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INTRODUCTION

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This book comes out at a critical moment in Botswana's history. The quest for fair representation, which is the context within which it is set, is at the core of the currently raging debate on minorities. So powerful and widespread is the discontent about representation that the Government has commissioned a review of the Botswana Constitution, the aim being to establish whether or not there are inequities in it, which could be disadvantaging some sections of Botswana. In response to the debate, the book has addressed various themes and questions surrounding minorities in Botswana. Naturally, some themes, as well as issues, have received greater attention than others. For example, a number of writers have focused on various aspects of the plight of Basarwa, although Basarwa, who are indisputably the most marginalised and clearly the most disadvantaged ethnic group, are not the major players in the move towards the review of the Constitution.

Except for Ramahobo who makes reference to Bennett's work, contributors to this book make their individual presentations without necessarily cross referencing their material. That tends to make each chapter discrete, and unrelated to others. The end result is that there is some discontinuity whereby issues raised by some authors do not benefit from related discussions in the works of other authors.

An attempt has been made to arrange the material of this book in some kind of sequence. The chapter by Bennett, which raises a number of key aspects of the minorities, was presented before others because it sets the tone for the book and its scope quite succinctly. First, the chapter begins by providing an historical account of the settlement of different tribes and ethnic groups in Botswana, from precolonial times to the time the country gained its independence. The account puts in relief the power differences of the various tribal groups. Such differences proved critical in the socio-economic configuration, which ended up with a layer that left some tribal groups at the helm, whether or not they were a numerical majority *vis-à-vis* the less powerful, their subjects within their territories. More importantly, Bennett's account shows that territorial and national boundaries were drawn by the colonial government; they did not exist during the precolonial period. If the creation of boundaries served the interests of the colonial government, it resulted in a number of problems for local populations. For instance, when drawing cross national frontiers, a tribe could be split into two, one portion falling inside one country, and the other portion residing in the neighbouring country.

Inside the territorial boundaries, populations consisted of more than one tribe, the major tribe and the minority tribe or tribes, all of them coming under the rule of one paramount chief. Although Bennett adduces evidence that there was disaffection with that arrangement, there is no indication that the system was uncontrollable. The case of the Kalanga under John Nswazwi as well as that of the Ovaherero under Maherero is clear evidence that chiefs usually received the support of the colonial administration to suppress rebellion from dissident tribes and individuals. The point that other contributors in the book take issue with is that the postcolonial government has inherited these boundaries and arrangements of chiefly governance without challenging them, even in the face of their glaring shortcomings.

Another important issue raised by Bennett is how the subjugated tribes such as the Bakgalagari and the Basarwa were dispossessed of their wealth by the more powerful Bantu tribes who settled in Botswana long after them. For the Basarwa, in particular, Bennett's account is instructive in demonstrating how what began as a complimentary relationship ended with Basarwa being clearly inferior to the Bantu tribal groupings. Further investigation of this issue might lead to greater understanding of

the continued marginalization of Basarwa in the face of current vigorous attempts to economically improve their lot.

However, the strongest contribution from Bennett's chapter is perhaps his incisive interrogation of the term 'tribe'. Bennett goes to great lengths in his analysis of the different uses of the word 'tribe'. His analysis lays a firm foundation, as well as a theoretical point of entry into the general debate on minorities. It also proves helpful in the interpretation of Sections 77 and 78 of Botswana's Constitution, a subject that is currently being hotly debated across the nation. Bennett points out that the term can refer either to a multi-ethnic political unit, or to an ethnic identity. Thus, the 'major tribes' of the Constitution were originally understood to be territorial political units, not ethnicities. His conclusion that 'the Constitution does not *formally* recognize any ethnicities' is not intended to deny the reality of the problem; rather it is a call for the clarification of issues. Bennett suggests that Botswana's debate has been hampered both by the legacy of confused colonial thinking on 'tribes' and by a failure to allow for the great changes in the nature of chiefship since Independence. The debate, he suggests, needs to escape from the confused colonial framework in which it has been conducted, and base itself instead on a more historically-informed understanding of Botswana's complex and changing structures. In particular he questions the idea of single, mutually-exclusive 'tribal' identities.

The chapter by Ramahobo engages some of the issues raised by Bennett, although its own main focus is on a different aspect of the minority. Ramahobo's overriding concern is the subjugation of one ethnic group by another. Using her own tribe, Wayeyi, as an example, she questions what she sees as a misnomer in the conventional understanding of the concept of minority. Ramahobo posits that in a number of Botswana's districts, the so-called major tribes, namely those whose cultures are the only ones recognised throughout the district, are actually a numerical minority. On the strength of that fact, she calls for a re-definition of terms of relationships between the so called minority groups and the majority groups within districts. She further questions why protest by the minority groups is regarded as tribalism while it is tolerated if it is from members of major groups.

It is my view that Ramahobo's concerns are genuine. Actually, the problems she confronts are an outcome of the way the colonial government defined territories through the boundaries they drew for each 'major tribe'. Until currently, when the Government set up a commission to look into the complaints arising from the implementation of Sections 77 to 79 of the Botswana Constitution, nothing has been done to deal with the deficiencies in the political definition of the 'tribe', a definition that is used by the state. It is these deficiencies that Ramahobo brings to the fore.

The failure of the postcolonial government to appreciate the inadequacies of representation under the political definition of 'tribe' has allowed for the drawing of a Constitution in which certain officers simultaneously play multiple roles, some roles being at a local level while others are at a national level. This is the case of the position of the Vice President, who in terms of the Constitution has to be an elected Member of Parliament serving at the level of a constituency, which is a local level position, at the same time as serving as Vice President, clearly a national level position. In the course of questioning the outcomes of the Constitution, Ramahobo seems to dissociate the actions of the incumbents from the fact that the contradiction in their roles is itself institutionalised, and cannot as such be attributed solely to the incumbents. A typical example is her discussion pertaining to Botswana's current Vice President. The contradiction arises because by focusing on the development affairs of his constituency, the incumbent might be considered by some to be sectionally biased, their argument being that as Vice President he is expected to look after the affairs of the entire nation. To me, it seems as if the contradiction is inherent in the Constitution that has allowed such a situation to exist; I do not see it in any way

reflecting sectionalism on the part of the incumbent.

Equally, I do not see any inconsistency between, on the one hand, the statement reportedly made by the Vice President in Etsha, where he warned his audience against joining organizations formed along tribal lines, and on the other hand, the philosophy behind his own development trust in his constituency. There has been no indication that the development trust is exclusively for one ethnic group. In the absence of that indication, it is fair to assume that the trust exists for all members of the constituency in which it is located, in spite of their ethnicities. If that is the case, then we cannot conclude, as Ramahobo seems to do, that the trust is formed along tribal lines just because it is located within a tribal reserve. Botswana has cultural organizations which are formed along tribal or ethnic lines. It can be argued that most likely, the Vice President was referring to those.

Another interesting case in Ramahobo's chapter relates to what is reported to have been said by the current President, while he was still Vice President, namely that all people living in the Central District should consider themselves to be Bangwato. Given that the statement was made in an attempt to diffuse tension between the Kalanga and the Ngwato, following the imposition of Ngwato headmen on the Kalanga, one appreciates Ramahobo's unhappiness with the statement made by the Vice President of the time. I agree that the move by the state enforces Ngwato hegemony over other tribes living in the Central District. This case depicts the shortcoming of the political version of the term 'tribe', which is the version used by the state, hence the Vice President was applying it at this point in time. According to it, all residents of the Central District are considered as Bangwato politically, and for administrative purposes, though they may not necessarily be Ngwato in terms of ethnicity. But what is evident here is that the Kalanga were losing out culturally, as a Ngwato headman would not be a symbol of their culture. It is for this reason that Ramahobo is justified in calling for a recognition and representation of all tribes in all structures of the communities within which they live. Indeed, such a call for an equitable representation of all groups is timely and would go a long way in cementing unity through diversity within the complicated society that has been evolving in Botswana since the country gained independence, thirty five years back.

The situation of the Kalanga and the Ovaherero in the chapter by Kirsten Alnaes introduces a variation in the theme. The Ovaherero are a migrant group which settled in the land of Tawana without necessarily wishing to be an integral part of the rest of the community. Actually, they prefer to remain away from the main village and outside Batawana chiefly authority in order that they can tend their cattle and practice their traditions. Unlike the Wayeyi who are fighting for equality with Batawana, the struggle of the Ovaherero is about maintaining their lifestyle separately from the lifestyle of Batawana. When their demands are not met, they threaten to return to Namibia, where they came from.

Thus while the Wayeyi and the Ovaherero are both minority groups, the two groups are different in that the Wayeyi consider themselves to be an integral part of the society, whereas the Ovaherero regard themselves more as migrants who may be there temporarily. This difference is quite important in that it shows the basis for the dissimilarity in the type of demands made by each of the two minority groups on the Batawana. Yet, the advice from Kgosi Tshakedi, regent of the Bangwato, on how Kgosi Letsholathebe Moremi should resolve the intransigence of the Ovaherero merely confirms that chiefs from the ruling Tswana tribes wanted to bring all tribes living in their territories under their control; and also that the framework within which Britain operated as the colonising power, always forced her to support the chiefs in these efforts.

The current relational difficulties between different tribes living in the same district can be traced back to this approach of the Tswana paramount chiefs, which was to subjugate all tribes within a chief's

territory. The Tswana chiefs, operating within a political model of indirect rule designed by the British for their convenience, were more concerned with what Bennett terms the political dimension of the tribe, *vis-à-vis* the ethnicity dimension.

A key question which should have been pursued by scholars is how resources, especially grazing land, interfaced with each of the two definitions of tribe. This question becomes critical when one considers that at the root of the ethnicity problem lies the two closely related and indeed inseparable issues of distribution of resources and representation. Practically, the OvaHerero resented settling in large villages because of a desire to gain control of grazing. Apparently, it was also for reasons of access to pastures that the Kalanga in the north east lived in small settlements. However, the Kalanga are a different type of minority in that while they press for equal treatment with the rest of Batswana, on the other hand the Tswana perceive them as a threat because there is a conspicuously powerful Kalangan elite with strong economic muscle, some of them in influential public positions. The basis for the Tswana to fear the Kalanga has so far not been established; it all remains a matter of speculation. Notwithstanding all that, it is not in all respects that the Kalanga can be compared to the rest of the minorities, even though there may be common issues of contention between them and other minorities, such as the lack of adequate representation.

Finally, the rest of the chapters have addressed problems associated with one ethnic group, Basarwa. The problems Basarwa face generally mirror those faced by the other so called minorities, except that the situation is more complex in the case of Basarwa. While in general minority groups are struggling to have their children use mother tongue in the first years of primary school, Basarwa have many languages, which are not mutually intelligible. There are extremely few qualified Basarwa teachers to teach Basarwa children in their mother tongue, while qualified teachers are not an issue among other minority groups. Self determination among Basarwa is made difficult by the fact that they are scattered all over the country, such that they would need to be grouped in one place in order for them to exercise self rule. Efforts to group Basarwa in one settlement have so far failed for various reasons, including language differences, their tradition of running their affairs without chiefs as well as resentment by one Basarwa tribe of a chief elected from a different Basarwa tribe.

Basarwa are the most despised of all ethnic minorities. Their cry for land and other resources, including representation in the House of Chiefs, is more acute than is the case in any one of the other minority groups. The world has heard the voice of Basarwa mainly because local and international non-governmental organizations, as well as some foreign governments, have for many years spear-headed efforts to bring these people to the same level as other Batswana, as Boko asserts. However, an important point which has not been raised in the book is that of late, Basarwa take a lot of pride in their ethnicity, and wish to be regarded as Basarwa. The real reason for this is not known but there is a tendency to link it with the growing sympathy and support for Basarwa by the international community. The point, however, is that it enhances the general call for recognition of minorities and their rights, especially representation.

There is no doubt that this book has advanced our understanding of the plight of minority groups in Botswana, from the colonial period to the present. Nevertheless, the fact that there are still questions to be asked about issues raised in it suggests that it represents unfinished work. The society is still evolving and each stage brings new opportunities and challenges which require appropriate modifications in the rules and regulations of governance. Notwithstanding that, this book has in it more than enough debate and information which should be of assistance in addressing current discomfort with Sections 77 to 79 of the Botswana Constitution, as expressed by members of certain minority groups.

SOME HISTORICAL BACKGROUND ON MINORITIES IN BOTSWANA

Bruce S. Bennett*

MULTI-ETHNIC SOCIETIES

As studies of the history of minorities in Botswana by UB research students have repeatedly found, the main context in Botswana in the modern period has been the pattern of incorporation within multi-ethnic societies. George Manase's study of the OvaHerero¹ showed how a cattle-oriented people, arriving as destitute refugees, were able to establish a position of some prosperity in a Tswana-ruled society. On the other hand, Phaniel Richard's study of Basarwa in the Kgatlang showed how an initial complementary relationship developed into subordination.² The outcomes are different, but in each case the development took place in the context of an over-arching multi-ethnic society rather than between independent groups.

The territory taken over by Britain as the Bechuanaland Protectorate consisted principally of a cluster of Tswana-ruled *merafe* (kingdoms or proto-states). These were in most cases multi-ethnic kingdoms, though two (the Ngwato and Tawana states) were much more varied in composition than the others. In them, a variety of groups were incorporated in a complex hierarchy. The ruling elite was in each case Tswana,³ with the partial exception of the BaLete where the ruling elite was of Ndebele origin, but long since assimilated to Tswana language and culture.⁴ The population however included Tswana (both of the chiefly clan and of other lineages) and other groups who generally had an inferior status. The exact status of non-Tswana groups varied, but it has been suggested that the main categories were commoners (such as Kalanga), foreigners (such as OvaHerero) and serfs (such as Basarwa and many BaKhalagari). Historically, groups have sometimes moved from one category to another. To exercise rights, it was necessary to be a member (as opposed to a subject) of a *morafe*, which usually meant being a member of a recognized ward. This excluded the great majority of Basarwa.⁵ To the south-east, Tswana predominated, but in the north-west a small minority of Batawana ruled over a diverse non-Tswana majority.

The origins of this situation are the subject of some debate. The basic pattern of settlement in Botswana is broadly agreed: Khoesans being the earliest inhabitants, Bantu-speakers arriving later. The main Tswana ruling groups of BaKwena, BaNgwaketse and BaNgwato seem to have established themselves in Botswana in the 18th century, though Sotho-Tswana speaking people had already been present for a long time before this.

What is less clear, however, is how the pattern of relatively large, multi-ethnic, Tswana-ruled states developed. Historians talk of processes of state-building, especially in the early and mid 19th century in the aftermath of the Difaqane, but the details are disputed.

It used to be generally assumed that the dominant Tswana groups had displaced, absorbed or subjugated the rest of the ethnic groups when they first established themselves in the territory. By this view, the Basarwa or Bushmen, who were seen as having been pre-agricultural hunter-gatherers since time immemorial, had been losing out steadily to more advanced groups, first the BaKhalagari and then the Tswana, over a long period. However, alternative possibilities have been suggested. Notably, E. M. Wilmsen (in *Land Filled with Flies*⁶) suggests a much more discontinuous history. In his view, the major Tswana groups were by no means dominant at the start of the 19th century, but