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**GROWING AUTHORITARIANISM
IN THE “AFRICAN MIRACLE” – SHOULD BOTSWANA
BE A CAUSE FOR CONCERN?**

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Growing Authoritarianism in the “African Miracle” – should Botswana be a Cause for Concern?

Ian Taylor

Botswana has, since independence in 1966, been governed uninterrupted by the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) and its economic growth-rate record has been impressive. From being one of the poorest countries in the world at independence, Botswana is now classified by the World Bank as an Upper Middle Income country, with a per capita GDP at purchasing power parity of almost \$8000 (UNDP 2003:280 and Republic of Botswana 2001).¹ It must be said that much of this has occurred at the expense of diversification, persisting inequalities and weaknesses in human development (Taylor 2003).

However, because of such growth rates and the fact that it has been ostensibly operating a stable liberal democracy from the outset (in contrast to most African countries before 1990, with the exception of Mauritius), Botswana has been showered with praise and has been repeatedly dubbed the “African Miracle” (a phrase originally coined by Thumberg-Hartland in 1978, repeated by Samatar, 1999). The bulk of the literature on Botswana is heavily imbued with celebratory positions. Much of this is idealistic and largely economic in its approach, missing much of the *political* dynamics of the country’s pre- and post-independence experience (see Vengroff 1977; Thumberg-Hartland 1978; Picard 1985; Picard 1987; Harvey and Lewis 1990; Holm and Molutsi 1989; Danevad 1993; Stedman 1993; Dale 1995; Leith 2004; Werbner

¹ Botswana is the world’s leading diamond producer, with its four mines sending 31 million carats valued at US2.6 billion to the De Beers’ Diamond Trading Centre in 2004. This is 25 percent of the world’s supply and an estimated 47 percent of the DTC’s business.

2004). These works even ask whether Botswana is indeed *A Model for Success?* (Picard 1987), and assert that the distinguishing characteristic of Botswana is its “prosperity” (Leith 2004).²

The dynamics of Botswana’s celebrated democracy must be investigated if the idea that the country represents a model of democracy in Africa is to be properly assessed. The proposition is doubtful primarily on the basis that the country’s democracy is highly elitist, power is centralized in the presidency, and the country’s two presidential transitions, in 1980 and 1998, both took place without reference to the wishes of the people. Furthermore, there is growing evidence of an authoritarian turn in the country’s politics.

REVISITING THE “BEACON OF DEMOCRACY”

Independent Botswana began, much as the British Protectorate had gone on, through agreement among colonial and indigenous elites. It was a smooth and painless transition, which took place, according to Fawcus and Tilbury (2000:187), among a quiescent, ‘entirely apolitical electorate’ (2000: 182). According to Wass (2004), a Protectorate officer involved in the run-up to independence, when a nationwide competition for the design of a new national logo and motto was launched, entries included a picture of a biting spider with the proposed national motto being *Tsoga!* (Wake Up!). The experience of popular struggle was wholly absent, and the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP), was a ‘party of government’ from its foundation, December 1960, shortly before the pre-independence elections (Picard 1987: 138-42).

The BDP’s founders were leading cattlemen, led by Seretse Khama and Ketumile Masire. For Seretse ‘it was [his] personal and financial interest in cattle which first led him into the confidence of...the colonial authorities’, and by the 1960s he was ‘the most influential livestock producer in the country’ (Parsons et al. 1995: 188-89). Khama and Masire established from the start an open, multi-party system, wherein the BDP immediately predominated. This openness

² What is intriguing about such writings is that it ignores the fact that 23.5 per cent of people receive an income below \$1 a day, whilst 50 per cent get less than \$2 daily. Undernourishment (in other words, chronic food insufficiency to meet one’s minimum energy requirements) affected 24 per cent of people, on the latest figures (1999/2001), up from 18 per cent a decade earlier. The Gini coefficient is the second highest in the world whilst approximately 40% of the population is unemployed. Botswana is fairly unique in experiencing a fall in human development while experiencing high growth.

entailed what a liberal politics functionally necessitated: *relative* freedom of speech and association (Macpherson, 1966: 46). Exceptional stability was conferred on the polity, and legitimacy too on the elected ruling elite, both bolstered further soon after by a competitive economy, diamonds and sustained growth.

Botswana's fundamental law was 'predicated on an effective executive president', and Seretse Khama quickly initiated the strengthening of the Office of the President (Parsons et al., 1995: 271). Great power was, and has since been, centralised in the presidency. Commanding both the state and the predominant party, all three presidents to-date have readily exercised their powers. Seretse Khama, we are told by his biographers, had 'never been really happy' with constituency politics and parliamentary debate, so the constitution was changed, as early as October 1972, to accommodate the indirect election of the president – 'the first step on the way to autocracy' (Parsons et al., 1995: 299). Festus Mogae made a number of personal, seemingly even secret decisions, favouring the inexperienced Lt.-General Ian Khama, eldest son of Seretse, as his Vice President – his initial appointment, his deputy's almost immediate, unprecedented "sabbatical" leave, and Khama's continued piloting of BDF aircraft against the express recommendations of the Ombudsman. The latter step expressed the presumption that he and the Vice-President were above the law. During the October 2004 elections Mogae publicly announced three times that, if parliament rejected his re-nomination of Khama as his deputy, and thus heir apparent, he would dissolve parliament. He supposedly backed up this threat by declaring his personal assurances that Khama did not have the authoritarian intentions that many BDP members suspected him of holding.

So elevated, all three presidents to-date have been ready to subordinate the law and the constitution to the political exigencies of the time on more than one occasion. When Vice-President Masire was twice rejected by his Kanye constituency, in 1969 and 1974, defeated by former Chief Bathoen Gaseetsiwe of the BNF, President Khama first abolished (in 1972) the provision for constituency election of the president, and then introduced the requirement that a chief had to have resigned his position for a period of five years before qualifying for parliamentary election (Makgala 2004: 6-8). The set of constitutional amendments introduced by President Masire in 1998 involved necessary reforms such as the lowering of the voting age and creating a (more) independent electoral commission, but they also allowed for the automatic succession of the Vice-President on the retirement, death or incapacitation of the president. Parliament – effectively the BDP in parliament – was removed from the succession process. When Ian Khama became Vice-President while remaining Paramount Chief of the Bamangwato, it should be noted that Mogae and Khama violated Masire's earlier constitutional amendment.

Presidential arrogance is repeatedly displayed in the immediate re-appointment of BDP MPs and ministers rejected democratically by their constituencies. The appointment of (four) so-called Specially Elected Members of parliament was a constitutional provision intended to assist weak communities to gain representation, but the provision has been 'blatantly used' for getting ruling party members back into parliament against the wishes of their constituents (see below). The provision was quickly used to re-appoint Masire as both MP and Vice-President by Seretse after Masire's defeat in the elections mentioned above (Parsons et al., 1995: 283-84). Notably, in 1989 the former Permanent Secretary to the President, Festus Mogae, and the former army Commander, General Mompoti Meraphe, were co-opted into parliament and elevated to cabinet office. When Vice-President Peter Mmusi was forced to resign in 1991 after his involvement in corrupt land transactions, Masire made Mogae his deputy.

This practice is a norm in Botswana politics. In October 2004, Margaret Nasha, an old BDP stalwart, was kicked out by her Gaborone Central constituents, only to be immediately returned to parliament, and to her Ministry of Local Government, by Mogae – again, in direct contradiction of the wishes of the electorate. In the popular view: 'The BDP government tends to reward its activists, rejected by the voters. The greatest loser in the whole circus is the people', (*Mmegi* (Gaborone) November 29, 2004).

The dominance of nomination over election is extensive. In November 2004 Nasha announced the names of nominated councilors. Out of 101 nominated local government councilors; only three came from the opposition. Given that the BDP gained 52 percent of the popular vote while the opposition accounted for 48 percent, the nominations were described by the press as 'a monstrosity' (*Mmegi* (Gaborone) November 29, 2004). As the paper remarked:

We are reminded yet again that this is Botswana where a person who has been rejected by the people [i.e. Margaret Nasha] is brought to Parliament through some phony democratic exercise called specially elected arrangement. The outrageous circus continues when the same individual is appointed to oversee another ridiculously undemocratic ritual of nominating councillors.

MASIRE-MOGAE AND MOGAE-KHAMA: AUTOMATIC ELITIST SUCCESSION

Until the early 1990s the BDP easily won general elections running on an effective political formula of returns (in goods, services, salaries, etc.) to those who made the biggest contribution to the growth economy. Thereafter, as a result of both infighting in the party and a series of corruption scandals involving top-ranking government officials, the Botswana National Front (BNF) challenged the predominance of the BDP in 1994. The response by Masire was to avoid the voters' judgement on his presidency and step down.

The context of Masire's peaceful – and elitist – transfer of power to Mogae needs contextualising. At the time, the BDP was riven with factionalism and disputes, with the party split into essentially two different groups, one allegedly behind the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mompoti Merafhe, the other behind BDP Secretary General, Daniel Kwelagobe. This factionalism related to various issues including the problem of elite corruption, and the dent that this made in the BDP's till then well-cultivated image of probity – or at least discipline – and development. It stemmed from a private parliamentary motion that supported a public register of all assets and business interests held by the President, Vice-President, Ministers and MPs. The Kwelagobe-associated group largely represented the interests of older elites, most of whom had “business interests” (Kwelagobe had earlier resigned due to corruption allegations involving himself and Mmusi).³

BDP in-fighting reached a crescendo in and after 1992, as students and workers demonstrated in Gaborone against ministerial wrong-doing. This meant that BDP went into the 1994 elections tainted with the look of a party given over to greed and in-fighting. The BNF duly gained the largest share of the popular vote in its history.

With its predominance seemingly threatened in the next 1999 elections, the BDP engaged a consultant, Lawrence Schlemmer, essentially to re-define its retention of power. The Schlemmer Report (1997) identified factionalism as a major problem and recommended that the BDP should obtain a person of ‘sufficient dynamism’, ‘untainted’ by factional fights, to

³ In 1991, the Presidential Commission of Enquiry into illegal land transactions in peri-urban land transactions close to Gaborone found evidence of the use of high office for personal gain in these illegal activities and implicated the then Vice-President and Minister for Local Government, Peter Musi, and the Minister of Agriculture, Daniel Kwelagobe. Both resigned from the government in March 1992. The report was nullified on a technicality after a court declared that its submissions were made in camera rather than in public.

'unite' the party. In addition, Schlemmer called for the retirement of the BDP old guard and an infusion of new talent. Essentially these recommendations focused on imagery and on some large assumptions, but it led directly to the supposedly celebrated transition from Masire to Mogae.

In 1997, the BDP failed to vote for a Central Committee, with a camp led by Merafhe threatening to boycott the poll because Kedikilwe (associated with the Kwelagobe clique) was believed to have agreed to step down as BDP chairman, so allowing Vice-President Mogae to obtain, what he conspicuously lacked, a party post, unopposed. The Kwelagobe camp wanted Masire to remain in power until the 1999 national elections – amendments to the electoral law and constitution would be coming into force by late 1997 which would provide for the automatic succession of the Vice-President. Masire, however, indicated that he considered retirement albeit in a decidedly circumspect way.

Masire himself was taciturn, not to say autocratic, towards his party colleagues on the issue. The 72 year old, in the highest office then for 17 years, was aware, he said, that some were saying that they do not want another "*Bandanyana*" (or small Banda). He had always known that someday he would have to retire, but this would be 'when I am ready'. He went on: 'I will let you know. It could be tomorrow, next week, next month, any time, but I will tell you' (*Botswana Guardian*, July 25, 1997). Here was the true voice of Botswana's leadership: aloof and high-handed, even towards the presidency and ruling party. The cabinet was said to be silently working on a retirement package modelled on that accorded to Kenneth Kaunda in Zambia (see below).

In November 1997 Masire met with a group of BDP veterans, concerned with his imminent retirement, and uncomfortable with the prospect of Mogae's succession. These veterans acknowledged the Vice-President's capability, but were concerned that he was not, as it was reported, 'a man of the people' (*Mmegi* (Gaborone), November 7, 1997). Mogae was the minister most responsible for the efforts to clean up the ruling elite in the wake of the

corruption furore, touching the top leadership closely.⁴ All this added to the opposition he faced from the Kwelagobe group who believed that Mogae's policies could somehow lose the BDP the next election.

It was finally announced that Sir Ketumile would stand down on March 31, 1998. If part of his self-identity was that he was "merely" 'a farmer on loan to the nation', he was also a highly experienced BDP politician. But he asserted that he was now 'going [back] into cattle farming' (*Mmegi* (Gaborone), January 16, 1998).

However, Masire's resignation was not some magnanimous gesture on his part – as Swatuk (1998) remarked, 'many observers [felt] that Masire got out while the going was still good'. The Electoral Institute of Southern Africa noted that Masire 'retired his position as Botswana's president in April 1998 owing to internal factionalism within his party and allegations of corruption' (EISA, no date). Masire's "peaceful handover" thus took place within a context of elitist corruption and party infighting. Hardly a "model" transition.

INTOLERANCE OF THE INDIGNEOUS

In recent years, Botswana has also been gaining a reputation for mistreating its indigenous inhabitants – the Bushmen or San. The issue surrounds a decision made in August 2001 to cut off services to the San located in a remote area of the Central Kalahari Game Reserve from January 31, 2002, reflecting the growing bureaucratic domination and interference in the lives of the San by the state (Hitchcock and Holm, 1993; Gall, 2001). The Reserve was established in 1961 on the Gana and Gwi's ancestral lands as a home for the two San "tribes". The twin goals of the CKGR were to protect the human inhabitants of the central Kalahari and to also

⁴ Essentially, Masire and his colleagues had been making the most of the National Development Bank through acquiring loan money. The President was in debt to the government's flagship lending agency for P546,000, while among other ministerial debtors, Kedikilwe owed P640,000 of which P260,000 was in arrears. (Mogae's name was conspicuously absent from the debtors list.) Masire offered no explanation about how these loans were obtained and maintained, but later suggested to an interviewer that, if the country wanted what he termed "venture capitalism", then loan money and perhaps overdue repayments were par for the developmental course. The President appeared to see himself as such a risk-taking, venture capitalist (Good, 1994: 509-515).

protect the fauna and flora.⁵ However, over the past sixteen years or so, Gaborone has sought to remove them, relocating many to “resettlement camps”, where hunting and gathering was impossible and where the San have, like indigenous First People elsewhere in the world, become dependent on government handouts and alcohol – worsening their position at the bottom of the Botswana social ladder. As a BBC reporter noted when she visited one of the resettlement camps, ‘alcoholism is rife, and an aura of despair and listlessness hangs over the dusty dwellings. There are no jobs, there is no grazing for the goats and cattle, no veldt food to gather, no wild animals to hunt. The residents have nothing to do’ (*BBC News Online*, March 18, 2002). A San activist pleaded that ‘it is not that we are a dull community. We are just like everybody else but it is...our government’s notion that we were created to be underdogs and to be exploited. Basarwa in this country are ill-treated and looked down upon. We want the world to know that’ (San activist Keiphile Steven quoted in *Botswana Guardian* (Gaborone), April 26, 2002).

Those who sought to avoid such a fate and chose to remain in the CKGR were also dependent on government largesse but at least had a choice in where they lived. But, at a total of 55,000 pula (8,200 dollars) per month the government claimed that supplying such people with services was “too expensive” to continue and must stop (*Mmegi/The Reporter* (Gaborone), February 19-25, 2002). This was rather ironic, not to say dubious in the extreme, bearing in mind that a main point of the Diamonds for Development campaign was that the mining of the country’s gems had accrued for Botswana a sizeable income from which to “promote development”. It was also rather unbelievable when one considers that the country had a budget *surplus* of 2.58 billion pula in the financial year 2000/2001! The government in fact refused offers of financial assistance from international organisations on this matter. The local newspaper *Mmegi* called the forced removal scheme ‘one of the most unfortunate courses of action since independence: the banishment of the Basarwa from their ancestral lands to a foreign land, a place with which they have no bond’ (*Mmegi/The Reporter* (Gaborone), February 15-21, 2002).

⁵ Note that in recent times Botswana’s President Mogae has sought, rather disingenuously, to re-write history by claiming that ‘in 1961 we drilled for water in the park to alleviate drought and the Basarwa moved into the park. Their settlement did not exist before then’ (quoted in *Mail and Guardian* (Johannesburg) August 31, 2001). Mogae appears to have been misinformed: the ‘we’ was in fact the British colonial administration and the park was set up not to alleviate drought but to establish a safe place for the San. It was only established as a ‘Game Reserve’ as new legislation would have been needed to establish a reserve expressly for people. Thus already existing law for setting up a game reserve was deployed instead.

The decision however neatly dovetailed with the oft-stated wish of the Botswana state to convince the San to move out of the CKGR as part of its policy to develop tourism – and *possibly* diamonds – in the area. This process was crystallised in the 1985 “Fact Finding Mission” on the Central Kalahari Game Reserve. The Mission reported back to the government on its findings. In October 1986 Moutlakgola Nkwako, Minister of Commerce and Industry, announced the government’s determination to have the San communities leave the CKGR. It was from that point on that sustained pressure was brought to bear on people to leave the Reserve and move to relocation camps. This intensified in recent years (post-1996).

The authorities’ original argument was that the removal of the San from the CKGR would allow better wildlife conservation. This did not go down very well with critics as it seemed that Botswana valued wild animals more than its original inhabitants.⁶ The rationale behind the removals subsequently changed to stress that better services could be provided to the San if they moved out of the reserve. Gaborone has asserted that over the last few years, 2,200 San have “voluntarily” left the Reserve to take advantage of a number of incentives such as free settlement, grazing land and compensation for loss of possessions. According to the permanent secretary for political affairs in the Office of the President, Tuelonya Oliphant, ‘those that want to stay can do so. But the services will be cut off and if they want old age pensions, destitute rations and other services, they must get them from the nearest settlement outside of the reserve’ (*Reuters* (Gaborone), February 3, 2002). Although the San had been involved in the cash economy since the mid-nineteenth century *contra* the popular idea of the noble and uncorrupted Bushman, the vast majority of the San were (and remain) officially deemed as destitute and dependent upon government services. The government subsequently stopped providing old age pensions, food rations and water to those San in the CKGR and also stopped issuing special game license for the San, thus preventing them from obtaining fresh meat. The removal of such services from point of delivery to a site far from their location thus left the remaining San with but one choice if they wished to continue to receive government rations: they must leave. In fact in late 2002 the government of Botswana sealed existing boreholes, destroyed property belonging to the San which might have been used to store water and removed holding tanks at the boreholes. The government also banned NGOs

⁶ In fact, a government official, M.H. Sebina, e-mailed Survival International on February 28, 2002 to tell them that ‘we are much better than your race...Our tourism is wildlife-based not human-based so “your” tourist you are talking about we don’t give shit about them’ [sic]. For full text of the e-mail, see <http://www.survival-international.org/bush%20gov%200228.htm>

from providing food and water to the San (*Botswana Guardian* (Gaborone) September 6, 2002). A British newspaper put it quite candidly, saying that ‘the *Botswana government is ethnically cleansing them* [the San] in ways that would cause outrage if Botswana were not prosperous, stable and pro-Western’ (*Sunday Telegraph* (London), August 11, 2002).

In response, the government of Botswana has been quite intransigent, illiberal and chauvinistic. For instance, Gaborone’s foreign minister, Mompoti Merafhe, was quoted as describing Survival International – a British-based NGO helping the San – as ‘our enemy, and an enemy of Botswana’ (*Midweek Sun* (Gaborone), February 20, 2002), whilst the Director of the Remote Area Dweller Programme (in charge of providing services to the San in the CKGR) declared that by enlisting the help of international NGOs the San were ‘highly seditious’ and that ‘someone is going to have to answer’ (*Mmegi/The Reporter* (Gaborone), February 22-28, 2002).⁷ The Minister of Lands and Housing, Margaret Nasha, denounced a San leader (Roy Sesana) as a ‘pathological liar’ who was having ‘his palm...greased by ill-informed whites’.⁸ What was quite interesting, bearing in mind Botswana’s self-proclaimed status as a non-racial and tolerant republic was the very quick way in which government elites resorted to racist slurs to try and defend their position, something unthinkable under the country’s first president, Sir Seretse Khama. Somewhat predictably, the Presidential Affairs and Public Administration Minister, Daniel Kwelagobe charged that those NGOs defending the San were ‘racists’ who wanted to keep them ‘chasing wildlife and dressing in hides’.⁹ An outrageous intervention by the leader of the official opposition, Kenneth Koma, that ‘racist whites’ were involved in the production of pornographic films ‘starring’ San was allowed to pass without comment from the government.¹⁰ In late 2002 the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Minerals, Energy and Water Resources

⁷ The San’s “sedition” is however very simply explained. “The feeling that the state does not recognise the San in the way it recognises other Batswana has made them perceive that they would receive better assistance from peoples outside Botswana, given that foreign organisations have proved to take a greater interest in the San’s welfare than does their own government” (Mazonde, 2002, p. 64).

⁸ *Mmegi/The Reporter* (Gaborone), September 20-26, 2002. Nasha was quoted on television in March 2002 as saying that the issue of the San was ‘problematic’ and that ‘we once had the same problems with elephants’.

⁹ *Mmegi/The Reporter* (Gaborone), February 22-28, 2002.

¹⁰ *Botswana Guardian* (Gaborone) March 1, 2002. The alleged source of this information—Roy Sesana of the First People of the Kalahari—pointedly denied Koma’s claims saying such statements were ‘not true’ and were totally made up. Koma was (unsurprisingly) unable to provide any support whatsoever for his allegations.

referred to 'Survival or Suicide International, whatever their name is' as a 'British-based fringe, lunatic and racist NGO'.¹¹

This sort of embarrassing over-the-top stance towards any who dare criticise the government in Botswana is now standard. In May 2005, when commenting on the attempted deportation of 72-year old politics professor Kenneth Good, the Attorney-General remarked that 'They [the government] didn't want Baader-Meinhof or al-Qaeda in Botswana' (*Sunday Independent* (Johannesburg) May 8, 2005).

FUTURE UNCERTAIN: THE MARCH TOWARDS AUTHORITARIANISM AND IRRATIONALITY

Botswana's October 2004 national elections revealed the severe limitations in the country's elite or liberal democracy. The polls were as usual free, in the sense of open – as easy to form a political party in Botswana, as it was waggishly observed, as for a public servant to obtain a government-backed car loan. As a result, there was the usual proliferation of 'brief-case', essentially ballot-splitting parties, made up of one-man-and-his-fax-machine efforts and egocentrics with highly localised or imaginary support. As in previous elections, these 'parties' diverted support from the two largest and best-organized opposition groups, the BNF and the Botswana Congress Party (BCP).

The ruling and predominant party was as ever best resourced, particularly as regards corporate and other donor funding. President Festus Mogae reportedly said at a rally in Moshupa in early October that his party had received P2 million in contributions so far that year. He also noted that a leading BDP member, the car-magnate Satar Dada, had arranged with Toyota to obtain four-wheel-drive vehicles needed for nation-wide campaigning on credit. Dada is an appointed MP for very good reasons: he is both the BDP's Treasurer and one of the richest persons in the country, owning the Toyota and the Land Rover franchises in Botswana. Land Rovers are the vehicles of choice of the BDF and the police, arguably raising questions of

¹¹ A.R. Tombale, Keynote Address 'Legislation and Government Policies on Mining in Botswana', paper presented at the First Botswana International Conference on Mining: Challenges Facing the Minerals Industry in Developing Countries, November 19-21, 2002. The government representative repeatedly tried to link Survival International's campaign to "hidden motives" which were supposedly "racist" in origin. At the same time, this representative offered absolutely no evidence for such claims.

conflicts of interests vis-à-vis Dada and his ownership of Lesedi Motors – the suppliers of the vehicles to the forces).¹² Through Dada the BDP had acquired 57 vehicles, enabling its candidates to campaign effectively in all of the new 57 constituencies in the country.

The BDP also enjoyed favoured access to state resources, such as the electronic media and communications. It is documented that BTV does not enjoy editorial freedom in its presentation of news, and the appearances and speeches of the BDP leader, Mogae, are accorded special prominence on the grounds that he is State President. Appearances by the opposition leaders on BTV, in contrast, are limited on the grounds that they are ‘political’ in nature. The ruling party can readily attract able and ambitious candidates, and while it competed in all 57 constituencies, the BCP did so only in 50, and the BNF in just 42. The enlargement of parliament from 44 elected seats to 57 a few months earlier – a move made without public notification and discussion of its consequences – further strengthened the ruling party. The government steadfastly opposes all proposals for public funding for political parties. In consequence ‘[opposition] parties are under-resourced and depend on unreliable and unsustainable sources of funding’ (Sebudubudu, 2003: 1). This restriction extends into access to the media, with patent results. The Constitution provides for freedom of speech and of the press but, according to a report of the U.S. Department of State (2003: 1 and 4), released in 2004, ‘in practice...the government attempted to limit freedom of the press and continued to dominate domestic broadcasting.’ Stories and news-sources were ‘occasionally censored’. The report noted that radio remained the most important medium of public communication in the country, and the state-owned Radio Botswana was the only service capable of reaching into the whole nation.

The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), has an autonomy which its predecessor did not enjoy before 1997, but which remains restricted by the characteristic power of the President to appoint the IEC’s Secretary, its chief executive officer, with over-riding responsibilities. The IEC places restrictions on the campaign spending by individual

¹² There have been various allegations around the BDF and its suppliers for years. In the past it was criticized as being run as a “family business” in favour of the Khamas. This was because the BDF bought some of its equipment from a company called Seleka Springs whose directors, Tshakedi and Anthony Khama, were brothers to Vice President Ian Khama, who at the time was the Commander of the BDF. The BDF then also bought its vehicles from Lobatse Delta, which was under the directorship of the Khama twins. Another company linked to the Khama family was Hot Bread Ltd., from whom the BDF bought its supply of bread for trainees and soldiers in the Kasane area. The wife of a former BDF Director of Personnel, Ndelu Seretse, coincidentally ran Hot Bread (*Botswana Gazette* (Gaborone), May 21, 1997).

candidates – which it does not police – but there are no limits on the funding of parties. Botswana's democracy is further restricted by commonly low levels of electoral – and civil society – participation; in the 1999 elections only some 42 per cent of eligible voters went to the polls, probably due to a combination of apathy and positive abstention from an unchanging system of BDP predominance and opposition weakness and division.

Against all the odds, the October vote represented a firm protest against the dominant order. Turnout of eligible voters rose to about 50 per cent, almost half of whom, 48 per cent of all voters, supported the opposition. Under the prevailing simple-majority system however, this strong vote translated into only 13 seats in parliament – thus, 48 per cent of votes gained 23 per cent of elected seats. The BDP, which won just four per cent more votes than its opponents, obtained 44 seats, or 77 per cent of elected positions. Despite an electoral system which favoured the already strong, a divided opposition had been supported by 171,628 voters, against the 192,020 to the government. The BNF obtained 12 seats and the BCP only one, although it had increased its vote from 40,096 in 1999 to 63,911 in 2004. At 48 per cent, the opposition had won its highest vote ever, while at 52 per cent the BDP's support was at its lowest.¹³

Three cabinet ministers lost their seats, on top of two others defeated in the BDP's earlier, and decidedly acrimonious, primary elections. But a notable addition was the increased military component in the government, which now included three Generals, a Brigadier, and a Captain (the military ministers being Ian Khama (Vice-President), Lt.-General Mompoti Merafhe (Foreign Affairs), Major-General Moeng Pheto (Home Affairs), Captain Kitso Mokaila (Environment), and Brigadier Ramadeluka Seretse (Lands and Housing)). One veteran Motswana politician asked: 'who can tell me why all the ex-BDF men are all in the Cabinet? I suppose we can all guess why. My guess is, obviously, to keep the presidency safe for Lt.-General Ian Khama.' (*Mmegi* (Gaborone), November 23, 2004). There is widespread concern within Botswana as to why a third of the new Cabinet are now ex-military men.

¹³ The IEC chooses to estimate turnout on the basis of registered voters, though by no means all eligible voters bother to register (the latter, as in 1999, might be only some 50 per cent of the former). The total of votes cast on November 4 was 421,272. If the over-eighteen population is estimated at some fifty per cent of the national total, or around 850,000, turnout was just short of 50 per cent. Personal communication, IEC, November 2004, and Professor John Oucho, University of Botswana, same date.

But it was in the appointment of the Vice-President which held greatest significance for the future. Constitutionally this was Mogae's second and last term in office, and under the law the Vice-President inherits the presidency automatically. There was a widespread sentiment, not without foundation, that General Ian Khama possessed decidedly authoritarian tendencies, valued allegiance over merit, and was politically inexperienced to boot. Shortly after his initial appointment in 1998, Khama told an interviewer that his interests were in management, and politics did not concern him. On the subsequent New Year's Eve, he used the police backed by the paramilitary to stop the service of alcohol in bars and restaurants across the country at 11pm.

Parliamentarians, even from the ruling party, voiced opposition to these authoritarian trends. Isaac Mabiletsa, of Kgatleng East, pointed out that Khama was the first Vice-President in Botswana's history to hold no ministerial post, and that Khama consistently failed to engage in parliamentary discussions. He also quoted Olifant Mfa, who said, as an assistant minister, that he was not sure what would happen to his democratic rights to free speech after Mogae's departure. This is understandable given that under Khama 'the BDF sometimes use[d] its power and influence to manipulate civilian institutions to its favor. In 1996, when the budget allocation for the Office of the President – under which the BDF falls – was presented in parliament, more than 48 army officers marched into the House. The officers, in full uniform, took up positions in the public gallery. While it was their right to do so, the coincidence of their appearance in parliament in full uniform was viewed as intimidating by politicians' (Molomo 2001).

Unease within the party seems to be growing vis-à-vis Ian Khama's ambitions *and* the prospect of yet another undemocratic transition. Prior to the elections, the senior BDP member, Kedikilwe, was interviewed on democracy in Botswana. According to Kedikilwe:

Khama had to be brought into government on his own terms. That is something that was unprecedented. For instance when he left the army he brought with him his own baggage. He brought attendants for whom positions had to be created in the civil service. One wonders whether such people could then be transferred or redeployed to other ministries as is common practice. Senior positions in the army do not necessarily translate into equivalent in the civil service... We seem to be making special dispensations for one man,.... Over the last couple of years the politics of this country has gone backwards.... *We have become a demo-feudal state* in the place of a democratic republic (*Botswana Gazette* (Gaborone), June 18, 2003).

The interviewer asked whether Botswana was 'sliding towards a dynasty'. Kedikilwe again:

Yes indeed, and with very dire consequences. Democracy will give way to autocracy. Many people in the top echelons of the party are today scared to speak their minds because of the stature of Khama. Many are no longer following any principles, but merely taking a side which they think will guarantee them longest stay in positions of power. For instance even people who you would expect to know...are merely competing at who licks hardest the boots of the man at the top...I am a commoner and do not wish to be parented by a chief. My contest therefore marks the struggle of ordinary people against the rule of chiefs.

And there seems to be a growing call to avoid a repeat of the Masire-Mogae transition. Some prominent party officials now openly call for the president of the BDP to be directly elected: 'The President will also feel proud that he has been elected by the majority, not the minority like it is now', said the Youth Wing Chairman, Gomolemo Motswaledi (*Botswana Gazette* (Gaborone), December 24, 2003). The media in Botswana agree, asserting that 'There is need for a debate on the wisdom of automatic succession of the vice-president to the presidency. The current practice, which was introduced more for expediency than principle, shuts out everyone else – including the elected representatives, the MPs – from the process of choosing the country's head of state. It is unthinkable that a president who is not popularly elected should enjoy the sole right to choose a future president for the nation' (*Mmegi* (Gaborone), November 3, 2004).

Currently, the president and his deputy are essentially two managers, not politicians – one a financial bureaucrat and the other a soldier. The temperament and actions of the latter in particular are autocratic and prone to order-giving, rather than debate and argument. The recent decision to ignore a government task-force's strong recommendations for the country's second university to be sited in Selebi-Phikwe, and instead locate it in Serowe – Khama's home town – is seen by many as a portent of things to come: favouritism and the overruling of procedure in the service of personal agendas (*Mmegi* (Gaborone), November 29, and December 3, 2004). Ian Khama had earlier announced that he expected his younger brother, Tshekedi, to "inherit" his parliamentary seat in Serowe North West – even the BDP secretariat expressed objection to such an abrogation of democratic procedures (*Mmegi* (Gaborone), September 15, 2004).

The rising opposition to Khama automatically becoming the next president is partly fuelled by the fact that President Mogae has been highly accommodating of Khama. This began with his

appointment to the Vice-Presidency, extended to his almost immediate sabbatical, and other matters noted already, and seemingly goes on. In early 2004, the then editor of the *Botswana Gazette* (Gaborone), wrote that he had learnt that the President might leave office early, and that Mogae had so informed some of his aides and friends. The presidential spokesman, Jeff Ramsay, asked to comment, 'agreed that indeed the President may leave before his term ends'. Ramsay did not know exactly when this might be, but specifically mentioned a date half way into Mogae's second term. According to the editor, Ramsay even declared 'that it has always been President Mogae's wish not to stay long as President.' The Press Secretary also 'ruled out health as a reason' for a premature departure (*Botswana Gazette* (Gaborone), January 28 and February 4, 2004). A month later, and the *Gazette* wrote that what was termed sources close to the BDP said that it was 'Mogae's intention to step down after the coming general elections', but pressure from 'some influential [party] members' had 'forced him to change his mind' (*Botswana Gazette* (Gaborone), March 3, 2004). Yet in January 2005 it was revealed that a large plot was already being purchased at a possible cost of some P1.5 million, along with the planned construction of a new house and office complex, with an estimated value of about P6 million, at Phakalane Golf Estate, near Gaborone, for the eventual retirement of Mogae (*Botswana Gazette*, (Gaborone) January 12, 2005). There were some ramifications here. This could well be simply a prudent long-term commercial undertaking, but it implicitly raised, or rather re-raised, big questions about exactly how long President Mogae intended to remain in office. Furthermore, near the end of his State of the Nation address in November 2004, Mogae described automatic succession as constituting 'the smooth transfer of executive authority', as being 'now entrenched', and as 'a hallmark of our democratic stability' (Republic of Botswana, 2004: 12).

The preference accorded Khama is to a man who has no ministerial job and is divisive within the country.¹⁴ Furthermore, Ian Khama has made no secret of his intense dislike of the compromises of politics and of his contempt for politicians. Indeed, he has previously attacked members of his own party as 'unprincipled, intolerant, selfish vultures and monkeys' (ISS, 2001). This is the person who is about to take over the "African miracle"...

¹⁴ 'Who is the Vice President? A distinguished retired army general? Big deal, he was never a colonel. [Made Brigadier at 26.] An accomplished academic? Have mercy! A seasoned politician? He is not active in parliament and is probably not accountable to it. A proven manager? He was relieved of his ministerial portfolio because he could not stomach being appraised by his peers in cabinet and having to report to the President as everyone else. Enter minister without portfolio, project manager supremo who works according to no known methodology and reports to nobody' – (*Mmegi* (Gaborone), November 26, 2004).

All of this has been facilitated (i.e. there has been until now minimal opposition to the BDP's actions) in Botswana by the fact that civil society has been poorly developed and disorganized, and the democratic impulse relatively weak, due to the undiversified nature of the resource-dependent economy (Good 2004). The predominance of the BDP was unchallengeable until the early 1990s, but considerable disarray in the ruling party has escalated since. Popular votes in the 1994 and especially 2004 elections suggest that, with the spread of education and urbanization – if not yet the strengthening of civil society – people might at last be waking up. Yet the adulation continues. The normally astute *Economist* ran a piece on the elections entitled “Africa's Prize Democracy”, which ended with the baseless and purblind statement: ‘most people seem pretty happy, for now, without [a serious opposition party]’ *The Economist* (London), November 6, 2004

The long-term voting trend, despite low turnout levels, is against the BDP. The independent media is active and more critical, and with future unity between the BNF and BCP, the dominance of the BDP just might be terminated. Long one-party predominance came to an end in Italy and Japan as both Christian and Liberal Democrats there became bereft of ideas and through splits and misconduct in the ruling parties. Principle and ideas, as Makgala (2004) has highlighted, play no role in the intense factionalism in the BDP, and Mogae-Khama show no tendencies to restraint or conciliation and the looming succession from Mogae to Khama undermines the country as the supposed model for Africa. Note that in May 2005 the Attorney-General of Botswana remarked that Botswana was a “respected” and conservative small democracy that did not embrace the “avant-garde” rights to freedom of expression recognised by larger nations (*Sunday Independent* (Johannesburg) May 8, 2005). It really is about time that Africa-watchers woke up to the goings on in the supposed “African miracle”.

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