

Mosireletsi Mokalake, *State Creation, Nationalism, Nationhood and Ethnicity in Southern Africa: The Case of Botswana and South Africa*. Gaborone: Keitsehang Publications, 676 pages, ISBN: 978-1-387-62503-1.

This is an interesting book, clearly the result of considerable work, which puts forward a striking argument. Work like this shows the deep interest and commitment Botswana have to their history. However, it has significant flaws. In Africa, amateur history such as this book plays an indispensable role. However, the book illustrates why amateur and professional historians need to work together more. There are numerous issues with this book which could have been avoided if the author had been able to get assistance from professionals at an early stage, allowing him to produce a stronger case. The book is well bound, and the print is comfortable to read. However, it is badly edited and lacks an index.

The basic case is that the pattern of nation-states based on colonial borders was a mistake, and that smaller, ethnically based states would have been better. The author argues that, contrary to the idea of whites dividing Africans, the Union of South Africa united them without their consent. (It has been noted that pre-apartheid policies were tending to create an African proletariat which the white elite did not desire, and the author's analysis could connect with this approach.) In 1994, South Africa should have been dissolved into smaller pieces, the author argues. He quotes a common Setswana expression by which women tell children playing that it is time to go home, meaning 'everyone must return to their mother's homestead' (p.574).

There is a particular focus on the Bophuthatswana homeland. This, in apartheid South Africa, was supposed to be the Tswana homeland. It existed in multiple pieces, mostly just south of Botswana, and was ruled by Lucas Mangope. The author argues that, unlike the other bantustans, it represented a genuine ethnic entity and was a well-governed state. (I think the claim that it was more prosperous and stable than other homelands is reasonable.) Lucas Mangope, he believes, was a man who sought to resist apartheid, just in a different way. Hence, the author argues, Botswana and the international community should have recognized it. For those of us of a certain age it is interesting to see 1980s South African talking points such as the 'land archipelago' idea being revived.

There is a long and detailed section of many Tswana *merafe's* traditional history, with some interesting material, which the author states is necessary background to his main argument, though the relevance is not apparent to me. The author's analysis is interesting, though open to question in places, and a little too inclined to rely on what seems intuitively obvious to him, but since I did not find this section very relevant to his main argument, I will not address it here.

The author is concerned about the precise use of terminology, and the avoidance of anachronism. This is highly commendable. However, it is somewhat undermined by his own problems with usage and detail. He repeatedly complains about the confusion caused by 'South Africa', which before 1910 meant a region, like West Africa, but since then increasingly meant the state of that name, with the old sense being taken over by 'Southern Africa'. But the author adds his own confusion, writing for instance 'High Commissioner for Southern Africa' which should be 'for South Africa'. The discussion of the status of the Union of South Africa is shaky on the history of dominion status. The suggestion that the Second World War led *directly* to independence in Africa is overly simple; Britain's initial response to the effects of war, such as the sterling crisis, was in fact the 'second colonial occupation', intensifying economic activity in Africa, which was now a key colonial area following the loss of India. Nor was independence in British Africa *normally* the result of armed struggle. The author is critical of what he sees as the deficiencies of previous writing; but this may be partly due to the fact that, to judge from the footnotes and bibliography, he does not seem to have had access to the best or most recent work on many subjects. The author has

indeed made extensive use of printed primary sources, which is very good, but greater familiarity with secondary analysis would have assisted him in interpreting them.

The author's strongest point is about the Southern Tswana territory which became British Bechuanaland. He points out that contemporaries, in discussing 'Bechuanaland', meant the whole area of both colony and protectorate, and that analysis which focuses only on the chiefs of the Protectorate area risks introducing an anachronistic division. This is a solid point; I remember a colleague who was writing on nineteenth century 'Bechuanaland' being asked why a Botswana history included areas that were 'outside Botswana'.

The book must, I think, be read as an endorsement of ethnic nationalism. It is not clear to me whether the author regards this as a way forward for Africa or is merely lamenting that the wrong way was taken. Either way, it does raise questions. How is everyone to go home now? Whether or not it is desirable, is it not too late? No one will dispute that colonialism cut up functioning African polities, but that is not the point. He traces the idea of self-determination to Woodrow Wilson and the Paris Peace settlement, but the story of what happened subsequently is not encouraging. It was not possible to create single-ethnicity states; what appeared were states with minorities. Ultimately these tensions were often 'solved' by what is now called ethnic cleansing. I am sure the author opposes anything like that, but it would be helpful to know how it would be, or would have been, avoided.

The author argues that Bophuthatswana need not have been dismissed as 'illegitimate', and makes the reasonable point that legitimacy and international acceptance are ultimately about politics more than law. However, this is what would have made recognition unfeasible even if contemporaries had agreed with the author's positive assessment of Bophuthatswana. Any recognition of homelands—whether well-run or not—would have amounted to an acceptance of the apartheid government's claim to 'solve its problems' on its own terms. Both opponents and supporters of the apartheid state understood this when discussing the issue. An obvious question is why, if Mangope was a successful ruler and the state was viable, Bophuthatswana ended so spectacularly with its leader calling in Afrikaner extremists, with results that many will vividly recall. However, the author does have an explanation: it was the work of ANC infiltrators.

Overall, this is certainly an original work and I commend the author for his hard work. I conclude with my opening point: African history needs a more comprehensive model of historical practice, including both professionals and amateurs. This would have assisted the author in getting feedback from professional scholars early on, and making his case more effectively.

Reviewed by Bruce Bennett

bsbgabs@gmail.com