

Article

Borders of Dissent in South Africa: The Bushbuckridge Saga

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Introduction

South Africa's democratically constituted new regional dispensation has failed to foster 'spatial consensus'. While national 'spatial emancipation' has been achieved, the struggle for civil liberties continues at the local level. The struggle for the emancipation of local communities is evidenced by the numerous disputes declared by indigenous populations and interest groups over the constitution of the different regions. Since the reconstitution of the South African spatial matrix, there have been 14 such disputes over new regional boundaries, the most intense being in the Taung/Kuruman/Kudumane areas of the Northern Cape and North West provinces, the East Griqualand area presently in the Eastern Cape province, but contained within KwaZulu-Natal province, and the Bushbuckridge (BBR) area of the Northern Province. The importance of boundaries cannot be over-emphasised. They

... create the territorial spaces in which we live, distribute power to people who influence our lives, determine where we vote, create tax bases, construct regional identities, facilitate or impede easy transport, and determine access to public services. (Griggs 1997:2)

More specifically, the boundaries between the Northern Province and Mpumalanga which directly impact on the lives of the people of Bushbuckridge (BBR) are fraught with political and emotional tension. This is because people have attached certain meanings to these lines. These meanings have a geographical basis and have demanded attention because they impact directly on the material conditions of life of the people of BBR. The lines are viewed as exclusionary in that they exclude the people of BBR from benefits which they perceive they would otherwise be entitled to if the boundaries were moved.

This dispute in BBR is of interest primarily because of the tension it has generated at the local, regional and national levels around what is essentially a geographical question. It is all the more significant in that while the BBR issue is situated in the post-apartheid era, it represents an interplay between apartheid, geography and identity which has to be deconstructed if an acceptable solution is to be found.

BBR cannot be separated from its apartheid legacy as encapsulated in the process of 'bantustanisation' which was itself ridden with conflict. The nature of this conflict was quintessentially spatial in nature and was played out at two levels: (i) between and within establishment structures, and (ii) between establishment structures and the mass democratic movement. Thus, for example, BBR was an area over which a territorial struggle was waged between the Lebowa and Gazankulu bantustans. More specifically, the Lebowa government claimed land in BBR which fell under the control of Gazankulu (Walt 1982, Surplus Peoples Project 1983). In addition, struggles were waged between the bantustans and the provinces of the apartheid state, specifically between Lebowa and the Transvaal province (Surplus Peoples Project 1983). However, BBR has a history of broader mobilisation against state structures. In 1989 it was reported that the Lebowa police harassed community members protesting against the scarcity of water supplies (National Land Committee 1990). The people of Bushbuckridge were amongst the first to rebel against the bantustan system shortly after the unbanning of the liberation movement in the early 1990s.

The struggle over the material conditions of existence in the area has remained resonant in the post-apartheid dispensation. This struggle is encased within a complex of politics at local, regional and national levels. At the local level, the people of BBR have formally organised into the Bushbuckridge Border Crisis Committee (BBCC). In 1993, the Commission for the Delimitation/ Demarcation of Regions (CDDR), in revisiting the spatial matrix of South Africa, resolved to situate BBR in the former Northern Transvaal (now Northern Province) rather than in the former Eastern Transvaal (Mpumalanga province). This 'spatial decision' was not well received by the people of Bushbuckridge who engaged the state to revisit the decision and include them in Mpumalanga – hence, the formation of the BBCC. The BBCC has taken on the character of a social movement organisation, and has consistently opposed the central state's demarcation of Bushbuckridge.

This article aims to analyse the nature of the border dispute, particularly

the role of the BBCC in this regard, and will demonstrate that the dispute derives from historically-constituted material conditions of life in the area. The paper is divided into four sections. The theoretical context for the paper relating to the nature of social mobilisation is presented in the first section. Thereafter, the struggle in BBR is situated in an historical context. Post-apartheid regional delimitation is briefly discussed in the third while the role of the BBCC is assessed in the final section.

Recent Trends in Social Movements

Social mobilisation is arguably the single most important factor which has contributed to the realisation of a new democratic South African dispensation. Such mobilisation has occurred at the micro-local, the meso-regional, and macro-national levels with the primary demand being the inclusion of a disenfranchised majority in decision-making processes. Social mobilisation is still an issue even in the post-apartheid era with agendas which totally differ from that formulated against the apartheid state. Similarly, the theoretical frameworks which were used to understand the nature of social mobilisation under apartheid need to be modified in trying to understand the nature of social mobilisation in the new era.

There is a vast literature on social movements and social movement theory. As paradigmatic orientations in the social sciences have shifted, so too have the theoretical dimensions of social movement theory been redefined. Escobar and Alvarez (1992:3) summarize the orthodoxy in social movement theory cogently:

The old is characterised by analysis couched in terms of modernisation and dependency; by definitions of politics anchored in traditional actors who struggled for the control of the state, particularly the working class and revolutionary vanguards; and by a view of society as an entity composed of more or less immutable structures and class relations that only great changes (large-scale development schemes or revolutionary upheavals) could significantly alter. In contrast, the new theories see contemporary social movements as bringing about a fundamental transformation in the nature of political practice and theorizing itself. According to these theorists, an era that was characterised by the division of political space into two clearly demarcated camps (the bourgeoisie and the proletariat) is being left behind. In the new situation, a multiplicity of social actors establish their presence and spheres of autonomy in a fragmented social and political space. Society itself is largely shaped by the plurality of these struggles and the vision of those involved in the new social movements.

More recent social movement theory may be classified into two main categories: those referred to as resource-mobilization theory, which is primarily American inspired, and those referred to as the identity-oriented theory, influenced by European post-structuralist currents (Mayer 1995). The American resource-mobilization approach preceded the European identity or new social movements approach (Foweraker 1995). Those who subscribe to the resource-mobilization theory assume that social movements are based on the conflict model of collective action. Collective action is ubiquitous (Mayer 1995) with no fundamental difference between institutional and non-institutional action because conflicts of interest are built into institutionalised power relations. Collective action involves the rational pursuit of interests by groups (Shefner 1995, Cohen 1985). The formation of social movements cannot be explained in terms of the goals and grievances of the movement and are dismissed as explanatory variables by resource mobilisation theorists (Mayer 1995). The formation of social movements depends on changes in resources, dense social-network organization, and opportunities for collective action (Cohen 1985, Foweraker 1995). Social movements are likely to succeed by the recognition of the group as a political actor or by increased material benefits (Cohen 1985).

The resource-mobilization model focuses on the conflict between those who control scarce resources and those who mount a challenge to this control (Jennett and Stewart 1990). While the resource-mobilization and political-process paradigm privileges systemic and middle-level variables – such as political-opportunity space, ideological and organizational resources, mobilizational networks, leadership, and so on – in explaining the emergence and development of movements, they show scant regard for the discursive practices and political identities continually being articulated by social movements, missing the meanings and values intrinsic to popular political action (Escobar and Alvarez 1992, Shefner 1995).

The identity-oriented paradigm, which has been influenced by post-modernist and post-structuralist thought, examines social movements as collective identities and has facilitatory ramifications for progressive political action and transformation in two fundamental ways:

...[firstly], the widening of 'sociopolitical citizenship', linked to people's struggles for social recognition of their existence and for political spaces of expression, and secondly, the transformation or appropriation by the actors of the cultural field through their search for

a collective identity and the affirmation of their difference and their specificity. (Jelin in Escobar and Alvarez 1992:4)

Furthermore, social action is understood as the product of complex social processes in which structure and agency interact in manifold ways and in which actors produce meanings, negotiate and make decisions. Generally speaking, social movements are seen to be engaged in a significant 'political struggle in terms of access to the mechanisms of power but also [a] cultural[struggle] in the search for different identities' (Jelin in Escobar and Alvarez 1992:4). Significantly, the identity paradigm denotes a shift away from pedantic class analysis and functionalist Marxism (Shefner 1995, Slater 1997).

While this paper adheres to the identity-oriented approach, we believe that the BBR situation is unique in many ways and demands a theoretical response which is novel and adequately addresses the contingencies of a dispute in the post-apartheid era. The dispute in Bushbuckridge concerns the struggle of a community to access resources, to have their basic needs satisfied while at the same time waging a battle to determine their own geography, in terms of attaching meanings to lines which exist on a map. The meanings they attach to these lines are all the more significant because of the historical situation. South Africa is in a new democratic dispensation and it is important to the laity that decisions which are perceived to impact directly on their lives be infused with democratic content. It is here that the identity paradigm can make a contribution.

The Geography of Apartheid: the case of Bushbuckridge

BBR is made up of the Mhala district of the former Gazankulu bantustan and the Mapulaneng district of the former Lebowa bantustan. Prior to the establishment of the self-governing Lebowa and Gazankulu bantustans on October 20, 1972 and February 1, 1973 respectively, BBR was located in the Eastern Transvaal sub-province and was administered by the Graskop local authority. When the bantustans were proclaimed, demarcation was determined on the basis of ethnicity and language. Those who were Sepulani speakers were combined with the Pedis. They were then administered by the Lebowa bantustan, whose seat of government was located at Lebowa kgomo. The Shangaan component, who spoke the Tsonga language, were classified as citizens of the Gazankulu bantustan and administered from the bantustan capital at Giyani.

The grand apartheid schema, hatched by the National Party (NP) in the 1950s, impacted on the demographics of Bushbuckridge. From the 1960s,

it was reported that members of the Shangaan ethnic group were dumped in this area from white farms and plantations as well as from areas such as White River and Sabie, which had been proclaimed as white towns under the Group Areas Act of 1950 (Surplus Peoples Project 1983:177). BBR was therefore a resettlement area – the dumping ground of the ‘surplus people’ who were removed from so-called black spots:

People [were] moved to create nature reserves such as the Blyde River Canyon reserve; they have been moved for strategic reasons such as the community opposite Bourkes Luck Potholes where there is an army base; yet others have been moved in the deproclamation of townships such as Graskop which was deproclaimed in 1978 – 2000 people were moved from Graskop. (Surplus Peoples Project 1983:177)

With the proclamation of the bantustans in the early 1970s, the regime introduced the parameter of ethnic nationalism which had never existed before. Such politically-engineered spatial units destroyed communities and rendered indigenous populations as aliens in their places of birth. The apartheid state created and sharpened the ethnic and linguistic cleavages by spatial inscription. This new geography of apartheid was not accepted passively by the oppressed. They voiced their displeasure against the state’s unilateral geographical strategy. However, attempts at persuading the state to overturn its decision were met with brutality by the National Party government.

With the failure of the displaced people to convince the regime to abandon its grand apartheid strategy, and the opportunism of apartheid surrogates in the form of the bantustan governments, artificial ethnic nationalisms came to the fore. The example of BBR is a case in point. Prior to the proclamation of Lebowa and Gazankulu, ethnicity played a very minor role in the social life of the resettled people of BBR. However, after the proclamation of these bantustans, BBR became the centre of a spate of border conflicts between the two bantustans, with Lebowa claiming land in BBR which fell under the control of Gazankulu (Walt 1982). As the Surplus People’s Project Report noted, ‘BBR has been integrally mixed for years. People have intermarried, settled, been moved together, and are now having to sort out ethnic differences’ (1983:177).

In addition to being the object of a tug o’ war between the two bantustans, there was also a groundswell of discontent regarding material conditions in BBR. In the 1980s, the Surplus Peoples Project (1983:180) reported that in BBR ‘there were no taps, and people had to walk more than a kilometre to get water. Few people had latrines... Cholera is endemic in the rainy season.

Furthermore, boreholes are a common supply of water'. BBR was, under apartheid, a bantustan enclave in the midst of a region in which tourism, commercial farming and game reserves were flourishing (Addison 1997:99).

In the late 1990s, the material conditions in BBR remain unchanged. BBR has a population of about one million people which is increasing by 2.5 per cent annually. Forty-four per cent of the population is under 15 years old. The area is densely populated, with between 186 to 225 people per square kilometre (Baumann 1998:325). Its economic role remains primarily that of 'an apartheid-era labour reservoir' (Baumann 1998:325).

The unemployment rate in the area stands between 50-60 per cent, with most being in the 25-34 age group. Average household income per month is R630, way below the mean living level (MLL) of R970. The main source of income is from migrant workers, with 70 per cent of economically active males working outside the area, largely in Mpumalanga province. Such workers, therefore, contribute in effect to the economic upliftment of Mpumalanga rather than the Northern Province. The people of BBR also spend their money at the major consumer centre in Nelspruit, in Mpumalanga province, rather than in Pietersburg, in the Northern Province. Nelspruit is, in terms of geography and accessibility, closer than Pietersburg.

Further evidence of the material conditions in BBR is highlighted by the fact that in 1996 there were 335 schools, catering for a student population of 196,727, with a pupil-classroom ratio of 54:1 in the Mhala district and 58:1 in the Mapulaneng district. The BBR area is also extremely under-resourced in terms of other basic services. There is no hospital (the nearest hospital is 85km away), only one clinic which is open from 8am to 4pm, and two police stations which cater for a population of approximately one million people. The area lacks electricity, has an inadequate water supply, and its roads are poor. The Northern Province administration has provided no additional facilities and little or no upgrading has taken place in the BBR area.

Residents of BBR believe that the Northern Province is too poor to provide for their development. The Northern Province is the poorest region in the country, with an average per capita income of R725. Forty eight per cent of the population were unemployed in 1996, while forty per cent of households had no source of regular income. The infant mortality rate in the province, 57 per 1000 births, is extremely high. The province also has the lowest literacy rate and the fastest population growth rate in the country (Levin 1996:362).

BBR residents maintain that the development needs of the area would be better addressed if it were to become part of Mpumalanga. Its economic growth rate over the past decade has been 4.4 per cent, compared to the national average of 1 per cent. It is the fourth-richest province in South Africa with an average per capita income of R5932 (Newham 1996:21-2).

When democratic governance became a fait accompli in 1994, BBR did not appear on either the development agenda of the Northern Province or Mpumalanga. This was because the Northern Province had expected BBR to be transferred to Mpumalanga, while the latter was reluctant to include the area in its development plans before a formal transfer was effected. This meant that services in the area came to a virtual standstill. This state of affairs existed until 1997, with the BBR not being included in the budgets of either province. It is little wonder therefore that the people have been so vociferous at their marginalisation.

While the people of BBR languish in a spiral of underdevelopment, the white component of the area, Hoedspruit, continues to reap the fruits of a democratic dispensation in the form of increased tourism and development. For example, the number of game lodges in the area has increased from 25 to more than 80 within the past two years (Addison 1997). Significantly, Hoedspruit is not lobbying to be included in Mpumalanga and is content to be part of the Northern Province. The town continues to prosper in a post-apartheid dispensation. Vast sums of corporate capital are being pumped into the area to take advantage of the huge demand for the 'African-safari' experience and more land is being enclosed by electric fences and communities are being shut out. It is a case of history repeating itself:

The capitalisation of land continues a process begun many years ago. When white miners and farmers moved into the area over a century back, indigenous people were impelled into wage labour and became habitual migrants working in mines and cities far away. The development of the Kruger Park accelerated this process, then came the forced resettlement of blacks into overcrowded homelands. Today the poor of this area are seeing more land enclosed once again for animals. (Addison 1997:106)

The irony is that tourism, which is the lifeblood of the economy here, has suffered directly as a result of the border dispute. Hotels in the nearby Hazyview area have reported minimal occupancy rates (*Beeld* June 30, 1997), reducing potential employment opportunities for the unemployed.

Post-apartheid Regional Decimation

In the early 1990s, with the demise of the apartheid state, the unbanning of the liberation movement and the dawning of a new era, the people of BBR were optimistic that they would finally be able to determine their own geography. During the drafting of the Interim Constitution, a Commission for the Delimitation/Demarcation of Regions (CDDR) was appointed to address the issue of bantustan boundaries and the reconfiguring of regions in South Africa. Submissions were invited from all interested parties. The people of Bushbuckridge argued for inclusion in the Eastern Transvaal province (now called Mpumalanga).

The CDDR proposed a nine-region dispensation to replace the four provinces and the myriad of bantustans. When the CDDR demarcated the borders of Northern Province and Mpumalanga, it separated BBR from the white commercial farming and game ranching areas of Mpumalanga. The border looped southward, following the old homeland borders (Addison 1997:101). This spatial inscription left the chasm between rich and poor unadjusted. It could not, however, reach consensus on all boundaries and referred certain disputed areas to the Negotiating Council for a final decision. These included BBR which was included in a list of affected areas which formed part of Schedule 1 of the Interim Constitution.

In terms of the Interim Constitution, a referendum could be held to determine the views of the residents in a disputed area. To that end it stipulated that a petition had to be lodged with the Secretary of Parliament and that within three months of this the referendum had to be held. It also stipulated that any such petition had to be lodged within six months of the commencement of the Interim Constitution. In May 1994, a Referendum Facilitation Committee (RFC) was formed in BBR. It was expected that the referendum would be conducted under the auspices of the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC). However, when the necessary procedures regarding the referendum were implemented, the people of BBR were once again met with resistance. The premiers of the Northern and Mpumalanga provinces came to Bushbuckridge and came out against a referendum on the grounds that it was a purely political issue and thus could be solved via political mechanisms, would cause instability and be too costly.

In an attempt to resolve the dispute, meetings were conducted with representatives of the people of BBR and the premiers of both provinces accompanied by their Executive Committee members (MECs). It was at one such meeting that it was agreed that no referendum would be held. It

was also agreed that ANC structures in BBR would be consulted to decide on the border issue. These subsequently met and ratified the common consensus of including Bushbuckridge in Mpumalanga (Bushbuckridge Border Crisis Committee 1997). This decision was accompanied by eloquent enunciations of the right of the people to determine their own destiny. A document to that effect was adopted and signed by the provincial authorities at the Mapulaneng College of Education. This, however, was not the end of the saga.

In 1997 when President Mandela signed the Final Constitution Act 108 of 1996, no provision was made for border changes. The absence of enabling legislation to facilitate boundary changes meant that the claims of the people of BBR had no constitutional basis. A new era of struggle thus began for the people of BBR.

The Role of the Bushbuckridge Border Crisis Committee

On 20 April 1997, when it became apparent that their demands were not being addressed constructively, the residents formed the Bushbuckridge Border Crisis Committee (BBCC) to engage the state. It was formed as a proactive body to engage the state in purposeful dialogue with the primary objective of excising BBR from Northern Province and incorporating it into Mpumalanga. Its membership consists of local blue-collar workers, teachers and businessmen. Its leadership is largely middle-class. According to Prince Ndlovu, a teacher and spokesperson for the BBCC, the objectives of the organisation are:

To primarily facilitate the incorporation of Bushbuckridge into Mpumalanga; to unite the people of Bushbuckridge; and to be the sole mouthpiece of the people on the border issue. Furthermore, the BBCC intended to enter into agreement and form alliances with other interested parties to galvanise support for its cause. (Interview, December 1997)

Although there have been such calls from some quarters, the BBCC is not motivating for a separate regional entity. Recently, however, after the loss of its court battle with the state, there were isolated calls for the declaration of a 'People's Republic of Bushbuckridge'.

The BBCC is conceptualised by its members as providing an alternative to the geographical identity imposed by the state, one couched in a communal construction/determination of the region of which the people of BBR want to be a part. In so doing, the people of BBR – through the surrogate of the BBCC – are attempting to impose their meanings of territoriality. In such a way the map engineered by a panel of experts is

being infused with local democratic content. The apartheid state never allowed black people to engineer space in this way.

The key question, however, is what are the meanings of territoriality that the people of BBR want the state to acknowledge? Under the bantustan administration, Lebowa was viewed as efficient in the provision of services in the area while Gazankulu was seen as corrupt and inefficient. The inability of the Northern Province to provide services reflects the apartheid experience and thus the desire to be part of a region that provides efficient services. Escobar (1992:69) has emphasized that social movements must be seen equally and inseparably as struggles over meanings as well as material conditions, that is, as cultural struggles. The discontent of the people of BBR has a material basis. The perceived failure of the Northern Province administration to address the material conditions of the people of BBR has led to them to seek an alternative means of addressing their needs – incorporation into Mpumalanga province. There is thus amongst the BBR a perception that not only will their material conditions be addressed, but also that the community will prosper under the growth regime of Mpumalanga.

Mpumalanga has enormous growth potential with the Maputo Development Corridor running through the province. Mpumalanga province will be a primary beneficiary of this project. The inclusion of BBR in the province will ensure that some of the corridor's development benefits will accrue to the area. Hence, an implicit objective of the BBCC is that Bushbuckridge be included in the accumulation regime of Mpumalanga province.

The claim of the BBCC is also based on ethics; they were promised by the premiers of the Northern and Mpumalanga provinces that their wishes would be honoured. Furthermore, it is viewed as morally just to honour the wishes of a community who were brutalised under an apartheid geography. Indeed, it is the promises which were made to the people of BBR that formed the basis of a court battle between the BBCC and the state. The BBCC had been threatening since 1997 to take the state to court. However, this did not materialise until October 1998, when the case came before the High Court in Pretoria. The decision to resort to the courts was prompted by two factors. One was the lack of progress towards an acceptable solution to the dispute while the second related to questions being raised by the community concerning the effectiveness of the BBCC and its leadership to manage funds which were collected from the community for the express purpose of taking the state to court.

The BBCC embodies the community of BBR. The defeat of the BBCC, therefore, meant that the community of BBR had suffered a setback in having their spatial identity acknowledged by the state. One of the problems arising out of this conflation of the identities of the BBR and the BBCC has been that those who are members of the BBCC as well as the African National Congress (ANC) were instructed in 1998 by the ANC to step down from representing the interests of the Crisis Committee (*City Press*, April 26, 1998). This is primarily because in identifying and leading the struggle of the people of BBR for incorporation in Mpumalanga, the BBCC has identified the ANC-led government – in its national and regional forms – as its adversary. According to Touraine, such reconstitutions within social movements are not uncommon. Rather, he argues that:

...social movements are always defined by a social *conflict*, that is, by clearly defined *opponents*. Actors often live their own actions first of all as a rupture with predominant cultural values or institutional roles. (1985:772)

Historically, the ANC which has a virtual monopoly on power in the region, has never favoured a regional dispensation. The policy inclination of the ANC has been that of a unitary state. However, changing political dynamics at the local level demanded that the ANC espouse a regional or pseudo-regional policy in the run-up to the first democratic elections of South Africa in 1994. The ANC government, therefore, has reluctantly espoused a regional policy and it is understandable that their response to the revision of regional boundaries has been guarded. The ANC-led government has, however, been caught between its own ideology and the realities of existing legislation and agreements, as well as the political contestation between its own officials.

State Responses to the BBCC

On August 31, 1995, the provincial legislature of the Northern Province passed a motion that BBR be included in Mpumalanga and secondly, that Groblersdal be included in Northern Province. On May 18, 1995, the provincial legislature of Mpumalanga resolved that BBR be included in Mpumalanga. Two days later it approved the transfer of Groblersdal to the Northern Province. The legislatures of the two provinces were thus in agreement, which was one of the requirements of the Interim Constitution. It was therefore possible to proceed with the next step in the process, namely, to effect an amendment to the Interim Constitution. In July 1996, the then Minister of Provincial Affairs and Constitutional Development,

Valli Moosa, submitted an enabling Bill to Cabinet. It read:

To amend the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1993, so as to effect certain amendments to the boundaries of the Northern Province and of the Province of Mpumalanga; and to provide for matters connected therewith. (Republic of South Africa 1996b:1)

The Bill was approved by Cabinet and then tabled in parliament. It was not, however, debated in the parliamentary portfolio committee, and was held over to be debated in the first session of parliament in 1997. Meanwhile, the interim constitution had been succeeded by the final constitution that made no provision for boundaries to be changed. It subsequently emerged that the Minister did not push the Bill through the parliamentary portfolio committee because he was sure that he would not be able to rally the two-thirds support needed to facilitate the transfer, even though the National Party and the Pan Africanist Congress supported the inclusion of BBR into Mpumalanga.

There was also conflict within the ANC caucus itself, specifically between representatives of the Northern Province and Mpumalanga. The conflict was highlighted by what many subsequently saw as a last-ditch attempt by Mpumalanga Premier Matthews Phosa to get the Senate to rule on the issue. In his address to the Senate, Phosa argued that:

...the issue of the finalisation of border disputes, and specifically the areas in question on the border of Mpumalanga and the Northern Province, needs to be addressed. We can no longer starve these communities of good governance and services. (cited in Hansard August 22, 1996:2807)

The failure to resolve the border conflict can be traced to the political manoeuvring which took place between the provincial legislatures of Northern Province and Mpumalanga. The attempt at a political solution, removed from the ambit of civil society, complicated what should have been a straightforward transfer of BBR from the Northern to Mpumalanga province. After an agreement had been signed to effect the transfer in 1995, negotiations took place behind closed doors, where it was decided that the transfer of BBR be linked to a transfer of Groblersdal and Marble Hall from Mpumalanga province to the Northern Province.

When the community of Groblersdal became aware of such a move, they dismissed the decision, arguing that they were content to remain in Mpumalanga. According to the Report of the Select Committee on Liaison with Provinces (SCOLP), the biggest meeting that it attended in Mpumalanga was at Groblersdal, where the community were adamant that they wanted

to remain part of Mpumalanga, and submitted six memoranda to the committee to support their position. Furthermore, the community at Groblersdal formed the Eastern Transvaal Joint Forum Alliance, which motivated aggressively against inclusion into the Northern Province.

Groblersdal, which under the apartheid regime was designated as a white town, was controlled by the National Party, which was opposed to its excision from Mpumalanga. The Northern Province, however, lobbied support and eventually persuaded the legislature of Mpumalanga to pass a resolution classifying Groblersdal as part of Northern Province (*The Star*, May 8, 1997).

The intransigence on the part of the two ANC-controlled provinces eventually led to the issue being referred to the National Working Committee (NWC) of the organisation. In May 1997, the ANC's NWC decided that BBR would remain in the Northern Province. This did not settle the dispute. The BBCC met with President Nelson Mandela on June 10, 1997 and unsuccessfully appealed to him to reverse the decision of the NWC (*Beeld*, June 11, 1997). As the issue remained unresolved, a task team consisting of all role players was constituted to revisit the issue.

The events outlined above reveal that there were two different agendas relating to the incorporation of BBR into Mpumalanga. The agenda of the people of BBR was simply for the material conditions of their existence to be uplifted. However, at the regional governmental level, it was the politicking between the Northern Province and Mpumalanga which was the primary reason for the lack of progress on the issue with some members of both legislatures fearing they would lose their positions if the transfer went through. As a means of entrenching their positions, some members of the legislatures opposed the BBCC.

The national government has sought to retain the present dispensation primarily in the cause of party unity. It has tried to quell the political infighting but, in so doing, has ignored the claims of the BBR community. In an attempt to prevent fractures within the party in the region, it has also given an ultimatum to ANC members serving on the BBCC to step down from it or leave the party. Finding itself in a catch 22 situation, government has basically resorted to a constitutional position, namely that the boundaries as agreed upon prior to the Final Constitution remain extant. In so doing, it has also tried to ensure that other communities in the region do not motivate for border changes.

Although the government may have been caught in a no-win situation, it does not detract from its incomplete understanding of the role of boundaries, nor its disregard for the oppression that people experienced under apartheid. The right of local people to jettison the baggage of apartheid and to fashion for themselves their own spacial destiny has been denied. The government has discounted the role of identity formation and social difference, and most importantly, the geographical basis of identity formation. Instead the government has, for its own advantage, ensured that regional political relations remained uncompromised, but by disregarding the claims of the people of Bushbuckridge.

In October 1998, the BBCC took the state to the High Court. It had decided to petition the courts to instruct parliament to support a motion to include BBR in Mpumalanga. The reason for this move was that the only way to change provincial boundaries was by a two-thirds majority parliamentary vote in favour of such a change. The move failed when the judge ruled it could not dictate what is essentially the prerogative of the parliament. Furthermore, because the political promise had not translated into an administrative decision, the court could not rule in favour of the BBCC.

What does the story of the BBCC tell us about localised social movements? It would seem that the success of localised movements is highly dependent on the nature of the devolution of state power. While provincial governments in South Africa are awarded certain powers, they are ultimately subject to national legislation and decision making. Consequently, localised social movements are perhaps most successful when state power itself is localised. Such movements, as the case of the BBCC illustrates, may also be disadvantaged through limited access to financial and other resources.

Does this mean that the BBCC has no real import? We would argue that the BBCC is an important social movement organisation given its capacity to represent local needs, which perhaps, given adequate financial resources and greater networking capacity, could achieve its stated goals. In November 1998 at a report-back meeting to the residents of Bushbuckridge, the BBCC was given a renewed mandate to explore other avenues to get the state to change the boundaries; indeed, the community called for an intensification of the struggle. The legitimacy of the movement therefore, has not been open to question and it continues as an advocate of the community on the issue of the boundary change.

Conclusion

Boundary disputes are neither unique to, nor a consequence of, the new democratic South African dispensation. The apartheid state's paranoid pursuit of race purity and spatial regimentation of South Africa resulted in people of colour being brutally uprooted and their land unceremoniously appropriated. The creation of these artificial spatial entities resulted in the formation of new townships and the redefinition of magisterial districts. The magisterial districts were the spatial premise of the apartheid state's four provinces and the nine 'development regions' of the 1980s. When the new nine region dispensation for South Africa was proposed, some observers warned that hastily planned regions could well be a recipe for disastrous and violent fission along ethnic, racial or party political lines.

The BBR saga illustrates that the struggle for political liberation is not congruent with the struggle for 'spatial liberation', particularly at the local or regional level. The refusal of the state to revisit the issue of boundaries is a clear indication of its intention to freeze spatial meanings and to impose its own conception of space. In the process, it has marginalised and repressed voices at variance with its national view. In effect, the struggle of the people of BBR has been a struggle to have their meanings of territoriality and boundaries accommodated by the state. These struggles, however, are always subject to more centralised state intentions, as well as existing legislation and institutional power struggles.

The process of region demarcation has erased the 'grand apartheid' schema of bantustan balkanisation. However, the spatial inscription which prescribes the separation of areas of abject poverty from areas of affluence persists. It has been the contention of this paper that the struggle of the people of BBR is rooted in the material conditions of their existence. It is apparent that service provision in the area is highly inefficient and in many ways not different from their experience under apartheid. The material basis of poverty thus remains uncompromised. The promise of the ANC had created a sense of expectancy which was misplaced by the subsequent marginalisation of the community of BBR. The struggle of the people of BBR is to re-define provincial borders so that their material conditions could be addressed.

The BBCC has been the conduit through which the demands of the BBR community for development and the upliftment of material conditions have been expressed. The community construe the alteration of boundaries as central to these issues. The BBCC has engaged the state at the national and

regional levels in order to have the boundary change effected. In effect, it is an attempt to devolve democratic decision making to the regional or local level, ie it is a call for the restructuring of relations between the national state, the regional and the local levels. While the BBCC has largely failed in its primary objective, it has won some significant concessions from the state. Perhaps the most significant is the proposed provision of services across regional boundaries.

The BBCC also called for constitutional reform. At present, the constitution makes no provision for the change of boundaries. There is a need for legislation to be introduced which will enable communities, particularly those brutalised under apartheid, to determine their own geography. There is also a need for a body to be set up to address the grievances of communities regarding border disputes, rather than the ad hoc commissions of enquiry at present. This would have the effect of broadening the scope of democratic participation.

In the struggle for 'spatial justice', the action of the people of BBR is a challenge to the authority of the state. A challenge to the authority of the state is at the same time a challenge to the way space is produced. As Pile and Keith assert:

...authority produces space through, for example, cutting it up, differentiating between parcels of space, the use and abuse of borders and markers, the production of scales (from the body, through the region and the nation, to the globe), the control of movement within and across different boundaries. (1997:3)

In challenging the authority of the state as the sole determinant of spatial production, the people of Bushbuckridge have posed important questions about the process itself. In effect, the entire process of regional demarcation has been brought into question. The initial process of regional demarcation has been shown to be a product of political expediency rather than democratic consultation. Communal dissent is a product of the marginalisation of the polity and indicative of the artificiality of the process. It is imperative that the state take cognisance of the discontent at the grassroots, revisit regional demarcation and institute constitutional reform.

The apartheid experience was defined by authority, patronage and exclusion. The aim of the post-apartheid state should be 'the creation of bases for the construction of a new civil society, in which the majority, through its own autonomous social and political organization, is able to

exercise decisive influence over the state' (Slater 1986:165). However, this reality has not been extended to the people of BBR.

Social movements have been indispensable to the democratic project in South Africa. In the post-apartheid era, social movements such as the BBCC are of vital import in the democratization of the state, the broadening and deepening of civil society and the creation of institutions which facilitate and enhance democratic participation.

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