ciskei Action Starts', *Cape Times*, 12 March 1992; 'ANC Launches its Ciskei Campaign', *Business Day*, 12 March 1992; Woker and Clarke, 'Homelands', 148.

⁶⁴ Franz Kruger, 'Ciskei Braces for ANC Protests', *Weekly Mail*, 13-19 March 1992.

⁶⁵ Friedman, 'Back to the Streets', 141-142.

⁶⁶ *Daily Dispatch*, 20 March, cited in Woker and Clarke, 'Homelands', 149; 'Pact Averts Codesa Crisis Over Ciskei', *Business Day*, 11 March 1992.

⁶⁷ 'ANC Vows to Carry on Fighting Gqozo', *Daily Dispatch*, 7 April 1992; 'Interim Rule: Ramaphosa Predicts Consensus', *Daily Dispatch*, 7 April 1992.

A number of the Campaign's other demonstrations were refused permission, and marches that did go ahead were met with repression.⁶⁸

Discord over the holding of referenda on homeland reincorporation further tested the fragile consensus at CODESA and heightened the tensions between the ANC's negotiators, its national leadership and its structures in the Border.⁶⁹ According to the ANC's interim proposals, the inclusion of TBVC states in an interim government council assumed their reincorporation. But as it became apparent that reincorporation would not be straightforward, the NP pushed for further referenda, this time within the homelands to test support for reincorporation. After suggesting in early April that the TBVC states would oblige by holding referenda, they soon turned against the idea.⁷⁰ The national ANC leadership also opposed such plebiscites which - without time or capacity for preparation and with the threat of repression - they might lose, and which would legitimate the existence of these regimes. But against the national stance, the ANC Border region supported a referendum on reincorporation of the Ciskei to expedite the demise of Gqozo and the introduction of interim government. Under pressure to temper the campaign following the despatch of further national ANC delegations to the Border, and following a Ciskei Supreme Court interdict which prohibited the Border ANC from holding a referendum, plans for polling across the region were scaled back to a symbolic and rhetorical campaign at forthcoming rallies.⁷¹

Writing in *Mayibuye* in April 1992, Marion Sparg, the Border ANC's spokesperson, explained – diplomatically, for this was an ANC publication – the problems that the ANC's proposals posed for democracy in the Border. Alluding to the way that the situation in the Ciskei had been ignored in the ANC's proposals, Sparg explained:

It is now clear that there will be no separate interim administration in the Ciskei. The interim government in both phases will be a national structure and it will include Ciskei. Therefore the call for an interim administration in Ciskei had to be revised. This, however, does not deny the people the right to demand the resignation of the Gqozo administration.⁷²

In response to the rejection of referenda on reincorporation in the TBVC states by the organisation at national level, the Border ANC organised a symbolic voting campaign at a number of planned rallies in late March and April. This voting campaign appears to have been as much a message to the ANC's national leadership as it was an address to Gqozo. Voters would be asked: 'Do you support the call for the speedy implementation of an Interim Government to ensure that Gqozo does not remain an obstacle to peace and democracy in the Ciskei?'⁷³ The wording clearly signalled as unacceptable the inclusion of the Ciskei regime in the proposed Interim Government Council. Furthermore, if the national negotiations could not offer meaningful interim arrangements to enable free and fair elections in Ciskei, change would have to come about through local mobilisation to remove Gqozo: 'The Campaign for Peace, Democracy and Free Political Activity in Ciskei continues', Sparg affirmed.⁷⁴ The Border regional leadership, responding to local demands, thus rebelled from a national leadership preoccupied with progress at CODESA. They would not stand to allow Gqozo to represent

⁶⁸ 'Ciskei Police Hurt 4 People- ANC Claim', *Daily Dispatch*, 12 March 1992.

⁶⁹ 'Homelands Become Area of Disagreement', *Star*, 22 April 1992.

⁷⁰ 'Bantustans to Test the Will of the People', *Sowetan* 2 April 1992; '3 TBVC States Say No to Poll', *Sowetan*, 22 April 1992; Humphries, 'Rescrambling the Egg'.

⁷¹ 'ANC Calls off Vote on Ciskei', *Sunday Times* 15 March 1992; 'Ciskei Goes to Court Over ANC Campaign', *Cape Argus*, 18 March 1992; 'CDF Fires Teargas at ANC Marchers', *Daily Dispatch*, 7 April 1992.

⁷² Sparg, 'Gqozo Must Go!', 18.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

‘the people of Ciskei’ in an interim government.⁷⁵ Constitutional decision making could not be confined to the boardroom, nor separated from the material realities of apartheid which, in Ciskei as in Bophuthatswana, still prevailed under repressive and violent bantustan regimes. As its leaders in the Border intended, the escalating Ciskei campaign forced the ANC’s national leadership and negotiating teams to take these realities seriously, as matters of national importance.

The Mass Action Campaign: June-August 1992

The breakdown of the CODESA negotiations in May 1992 has been often attributed to disagreement between the NP and the ANC in Working Group Two over the ‘70%’ – the majority of votes in a constituent assembly necessary to change the constitution. The National Party pushed for a 75% majority, while the ANC demanded a lower two-thirds majority. By conceding it would agree to a 70% majority, Ramaphosa nearly brought the ANC into an agreement, but this offer was quickly withdrawn. It has been argued that Ramaphosa engineered the crisis in Group Two as it dawned on ANC negotiators that their concessions at CODESA would find little support among the Alliance.⁷⁶ It is rarely acknowledged that events outside the negotiations, and questions concerning interim governance in the ‘homelands’, were of great significance in shaping this turn. The crisis in the Border in March 1992 was a critical juncture for the ANC, as the national leadership struggled to balance negotiating priorities and its claims to legitimacy. The national leadership of the Alliance managed to briefly temper the campaign and its overt challenge to Gqozo and sought to minimise the public exposure of such internal cleavages within the organisation. Nevertheless, amid ongoing repression, the local campaign continued to gain momentum, putting pressure on the national leadership to respond to their demands for satisfactory interim arrangements. At an Alliance ‘Popular Front’ consultation meeting shortly prior to the CODESA plenary in mid-May 1992, it became clear that the ANC’s supporters remained committed to the position of a two-thirds majority.⁷⁷ While Ramaphosa put forward a compromise proposal to CODESA of a 70% majority, on 26th May he withdrew this offer in the knowledge that this, alongside the interim proposals, would provoke a crisis for the organisation and undermine the legitimacy of the ANC’s national negotiating teams.⁷⁸ Ramaphosa conceded the following year that they had focused too much on national issues and had neglected questions of regional government. Of the interim proposals he reflected: ‘Taking everything into account, the totality of everything, it would have looked like the ANC had actually sold out completely.’⁷⁹

De Klerk emerged from his success in the March 1992 white-only referendum confident of his leadership, while the ANC leadership faced criticism for being out of touch with its grassroots. Amid

⁷⁵ Shaun Johnson, ‘Ciskei Ripe for Conflict,’ *Daily News*, 8 September 1992.

⁷⁶ P. O’Malley, ‘Overview of 1992’, Heart of Hope Archive, accessed at <https://omalley.nelsonmandela.org/cis/omalley/OMalleyWeb/03lv00017/04lv00344/05lv00607/06lv00608.htm> on 20 March 2022.

⁷⁷ P. O’Malley, Interview with Chris Hani, 15 July 1992, Heart of Hope Archive, accessed at <https://omalley.nelsonmandela.org/omalley/index.php/site/q/03lv00017/04lv00344/05lv00607/06lv00635.htm> on 5 June 2019.

⁷⁸ P. Bulger, ‘End of Innocence: Working Group 2’ in Friedman, *The Long Journey*, 78-80; H. Ebrahim, *The Soul of a Nation: Constitution-Making in South Africa* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1998), 126, cited at <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/convention-democratic-south-africa-codesa-codesa-2>; <https://www.concourt.org.za/index.php/constitution/history>.

⁷⁹ P. O’Malley, Interview with Cyril Ramaphosa, 17 Aug 1993, Heart of Hope Archive, accessed at <https://omalley.nelsonmandela.org/index.php/site/q/03lv00017/04lv00344/05lv00730/06lv00774.htm> on 5 June 2019. See also A. Butler, *Cyril Ramaphosa* (Oxford: James Currey, 2008), 293.

growing dissatisfaction among its constituencies - calls for mass action by COSATU and for a return to armed struggle by MK and the Youth League - the organisation's leadership sought to renew its legitimacy to negotiate on behalf of the black majority. Mass action offered a plebiscite through public performance; to renew the mandate of ANC negotiators, and to reinvigorate connections between the leadership and the grassroots of the organisation. ANC leaders spoke about 'harnessing the power of the people' to strengthen their hand in negotiations,⁸⁰ but the adoption of a mass action campaign was as much about addressing anxiety over the leadership's relationship with their own constituencies.⁸¹ As Chris Hani argued in late July, 1992:

There was a gap in perceptions between the leadership and the people on the ground. The majority of the people never really understood negotiations. [The] people [began to] think, "These guys are talking and yet the killing is going on." It was only when a few of us went around that we began to feel we had moved too fast ahead of the people. If we had not called a stop [to negotiations], the net result would have been growing disaffection and even alienation [from the ANC].⁸²

The ANC launched its mass action campaign on 16th June with a mass stayaway and planned a week of action to begin on 3rd August with a two-day stayaway. COSATU threatened to strike if their demands were not met in negotiations with business; the ANC echoed this with plans for mass action to bolster renewed demands for interim government and progress towards democratic elections.⁸³ The real debate within the ANC was not between communists and moderates, as some alleged, but over 'the correct blend of negotiations and mass action', James Hamill argued: '[s]hould mass action be seen as a fallback (and essentially reactive) tactic to be used in the event of deadlock or should it be viewed as complementary to negotiations, continually casting its shadow over the negotiations?'⁸⁴ If the latter perspective dominated in the civic movement, the former came to dominate among the leadership during the winter of 1992, underpinning the hard-ball negotiating strategy that evolved in August. Hani and many colleagues on the left of the Alliance feared that the ANC were being drawn into a 'trap' of coalition through interim government. As Hani argued in July:

[T]he future of SA is not going to be decided at CODESA. There are millions of people out there in the streets... who want change as soon as possible... we are going to go to those people for a fresh mandate... If negotiations are deadlocked, we have got to make sure that we unlock those deadlocks through mass action... I think we saw illusions that everything would be solved at CODESA, the people must just wait and should be passive spectators, and I think that was one of the weaknesses of our negotiations strategy.

I believe that now we should go back to negotiations with clear positions. We must not go back to negotiations to repeat the protracted, endless exchanges and discussions of technical matters. First of all de Klerk must do something about this violence; he must do something about the hostels; he must accept the presence of international forces so that he

⁸⁰ R. Suttner, 'The Bisho March and Massacre: An Assessment,' *African Communist* 130, Third Quarter (1992), 25.

⁸¹ H. Adam and K. Moodley, *The Opening of the Apartheid Mind: Options for the New South Africa* (London: University of California Press), 101.

⁸² Hani in *Newsweek*, 20 July 1992, cited in J. Hamill, 'South Africa: From CODESA to Leipzig,' *The World Today* 49, 1 (January 1993), 14.

⁸³ Friedman, 'Back to the Streets', 150- 151.

⁸⁴ Hamill, 'From CODESA to Leipzig', 16.

is not a referee and a player; and finally, de Klerk must be made to agree to certain strategies in terms of the interim government and in terms of elections for a sovereign Constituent Assembly. That Constituent Assembly should be a one chamber house with no veto from anybody... 66% ratification.⁸⁵

Mass action was thus seen as essential to bolster these clarified demands and to renew support for the leadership in negotiations. As the campaign took shape in the winter of 1992, the August stayaway of 3-4th August was understood as a performative plebiscite to match the NP's referendum. Campaign leaders, such as Jay Naidoo, spoke of striking a 'yes vote' for the Alliance's negotiators; mass turnout was celebrated for its demonstration of the ANC's political mandate. As Naidoo proclaimed to a small crowd in Johannesburg on 3rd August:

The strike has been a resounding yes vote for the programme of the ANC, COSATU and the SACP. It has been a resounding yes vote for the demands that Nelson Mandela has been chasing in our negotiations with the De Klerk regime... This referendum... indicates the beginning of the end of the white minority regime.⁸⁶

The affair in March 1992 had raised the profile of the campaign in the Border, where, in contrast to other cities, marches were consistently large and militant.⁸⁷ In Mdantsane, MDARA and BOCCO spearheaded the fight around housing and against the reimposition of headmen in Ciskei. On 16th July Mdantsane's new SANCO branch staged a march and four-hour occupation of the NU 1 Magistrate's office in Mdantsane to coincide with the scheduled auction of houses repossessed by the Ciskei Building Society. Ciskei security forces manhandled protesters, who responded with stones, and the security forces opened fire, hurling teargas into the crowd.⁸⁸ Teargas and sjamboks were used to disperse protesters at the Zwelitsha magistrate's court, where 40 people were arrested.⁸⁹ No longer constrained by the politics at CODESA, some national leaders turned out in support of colleagues in the Border. At a rally in Mdantsane on 12 July, Harry Gwala likened the situation of low intensity warfare in Ciskei to that in the Natal Midlands, while Steve Tshwete urged protesters to direct mass action at Gqozo's military regime.⁹⁰

On Saturday 25th July 1992, prior to the planned week of action, the Alliance held a People's Assembly in East London, occupying the city's main drag of Oxford Street. Among the speeches and performances, a mock trial was staged in front of the City Hall, in which Brigadier Gqozo, played by an actor, faced multiple charges including 'illegal occupation of the seat of government' and was sentenced to life imprisonment (fig. 3).⁹¹ Gqozo was incensed by this public humiliation.⁹² This

⁸⁵ O'Malley, Interview with Hani, 15 July 1992.

⁸⁶ Robben Island- Mayibuye Archive, University of the Western Cape, VNS/ Afravision Collection, Mass action campaign: stayaway - Jay Naidoo speech in downtown Johannesburg, VNS 2181, 1992-08-03, Item ID: RIM.FV.2000.2120, Video 3 of 4 tapes.

⁸⁷ Poor turnout was reported at marches in Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban, Pretoria and Port Elizabeth. 'De Klerk Insists on Transitional Government as ANC gets Poor Turnout for Protests,' *The Ottawa Citizen*, 26 July 1992.

⁸⁸ 'Police, Protestors Clash in Mdantsane', *Daily Dispatch*, 16 July 1992.

⁸⁹ '40 Held After Sit In', *Daily Dispatch*, 22 July 1992.

⁹⁰ 'Gwala: SA in Grip of Low Intensity War', *Daily Dispatch*, 13 July 1992; 'Tshwete Sees Ciskei as Target for Protest', *Daily Dispatch*, 13 July 1992.

⁹¹ 'Border Mass Action Peaceful', *Daily Dispatch*, 27 July 1992.

⁹² Pik Botha to Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Bisho Massacre Hearing, Day 1, 9th September 1996, accessed at <https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/hrvtrans/bisho1/day1.htm> on 20 March 2022.

occupation of public space was held up as the example of the People's Assembly that leaders wished to hold in Bhisho.⁹³ Heartened by a radicalising national campaign, regional organisers planned a march to Bhisho to hold an Assembly on 4th August.



Figure 3: 'Gqozo' is subject to life imprisonment in a mock trial staged at the People's Assembly, Oxford Street, East London, 25th July 1992 (Daily Dispatch, 27th July 1992).

On the 3rd August, the first day of the two day stayaway, violent confrontations took place across the Ciskei. Knowing that the planned march on Bhisho the following day would go ahead regardless of his refusal to grant permission for the demonstration,⁹⁴ Gqozo had called in reinforcements from the SADF. Parts of Mdantsane, especially NU1 and NU2 zones, resembled 'a war zone'. The township was brought to a standstill and few went to work. The Ciskei police fired teargas to disperse a peaceful memorial gathering at Egerton station, held to commemorate the anniversary of the five shot during the 1983 bus boycotts. The crowd responded, throwing stones, and the Ciskei Police opened fire. A crowd marching to Sisa Dukashe stadium was teargassed; the Ciskei Building society was set alight; the rent office in NU1 burned to the ground. Burning barricades of tyres and vehicles were erected in the centre of the township and on the Ziphunzama bypass.⁹⁵

With Gqozo determined to prevent marchers reaching Bhisho, and Alliance leaders resolved to ignore these declarations, the march on 4th August came excruciatingly close to the use of fatal violence by the Ciskei. A crowd of more than 50,000 people gathered at the Victoria Ground in King William's Town, where the People's Assembly had been reluctantly held four months earlier, preparing to walk the five kilometres to Bhisho (fig. 4). Organised and led by the ANC Border Regional Executive Committee, and joined by national leaders including Chris Hani, Steve Tshwete and Raymond Suttner, the organisers planned to hold a People's Assembly in Bhisho where they

⁹³ Interview with Petros Vantyu, SABC News, 7 September 2012, accessed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RdX5_78fCZg on 1 February 2022; Interview with Petros Vantyu, East London (3 July 2019); P. Vantyu, 'The Bhisho Massacre', ANC Political School Assignment, 10 July 2010.

⁹⁴ 'Gqozo Refuses Permission for ANC March to Bisho', *Daily Dispatch*, 4 August 1992.

⁹⁵ 'Ciskei Forces, Protesters Clash: Gqozo Calls in SADF', *Daily Dispatch*, 4 August 1992.

would issue a list of demands, principle among which was the removal of Gqozo. At the border with Ciskei, the march was met by Ciskei Riot Police and CDF soldiers who prevented their entry to the bantustan.⁹⁶ A deadlock ensued: protesters and security forces stood in the sun for five tense hours as negotiations unfolded between Chris Hani, Cyril Ramaphosa, Bantu Holomisa, the Ciskei Government and the South African Foreign Minister Pik Botha. Peace negotiators Anthonie Gildenhuys (National Peace Accord) and José Campino (United Nations) engaged in lengthy and tiring 'shuttle diplomacy' between the Alliance leaders and Ciskei officials at the Council of State offices. Instructed by Gildenhuys to telephone Botha, Hani travelled by car to the Amatola Sun hotel and two hours of telephonic negotiations - involving Ramaphosa, Gqozo and Botha - ensued.⁹⁷ A deal was brokered through the effective intervention of the peace negotiators. The Alliance delegation returned to the demonstrators waiting at the border, Hani declaring 'it's a stalemate': they had negotiated that the crowd would march into the stadium at Bhisho but would not be allowed to proceed further. The possibility of violence reached a critical moment: the crowd surged forward, to be warned that soldiers would shoot. One soldier told a reporter: 'people are going to die here today', while Holomisa described the determination of the demonstrators: 'God knows what would have happened if people had been shot. At that late hour ANC members were preparing to move in and defy the order.'⁹⁸ While the concession to enter the stadium was later represented as a victory for all sides, for the activists and their leaders determined to get into Bhisho it was a source of deep frustration. In the nick of time, the compromise had been enough to avert a confrontation, but the events of this march would shape the tenacious resolve among Alliance leaders in September to get to Bhisho at all cost.



Figure 4: 4th August: Demonstrators march from King William's Town to Bhisho, led by national and regional Alliance leaders (*Daily Dispatch*, 5th August 1992). With permission: Daily Dispatch.

⁹⁶ Associated Press, Footage of 4 August march (1'20" - 1'45"), accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YJOM6lb5nhk> on 20 March 2022.

⁹⁷ 'Talks Avert Bisho Clash', *Daily Dispatch*, 5 August 1992; P. O'Malley, Interview with Pik Botha, 24 August 1992, Heart of Hope Archive, accessed at <https://omalley.nelsonmandela.org/index.php/site/q/03lv00017/04lv00344/05lv00607/06lv00703.htm> on 1 March 2021; Vantyu, 'The Bhisho Massacre,' 9.

⁹⁸ 'Talks Avert Bisho Clash', *Daily Dispatch*, 5 August 1992.

Following the 4th August march, violence in the region escalated significantly. Defiance continued: on 5th August, the day after the two day stayaway, most workers in East London city left work by mid-morning to attend a further occupation of Oxford Street;⁹⁹ in Queenstown, another mock trial was held during a large rally in the town's central Hexagon.¹⁰⁰ Repression increased: the general incidence of violence reached proportions 'almost impossible to monitor', the Border ANC reported.¹⁰¹ Numerous peaceful demonstrations were broken up by security forces waging 'a concerted campaign of harassment, intimidation and... state terrorism'.¹⁰² Counter-violence also escalated in August: there were numerous attacks on Ciskei state property and personnel; six Ciskei police were killed in three days by planned attacks.¹⁰³ On 7th August a bus carrying CDF soldiers was attacked with hand grenades and AK47s; on 8th and 9th August, CDF soldiers were attacked at their homes with hand grenades and rifles.¹⁰⁴

The August march was regarded as having made clear 'gains' for the Alliance: leaders in the Border celebrated the fact that the march had managed to 'push our way into the Bisho stadium in spite of Gqozo's threats'.¹⁰⁵ In his report of the August march, Raymond Suttner described how the crowd marched past the stadium intersection and towards the government buildings; highly disciplined as they waited for negotiations to unfold. The crowd surged forward, forcing police and the casspir to retreat. When the agreement was finally made for the march to proceed into the Bisho stadium, the crowd were instructed by security officials to turn around, back to the intersection, in order to enter the stadium. Instead, the crowd surged ahead, gloating as they toyi-toyi-ed past police, forced into retreat, before turning towards the stadium.¹⁰⁶

Leaders were encouraged that they would, with the pressure of another large march, be able to enter and occupy Bisho. Thus, on the 11th August the Regional Alliance Campaigns Committee decided that they should plan a repeat march to Bisho, which might take the form of 'an occupation of Bisho with different marches converging on Bisho all along the main roads.' Having consulted with ANC leaders at subregional level, and with the strategic aspects still to be refined, their programme of action was approved by the ANC regional executive committee on 19th August.¹⁰⁷

The August week of mass action witnessed a number of significant demonstrations across the country involving a total estimate of 5 million people, the largest of which included marches to Bisho and to Pretoria's Union Buildings on 4th and 5th August respectively.¹⁰⁸ The ANC claimed that 90 percent of workers had observed the stayaway in the country's largest ever strike.¹⁰⁹ But organisers of the mass action campaign, in particular campaigns officer Ronnie Kasrils, faced some

⁹⁹ 'De Klerk, Mandela, Hopes for Renewed Talks', *Daily Dispatch*, 6 August 1992; 'Workers Join EL Protest', *Daily Dispatch*, 6 August 1992.

¹⁰⁰ 'Mock Trial at Q'town Rally', *Daily Dispatch*, 6 August 1992.

¹⁰¹ University of the Witwatersrand, Historical Papers Research Archive, Kasrils Papers, A3345, E 2_1_1, 'Border ANC Report on the Events Surrounding the Bisho Massacre on Monday 7th September 1992', 1-2.

¹⁰² There were multiple attacks on ANC members' homes and assaults in which seven people had died, including a four year-old girl and a two month-old baby. *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁰³ P. Goodenough, cited in C. White, 'The Rule of Brigadier Oupa Gqozo in Ciskei: 4 March 1990 to 22 March 1994' (MA thesis, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, 2008), 128.

¹⁰⁴ White, 'The Rule', 133.

¹⁰⁵ Border ANC Report, 4.

¹⁰⁶ Kasrils Papers A3345, E2_1_1, Raymond Suttner, Report on 4th August March.

¹⁰⁷ 'Border ANC Report', 4-5.

¹⁰⁸ 'Mass Action Focus: The Alliance Assesses the Past Two Months', *South African Labour Bulletin* 16, 7 (September-October 1992), 31.

¹⁰⁹ 'Roll, Mass Action, Roll', *Mayibuye* 3, 8 (September) 1992, 12.

damning public assessments. The stayaway on 16th June had lacked 'clout', some argued, and was ultimately overshadowed by the tragedy at Boipatong.¹¹⁰ Poor turnout was also reported at many of the major city marches in late July, threatening hopes that mass action would sway negotiations.¹¹¹ Hani conceded in July that the campaign lacked strategic clarity.¹¹² Friedman argued that if the highpoint of the campaign was 3-4 August, it was short lived and its 'practical effects' limited.¹¹³

Meanwhile, private talks resumed between the ANC and the NP: it was widely assumed that open negotiations would soon resume.¹¹⁴ After news of secret meetings on 9th August (attended by Ramaphosa, Thabo Mbeki, Jacob Zuma, Joe Nhlanhla, Roelf Meyer and Dawie De Villiers) there followed popular discontent that the meetings contravened the agreed protocol for the resumption of negotiations.¹¹⁵ As a COSATU discussion paper later proclaimed, the 'ill-considered bilateral with the regime on 9th August' 'reflected strategic unclarity' and 'nearly threw away all the ground we had won in the previous two months'.¹¹⁶ Frustrated by the lack of movement by government on their key demands, and responding to criticism from within the Alliance, Ramaphosa reframed the purpose of these meetings and assumed control over future negotiations. All further meetings with the regime would cease: the government should address any 'practical implementation' of the ANC's demands to the the office of the Secretary General.¹¹⁷ This intervention also implied a criticism of Mandela and others taking a more conciliatory approach.¹¹⁸ Valli Moosa reasserted that nothing short of a response by the government to the list of demands laid out by the Alliance in the 23 June memorandum could lay the ground for new negotiations.¹¹⁹ By late August, with bilateral talks established between (principally) Roelf Meyer and Ramaphosa, it was widely anticipated that a new round of multiparty talks were on the cards: the Alliance thus held a summit to discuss its strategy.¹²⁰

At this summit, COSATU criticised the Alliance's failure to analyse and build on the mass action campaign.¹²¹ They had so far struggled to translate mobilisation into political gains. Responding to this and the recent resumption of talks, the Border campaign - which had seen one of the largest marches and the most dramatic event of the stayaway - was seen to be of national significance as leaders sought to use the campaign to tactical effect in negotiations. The Border region presented its programme of action to the ANC National Campaigns Committee, headed by Ronnie Kasrils, on 21st August at an early session of the National Alliance Summit. They agreed that 9th September should be a national day of focus on the bantustans, regarding Ciskei as the 'weakest link' in the government's alliance and Gqozo's removal thus highly strategic. Divisions were identified among the Ciskei's security forces: to 'maximise the gains' of the August march mass action should be

¹¹⁰ 'Protests Lack Clout to Topple De Klerk', *Guardian*, 17 June 1992.

¹¹¹ Poor turnout was reported at marches in Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban, Pretoria and Port Elizabeth. 'De Klerk insists on transitional government as ANC gets poor turnout for protests,' *The Ottawa Citizen*, 26 July 1992.

¹¹² O'Malley, Interview with Hani, 15 July 1992.

¹¹³ Friedman, 'Back to the Streets,' 151.

¹¹⁴ 'I had discussion with FW on Friday, says Mandela,' *Star*, 10 Aug 1992; 'Hopes that talks will resume', *Sowetan*, 10 August 1992.

¹¹⁵ 'No More Meetings with Govt', *Star*, 14 August 1992.

¹¹⁶ 'Mass Action Focus: The Alliance Assesses the Last Two Months', 33.

¹¹⁷ 'No More Meetings with Govt', *Star*, 14 August 1992.

¹¹⁸ 'FW, Mandela on "Hotline"', *Star*, 15 August 1992; 'Now You See It', *Financial Mail*, 21 August 1992.

¹¹⁹ 'Talks Are On, One-to-One This Time', *Weekly Mail*, 14-20 August 1992.

¹²⁰ 'Govt ANC in Bid to Restart Negotiations', *Star*, 26 August 1992; J. Baskin, 'A Winter of Discontent,' *South African Labour Bulletin* 16, 7 (September/ October 1992), 15.

¹²¹ 'Mass Action Focus: The Alliance Assesses the Last Two Months', 31-35.

escalated both 'qualitatively and quantitatively' to 'lead to Gqozo's removal.'¹²² Two days later, the issue was discussed further at a National Tripartite Alliance meeting: here it was suggested that the proposed march on Bhisho, scheduled for the 9th September, be brought forward to coincide with De Klerk's conference on federalism, scheduled for the 7th.¹²³ The Alliance thus hoped to use the Bhisho march to blunt the NP's efforts to formalise regional alliances with bantustan leaders, challenging Gqozo while he was away at the conference.¹²⁴ The Border Regional Working Committee invited national leaders, including Kasrils as campaigns officer, to engage in a planning meeting on 26th August ahead of the impending march.¹²⁵

Conclusions: the ANC in transition

Having held the simmering crisis in the Border at arm's length, it now offered an opportunity for the national ANC leadership to strengthen their mandate by visible association with the signs and symbols of struggle in the organisation's heartland. The mass action strategy could now be clarified with a tangible focus on the Ciskei as the 'weakest link' in the government's alliance and the first metaphorical domino on the path to power.¹²⁶ The march to Bhisho in September - which was to be a showdown by all expectation - promised to be widely reported and televised. Leaders aimed to fulfil the frustrated ambitions of the August march: to hold a People's Assembly in Bhisho and thereby to force Gqozo's resignation. The new phase of 'rolling mass action' looked to topple Ciskei, Qwaqwa, Bophuthatswana and KwaZulu and promised to serve various functions for national ANC leaders: to strike a blow to their opponents by challenging the NP's bantustan allies and thereby to strengthen the ANC's demands for an interim government and elections to a constitutional assembly; meanwhile consolidating their positions of power within the leadership through association with mass mobilisation. Some Alliance leaders adopted a vanguardist rhetoric, as they looked to 'harness the power of the people' in hard negotiations.¹²⁷

This episode reveals the contradictions and conflicts inherent in the ANC, itself in transition, as leaders sought to transform it from an exiled organisation dominated by a political elite into a broad-based political party through the absorption of the structures and caucuses of the UDF. By 1992, in the Border this transformation appeared to have been partially successful. Set against the financial struggles of the ANC at national level, and the limited branch membership in many regions,¹²⁸ the Border ANC enjoyed an unusual level of financial independence and thus control over its activities. This financial and operational independence in turn supported a coherent regional identity for the organisation and enabled the campaign against Gqozo to develop despite opposition from the ANC national executive, no doubt frustrating those in the executive who saw branches existing to perform a legitimating function, 'to give substance to the ANC's authority and leverage at the negotiating table.'¹²⁹ Despite repeated attempts by the national leadership to rein them in,

¹²² 'Border ANC Report', 6.

¹²³ Sparks, *Tomorrow*, 147.

¹²⁴ 'Federalism Summit to Kick off Amid Conflict,' *Business Day*, 7 September 1992; 'ANC Plan to Drive a Wedge into the Nats' Alliance,' *Business Day*, 7 September 1992.

¹²⁵ Present at this meeting were Silumko Sokupa; Lucilla Meyer; Andrew Hendricks; Donne Cooney; Chippy Olver; Skenjana Roji; Shepperd Mayatula; Temba Kinana; 'Giwu'; Mcebisi Bata; Mac Maharaj; Chris Hani; Ronnie Kasrils; Arnold Stofile. 'Border ANC Report', 6.

¹²⁶ 'Border ANC Report', 6.

¹²⁷ Suttner, 'The Bisho March and Massacre', 25.

¹²⁸ Lodge, 'The African National Congress Comes Home', 18.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

structures in the Border region escalated their campaign against Gqozo. In doing so they challenged the national leadership, their assumed authority and their negotiating strategy at CODESA.

The campaign in the Border was crucial in shaping the national ANC position on the homelands by September 1992. While the NEC's approach towards the bantustans throughout 1990 and 1991 was ambivalent - even in March 1992, they continued to court Gqozo - the Border campaign pushed back against the more conciliatory politics of the executive. As time wore on, the campaign exposed the organisation's problematic approach to the TBVC states. After CODESA collapsed in May 1992, it was no longer expedient to temper the local campaign, or to address the TBVC as a bloc in order to hold together constitutional proposals: ANC negotiators at last realised that a more strategic path should be taken. Adopting the approach outlined by the UDF in its August 1990 conference, from late August 1992 the ANC leadership highlighted a distinction between 'sympathetic' and 'hostile' bantustan regimes.¹³⁰ While ANC leaders learned about the landscape of transitional politics and clarified their strategy through the negotiations at CODESA, it is evident that developments outside the negotiations were equally significant.

After two long years, the campaign against Gqozo in the Border was belatedly supported by national ANC politicians as they moved to develop an ill-defined mass action strategy. Amid widespread dissatisfaction with the course of negotiations, and their eventual collapse, the left among the leadership, now vindicated, identified an irresistible opportunity to renew their mandate to negotiate by visible association with a grassroots struggle. Only after the nationwide stayaway in August 1992, when it became unavoidably apparent to national leaders that the campaign in the Border presented some of the most militant and popular action in the country, did the leadership take the objectives of the local campaign in the Ciskei seriously: they adopted the campaign against Gqozo as a strategic stepping stone to topple the more powerful bantustan regimes of Bophuthatswana and KwaZulu and thereby to weaken the National Party. But unlike Kasrils' new national strategy for the mass action campaign, the impetus behind the September march extended far beyond the narrow circles of the SACP and was less caricatured than narratives of the so-called 'Leipzig option' suggested. The radical aims of the march were not simply derived from Eastern Europe, nor were they little considered as the criticisms later suggested. The September march was rooted in a longstanding local civic campaign inspired by the various ideologies and practices of 'people's power' developed in South Africa's mass movement: activists aspired to force the introduction of an interim administration, broadly representative of local political organisations, through a participatory People's Assembly. There was no suggestion that they believed they might overthrow the state entirely: local ambitions were focused on bringing about the necessary local change of interim administration in the Ciskei to enable democratic mobilisation and preparation for elections. Nevertheless, the ill-fated showdown planned for the 7th September became a theatre of national politics.

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¹³⁰ Sparks, *Tomorrow*, 147.

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