

‘Mind Your Language’: Tribal Bigotry and the Spectre of Rwandan Genocide in Peaceful Botswana

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Abstract

In just a period of 34 years (1966-2000) nation-building in Botswana resulted in a peaceful and relatively united society despite the imposition of Tswana linguistic hegemony on the country’s ethnic ‘minorities’. Since the country’s independence in 1966 there had been sporadic and ineffectual campaigns by the elites of the ethnic minorities for constitutional recognition at the same level as Tswana-speaking groups. However, in 2000 the government of Botswana finally constituted a Commission of Inquiry to consult Botswana on the old grievance that sections 77, 78 and 79 of the Republican Constitution discriminated against ethnic minorities. The consequence was heated and often inflammatory public debate by those against the cited sections of the Constitution and those supporting the status quo. The debate soon degenerated into a Bangwato-Kalanga skirmish characterised by vicious accusations and counter-accusations of tribal bigotry, name calling, and war talk. The 1994 Rwandan genocide was often evoked as likely to be repeated in Botswana. This paper, analyzes the dynamics and magnitude of this discourse through detailed exchanges in Botswana media. It concludes that repeat of Rwandan genocide was unlikely in Botswana thanks to the country’s democratic tradition, and multiple and layered ethnic identities that seem to sustain peace. Not least the executive’s stranglehold on the legislature seems to have also cowed ruling party legislators from the so-called minority groups into acquiescing to the status quo.

Keywords: Botswana; Botswana constitution; tribal groups; ethnic minorities; linguistic hegemony

Introduction

Here we provide background to the hostile tribal relations from the colonial period to the post-independence period. The emphasis is on the anti-Kalanga sentiment because it is the one that remained strong during the period under discussion. This can be traced to the colonial period when the British authorities supported *Dikgosi* (Chiefs) of Tswana-speaking groups against ethnic groups under their rule. For instance, the relations between the Bangwato under Kgosi Khama III was said to have been characterized by cordiality and diplomacy. However, in the late 1920s and early 1930s relations between Bangwato under Tshekedi Khama and Bakalanga of John Nswazwi deteriorated badly with the British authorities playing a contradictory role. The British Resident Commissioner at the time, Charles Rey, and Tshekedi hated each other and initially Rey condemned Tshekedi and Bangwato’s attitude towards the Nswazwi people. In 1930 Nswazwi was arraigned before Tshekedi’s tribal court (*kgotla*) on charges of insubordination and the case was tried by Edirilwe Seretse, since Tshekedi had gone to England. Edirilwe sentenced Nswazwi to resettle in the Bangwato tribal capital of Serowe or else a regiment was to be despatched to enforce the decree. The indignant Nswazwi appealed to Rey who gave an interdict preventing the regiment from enforcing the judgment and also had poisonous words for the Bangwato (sometimes called Bamangwato):

The so-called trial appeared, from the report of Edirilwe’s judgment, to be a mere travesty of justice: the verdict and sentence having probably been dictated by Tshekedi before he left for England.... The [Bakalanga] tribe, of which John [Nswazwi] is Headman, is, from all the information

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I have been able to obtain, superior in many ways to the Bamangwato. Their physique is better: they are harder workers and as a result of their greater industry they have attained to a higher state of prosperity. This has caused jealousy among the Bamangwato who apparently lose no opportunity of emphasising their overlordship over this comparatively small tribe (Makgala 2006:59).

Paradoxically, after Resident Magistrate Gerald Nettelton's inquiry into the matter, in August 1930 Rey accused Nswazwi of being presumptuous and insubordinate to Tshekedi:

I have read all the evidence given at the Inquiry, and I agree with the Magistrate's findings. You have no serious matter to bring against Chief Tshekedi or his representatives, and yet you presumed to trouble the High Commissioner with these empty complaints. You tried to go behind your Chief's back. You ran away twice when His Excellency wished you to state your case to Tshekedi so that he might hear it and the Resident Magistrate as was proper ... I am displeased with your underhand methods of attacking your Chief, your intrigues and secret meetings, your endeavour to work matters through the newspapers, and the deceitful manner in which you conducted your case in the Kgotla at Serowe. You have been deliberately disobedient and defiant to Chief Tshekedi, who has shown great restraint.

The difficulties between Nswazwi and Tshekedi worsened, and in 1948, and with the help of the British, Nswazwi and his people were rounded up and compelled to flee the territory and took refuge in Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe). The tragic Tshekedi-Nswazwi relations contributed to the long-running rancour between Bakalanga and Bangwato which was also embraced by other Tswana-speakers outside the Bangwato tribal territory. On the other hand, as a non-Sotho Tswana linguistic and cultural group Bakalanga assimilation or incorporation among Tswana speakers, or Bangwato specifically, was bound to be problematic. The circumstances of their tightened control under Bangwato tribal leadership was also bound to cause their resentment towards Bangwato and later other Tswana-speakers at the national level following independence.

This has over time led to Bakalanga being perceived and alleged to be clannish and devious which fueled their resentment by Tswana-speakers in the post-colony. For instance, the founding president of Botswana and uncrowned Chief of Bangwato, Sir Seretse Khama, had to deal with allegations of increasing Bakalanga domination of the civil service. An interesting development was the appointment and soon after cancellation of Richard Mannathoko as Botswana's High Commissioner to London in the late 1960s. 'A week or so before his departure his friends held a party for him in Gaborone. Seretse was invited. At the party someone made an unwise remark to the effect that Mannothoko (sic) was going to London to represent the Bakalanga as much as Botswana. This made Seretse see red, as he looked around and realized that he was the only non-Mokalanga present. He left the party in protest and proceeded to cancel Mannothoko's posting, sending Bias Mookodi [Mongwaketse] to London instead' (Parsons *et al.* 1995:276-277). We are further told about alleged Bakalanga conspiracy to topple Seretse's government through guns of war (Parsons *et al.* 1995:277).

However, as we will demonstrate below the much maligned Bakalanga, whom for ages had been subjected to hurtful and debasing stereotypes, were quite patriotic. The Anthropologist, Richard Werbner, who has conducted research on the Bakalanga elite refers to them as *Reasonable Radicals* which is the title for his 2004 book on this elite. One of the prominent member of the Bakalanga elite was Gaositwe Chiepe. She was highly educated former director in the Ministry of Education, and was appointed by Seretse to the diplomat service. Damaging rumour mongering among Tswana-speakers had it that while at the Ministry of Education Chiepe ensured that applications for scholarship by Bakalanga had a drawing of a peanut (Kalanga delicacy) which was enough for one to get a scholarship.

However, such claims did not seem to negatively influence appointments of Bakalanga to critical and strategic positions in government by Seretse and his successor Sir Ketumile Masire (1980-1998). For instance, Chiepe served as cabinet minister in both Seretse and Masire's cabinets. In fact, Masire speaks very highly of her saying 'I thought about her very seriously as a vice-president' (Masire 2006:89). He writes in his memoirs that 'The group of Batswana we sent abroad for training just before independence was a talented lot. I was part of a committee that selected these students to go abroad, and we found some very able people. Virtually all of them came back to some form of public service. In fact, in his later years, Seretse used to ask: "When shall we have the Mphuchanes and Tibones and Mogaes again?"' (Masire 2006:99). Masire further says that 'The young people we promoted early such as Baledzi Gaolathe, Charles Tibone, Sam Mphuchane, or Lebang Mpotokwane were very successful bets'. It is very instructive that his list includes Gaolathe, Tibone and Mphuchane who are Bakalanga. The fact that Masire was involved in their selection process shows that it was transparent and targeted talent as opposed to tribal affiliation. Gaolathe and Tibone, among other Bakalanga, became permanent secretaries and cabinet ministers for strategic ministries under Masire and later President Festus Mogae (1998-2008). They were appointed to these key government and national positions on their proven merit and not tribal identity it can be argued.

In 1997 President Masire appointed Gaolathe as convener of Vision 2016 which produced a document called *Towards Prosperity for All*, a long term vision for Botswana. Among other aims the document envisioned Botswana as a prosperous, proud and united society when it attained its 50th anniversary of independence in 2016 (Republic of Botswana 1997). As we show below numerous contributors to the debate on tribalism in Botswana indicated how such practice and sentiments flew in the face of the aims of Vision 2016, particularly its emphasis on 'a proud and united nation'.

The turn of the new millennium saw a groundswell in campaign by the elite of the country's historically marginalized or 'minority' tribes for recognition of their languages and culture at the same level as the dominant Tswana-speakers. The debate reached a crescendo in 2000-2002 when it became inflammatory as some Tswana-speakers also assembled their own tribal association to counter the campaign by the minorities. In 1966 the government had given recognition and promotion only to the Setswana language as the national language believing that it was uniting and building the nation. An impression was created that the population of Botswana was homogenous. English became the official language.

Sections 77, 78 and 79 of the Constitution of Botswana also recognized the existence of only eight Tswana-speaking tribes as principal tribes whose *Dikgosi* automatically became *ex officio* members of the House of Chiefs. Other tribal groups in 'non-tribal' state land regularly elected representatives to the House of Chiefs. Since the 1980s or even before, this arrangement was seen by politicians from disadvantaged tribes as unfair and discriminatory. In 2000 the issue became extremely inflammatory in the media and other fora. The situation was so charged and tense that President Mogae appointed a commission of enquiry to probe the validity of chieftaincy in modern Botswana and make recommendations on how the above mentioned constitutional clauses could be redressed (Republic of Botswana 2000). The commission came to be referred to as the Balopi Commission after Patrick Balopi who chaired it.

Almost all ethnic minorities made submissions to the Balopi Commission, which started its work on 8 August 2000 and addressed *dikgotla* meetings across the country, making very strong submissions against sections 77, 78 and 79 of the Constitution. This debate took place regardless of the fact that there is hardly any sense of mutually exclusive identities in Botswana but multiple and layered identities (Bennett 2002:5-17). However, the debate on tribalism in the public arena in Botswana, while inflammatory, seems to fit in well with Botswana's democratic dispensation. This acts as a safety valve, ensuring that solutions to problems of national importance are sought through dialogue and not by physical confrontation or civil war as has been the case in many African countries. Moreover, widespread inter-tribal marriages and business partnerships seem to give patriotism an edge over tribalism in Botswana. This has even

led to some people concluding that there is no tribalism in Botswana but rather professional jealousies and personal vendettas. The scholar of Bakalanga elite, Richard Werbner observes that ‘All the leading Kalanga notables, who are now elders, have married non-Kalanga wives, from Sweden, from South Africa, from Zimbabwe, [from Lesotho] and from Tswana-speaking parts of Botswana but mainly from southern communities near the capital’ (Werbner 2004:29).

Contextual Framework: Botswana Developmental Trajectory and Rwandan Genocidal Trajectory

Inter-tribal conflict and violence was experienced on numerous instances in colonial Botswana. In addition to the Bangwato and Bakalanga of Nzwasi, there was violent removal of the Babirwa of Malema from the Tuli Block by Bangwato regiments of Khama III in the early 1920s (Ramsay 1987). There was also violent removal of Bakgatla-baga-Mmanaana from Bangwaketse territory in the 1930s (Ramsay 1987). In the Batawana reserve relations between Batawana and groups such as Baherero among others sometimes teetered on the brink of violence (Alnaes 2002). However, the post-independence nation-building exercise seem to have rendered inter-tribal confrontation ineffectual or less visible.

The much-discussed executive’s strong domination of the legislature means may have also contributed to this scenario. For instance, the country’s Constitution makes the president excessively powerful and together with his executive they can undermine parliament in many ways. Parliament or legislature lacks independence by virtue of being a unit or department under the presidency. What legislators decide can be ignored by the President if he does not like it. Efforts to strengthen parliament and make it independent are ignored or suppressed by the executive (Nasha 2014 and Molomo 2012). The ruling Botswana Democratic Party (BDP), which has been in power since 1966, strictly ensures that its majority legislators adhere to decisions of the party’s parliamentary caucus which are always pro-executive. This executive upholds the traditional interests of the Tswana-speakers. Therefore, while legislators from the ‘minority’ groups normally outnumber their Tswana-speakers, that numerical superiority amounts to nothing. Legislators who dare to go against decisions of the party’s caucus are dealt with harshly.

Development policies in the post colony also led government providing services throughout the country in a relatively equitable manner. This coupled with the country’s low levels of corruption and mismanagement prevented ethnically-induced social strife and civil wars. Many African countries experienced this ‘resource curse’ phenomenon while Botswana’s developmental ‘exceptionality’ led to it being labelled the ‘African Miracle’ (Samatar 1999). Angela Gapa argues that ‘part of the reason Botswana escaped the resource curse was a bid by Botswana elites to buffer the negative effects of ethnicity on resource distribution through identity management, specifically assimilation, at various points in the country’s history. This was mainly achieved through the political entrepreneurship of pre-colonial, colonial, and postcolonial elites, and through social and colonial discourses predicated upon materialistic production and exchange, that led to the establishment of a new identity category (Gapa 2017:1). She further observes that ‘In doing so, Botswana elites created a new criterion for resource access based on successful assimilation that largely excluded those who failed to assimilate’.

Amy Poteete observes that ‘intergroup violence in Botswana has been limited and sporadic despite objectively significant social divisions’ (Poteete 2013:183). She notes that Botswana has not had civil wars or coups, riots do occur but rarely and subside quickly. To her ‘three factors have discouraged mobilization around intergroup divisions: (1) the cross-cutting nature of those divisions, (2) sustained economic growth, and (3) development policies’. According to her ‘ethnolinguistic background, region, and economic status have been perceived in a manner that allows for crosscutting memberships. Consequently, “losing” groups on some issues often see themselves among the “winning” groups on other issues. Just as “a rising tide lifts all boats,” robust economic growth in the decades following independence supported improvements in living standards for a wide cross-section of society and obscured entrenched inequalities. Far from being

the inevitable consequence of diamond-driven development, this outcome is the product of development policies that deliberately sought to downplay potential social divisions' (Poteete 2013:183).

Unlike Botswana, Rwanda has always been a nation of ethnic and political tension as well as military dictatorship that eventually led to the 1994 genocide. The Rwandan genocide of 1994 had a deep historical roots. It is estimated that by 1994 the densely populated Rwanda constituted of 85% Hutu while Tutsi made part of the remaining 15%. The ancient Hutu-Tutsi rivalry was worsened by the territory's Belgian colonial masters' divide-and-rule strategy by 'empowering' the Tutsis over the Hutu creating a platform for enduring conflict that flared up into ethnic violence even during the colonial period. For instance, in 1959 Hutus led a campaign that forced some 330,000 Tutsis out of the country and in 1961 the Tutsi monarch was also forced to flee. The country gained its independence in 1962 and ethnic violence was never far away. There was a military coup that led to General Juvenal Habyarimana becoming the country's leader in 1973. A military dictator whose National Revolutionary Movement for Development (NRMD) party 'won' national elections from 1978 to 1988.

1990 saw the invasion of the country by Tutsi military outfit Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF) operating from the neighbouring Uganda. Habyarimana retaliated by arresting as well as slaughtering hundreds of Tutsis between 1990 and 1993. A power-sharing transitional government which included the RPF, was arranged after an agreement was reached in Tanzania in 1993. Hutu extremists were bitterly opposed to this 'unity' arrangement and were determined to avert it. The situation exploded after the death of Habyarimana and President Cyprien Ntaryamira of Burundi in a plane shot over the Rwandan capital of Kigali in April 1994. The result was swift and unrestrained carnage of Tutsis and moderate Hutus by the country's military in cahoots with Hutu militia groups going by the names *Interahamwe* ('Those Who Attack Together') and *Impuzamugambi* ('Those Who Have the Same Goal'). Before long the massacre spread throughout Kigali and throughout the country. Government officials and radio stations took active roles in the spread of the bloodshed by providing the assailants with resources and virulent anti-Tutsi propaganda through radio stations. 800,000 victims were recorded in a period of three months (Melvern 2006). Meanwhile the carnage and endless streams of desperate refugees fleeing the country were beamed to the world through international television news outlets which people in Botswana saw. This is the context within which the Rwandan genocide was evoked in the 2000 debate in Botswana even though there are no parallels between the two scenarios.

This paper does not delve into the theoretical context of ethnicity in Africa suffice to indicate that there is established critique of these theories among others by Williams (2015) and Bonny Ibhawoh, with the latter postulating that:

Theories of ethnicity in Africa fall within three typologies -primordialism, instrumentalism and constructivism. While early colonial-inspired primordialist models perceived ethnicity in Africa as a carryover from Africa's primordial past, instrumentalist models saw ethnicity mainly as a tool in the hands of both the colonial state and post-colonial elites in furthering their interests. More recent constructivist models construe ethnicity not simply as an instrument in the hands of a colonists or African elites but as the product of the complex socio-political dynamics of colonial and post-colonial societies. The 'invention of tradition' thesis and other constructivist models go further than previous models in acknowledging the complexities and nuances that underlie the historical processes that have produced ethnic identities in Africa. Yet, even this model is problematic in its essentializing treatment of ethnic identities in Africa. This essay offers a critique of the dominant paradigms that have been employed to explain ethnicity in Africa, with particular focus on the instrumentalist and constructivist models. It argues that for all the insights they provide for understanding the dynamics of social and political relations in Africa, there is a need to move

beyond these models and seek novel ways of conceptualizing and historicizing social identities in Africa (Ibhawoh 2010:221).

To some extent Ibhawoh's suggestions can be applied to both Botswana and Rwanda. Naomi Weir's article 'Primordialism, constructivism, instrumentalism and Rwanda', is insightful on Rwanda. The argument is that 'conflict seemingly inspired by ethnic hates is in fact driven by the aims of political leaders' (Weir 2012:1).

In this work ethnicity simply means cultural and linguistic identity while tribalism and tribal bigotry refers to demagogic mobilisation and exploitation of ethnicity for political and economic gain. This paper is a straightforward account of the discourse as it unfolded in Botswana from 2000 to 2002. Anthropologist Richard Werbner has already studied aspects of this discourse from the perspective of citizenship and public anthropology of the Bakalanga elites (2004), and what he calls 'cosmopolitan ethnicity, entrepreneurship and the nation' with focus on Botswana's ethnic minority elites (2002).

Perhaps, it suffices to note that in addition to evoking the Rwandan genocide and occasionally apartheid South Africa, the contributors to the debate did not mention the 1983 'genocide next door' -Zimbabwe. This '*Gukurahundi*' as it was called, was the massacre of some 20,000 Ndebele people by North Korean-trained Fifth Brigade of the Zimbabwean army with thousands of refugees and their leader Joshua Nkomo fleeing into Botswana.

Anti-Bakalanga Hate Speech and Response

In July 2000 an anonymous but highly inflammatory and virulently anti-Bakalanga letter appeared in the private *Mmegi Monitor* newspaper. Copies of the letter were said to have been put into government of Botswana envelopes and deposited into pigeonholes of Tswana-speaking Members of Parliament and House of Chiefs at the National Assembly building. The letter, which may have sounded similar to propaganda material that triggered the Rwandan genocide, started off by declaring that:

It's such a pity that you Batswana cannot get along with each other. *O a itse ruri go utusa Botlhoko* [You know it really hurts]. You Batswana are so stupid that you are jealous of each other and you cannot unite. Can't you people see that Makalaka are strongly united in this country and they are trying to take this country away from us. Masire has made a big mistake by making Mogae as a president. Can't you see who Mogae's advisors are? Can't you people see which people have economic power in this country? Can't you see who is running the media in this country? If you do not know, it is all Makalaka. Batswana men and women stop sleeping with your shoes on. Don't let Makalaka take this country from us. They are hungry for power and they want to revenge plus they want to rule this country. They have formed Kalanga cliques and societies in this country and when you ask them what the society is all about, they will tell you that they want to improve developments in their respective villages. But that is a damn lie. The Society is for uniting all Kalangas in the country against Batswana (that's what they call us as if they are not Batswana themselves. The society is also meant for Kalanga's to employ each other in the government or private sectors. When a Kalanga owns a business they should employ only Makalaka that's their motto and we already have businesses like that, they will even talk to you in Sekalaka in their businesses. I am not talking about Francistown. It is happening right here in Gaborone ('Concerned Motswana Citizen' 2000).

In the post-colony the citizens of Botswana are all called Batswana while Tswana-speakers can be referred to as Tswana for distinction. However, the author of the letter referred to Tswana-speakers as

Batswana to indicate that they were proper and 'pure' Batswana while pejoratively referring to Bakalanga as Makalaka. The Society being misrepresented and scandalized by the author is Society for Promotion of Ikalanga Language (SPIL) which had been formed 16 years prior to ensure survival of the Ikalanga language and culture in the face of official marginalization by government language policy. It is worth citing the author directly at length so that the tone of his/her message is not diluted as he/she continued the vitriol including mentioning of names of respected senior citizens for abuse and slander:

They say there is tribalism in Botswana and yet they are the ones practicing it. On the streets they will even tell you that they are ruling this country and of course they are. They will tell you that it is because they are intelligent. But let me tell you something, Makalaka are not intelligent they are corrupt, very corrupt like Zimbabweans and very tribalistic. They want their own kind and they want to dominate that's what they are. When you have a Kalanga boss he/she will hire and promote only Kalangas. Masire made a big blunder by choosing Mogae as President. Mogae is a real Kalanga and so is Tebelelo Seretse [Minister for Commerce and Industry]. Mogae and his advisors do not like Ian [Khama, late President Seretse's son, Chief of Bangwato and Mogae's controversial Vice President], they are using him because they know Ian is a white man and he does not know anything about Kalanga and tribalism. He was raised by a white woman. That is why Mogae created a post for Tebelelo to spy on Ian, in case he changes.

I am not talking tribalism, I am talking facts and it is really painful for Batswana to see Makalaka in control of our country. Look at Mogae's advisors, they are all Kalanga's, [Louis] Nchindo, [Julian] Nganunu, [Gobe] Matenge and [Richard] Mannathoko. Mogae and his Kalanga advisors are the ones who didn't want [Ponatshego] Kedikilwe or any other Minister as a president because they knew they wouldn't let them do what they are doing. They are just using Ian. You have to get together and topple this Makalaka especially Nganunu who is in the judiciary and also interfering with the President's structures, look at who heads most corporations in this country and look at who are the board members of most corporations in this country. Look at what Nchindo has done to Orapa [Diamond mine]. Orapa is a Kalanga community and they all hold high positions. This is what Masalila did to BDVC [Botswana Diamond Valuing Company] when he was the Personnel Manager, this are (sic) just but a few examples. You won't see any negativity about Kalanga's in the media because they own the media and the editors are Kalanga's. They are using Ian to their Kalanga advantage and yet their media is tarnishing his image because his grandfather (sic) destroyed the Kalanga [Nswazwi] community and they are destroying his power base in the country.

However, some of the individuals mentioned above happened to be Mogae's long time close friends cutting across tribal lines, and some could not be identified as Bakalanga. In fact, Mogae and Kedikilwe were Batale, originally of Kalanga stock but since assimilated into Bangwato to the extent of having completely lost their tribal language and identity. The author was unrelenting in his/her vitriol:

During the day in the office you will think Kalangas are not friends but wait until 10:00 pm, you will be surprised that they visit each other at homes, they will discuss you and plot against you. You wouldn't know because you will think they don't like each other but they hold Kalanga societies at homes. When a Kalanga tables a motion in parliament they have already agreed about it at home. Look at what happened to the Ministry of Transport. Do you know why the real reason why plate numbers like BG, BB, BL, etc [reflecting tribal territories among others] were destroyed? It is because the then Minister of Transport [Chapson] Butale or [Patrick] Balopi was intimidated by

other MP's plate numbers since where he comes from there was no plate number. Stop fighting with [Ian] Khama, talk and teach him and show him what is going on. All other tribes are okay except Makalaka. They know that they are not Batswana, they are Zimbabweans [perhaps because Ikalanga language is closely related to Shona in Zimbabwe], they were dogs of the Ndebele's and the Ndebele's chased them away because of these kinds of things and now they are practicing it in Botswana and you are letting it happen. But you people of this country, stop hating each other, stop fighting Khama and fight against the Kalanga's for they are fighting against us under the carpet.

You are not wise to see what is happening and you will realize when it is too late and your own kids are going to suffer under the Kalanga rule for they are stoneheaded and have no mercy. It started with MmaChiepe who made Kalangas draw a peanut symbol at the back of their application letter.... She also made most of the secondary school headmasters Makalaka, she choose (sic) Lone Matshaba a Kalanga to be a head of Molepolole College, she also choose (sic) a Kalanga to be a head of Tonota College of Education, as well as Tlokwenng College of Education, and 90% of the secondary school heads are Kalanga's as well as the most directors (sic) in the Ministry of Education, especially primary department which has 99% Kalanga bosses. It is because you cannot see what is happening you should start to open your eyes and do something.

One thing very serious: don't ever have a Kalanga as a friend, and do not even trust them. They will pretend to be your friends but deep down they do not like you because you are [not] a Mokalaka and they will not be honest to you, they will tell another Mokalaka what you have said and they will call you nkwa [bushman].

It was said that the letter was nearly read in the National Assembly but some parliamentarians objected, given its obnoxious contents and tone. The *Mmegi Monitor* (11-17 July 2000) referred to the letter as having 'the potential of ripping the nation apart'. Among MPs interviewed by *Mmegi Monitor* was Ronald Sebege who said, 'I never felt anything I just thought it was one of the citizens expressing his views which is a guaranteed constitutional right. What I however find disturbing is the very abrasive language used, even if this person had any grievances I think there are better forums to raise them'. Another MP, Daisy Pholo, who was 'shocked by the obscene way in which it addresses the person of the president.... Outside the letter being insulting to the President she thinks it expresses the wrong perceptions held by some members of the public'. She went on to counsel that 'Unless we act fast and stem this tendency in the bud we are likely to experience a repeat of the Rwanda genocide' (*Mmegi Monitor* 11-17 July 2000). MP for opposition Botswana National Front (BNF), Robert Molefhabangwe, who claimed to have been 'the first to receive the letter condemned it as disgusting'. He suspected the letter to have been written by an MP in collaboration with some civil servants because government envelopes were used to deliver it. He felt that this development tarnished Botswana's civil service.

The *Mmegi Monitor* was heavily criticized in some quarters for publishing the letter whose insensitive contents were seen as severely undermining national unity. In defending its publication of the letter 'by some narrow-minded cultural bigots' the newspaper editorial indicated that 'Our aim in publishing the letter is not that we derive any mirth from seeing the Kalangas and even some of our leaders vilified. As a responsible newspaper we believe that part of our role is to hold a mirror up to society to see its beauty and even the stains that besmirch our spotless beauty as a nation. Obviously this task cannot be attained if we all the time look at our beauty and decide to conveniently ignore our less attractive aspects' (*Mmegi Monitor* 11-17 July 2000). The newspaper editorial argued that

It is self-defeating to be smoothed by the illusion that attempts to address tribalism necessarily lead to entrenchment of tribalism. The publication of this letter... serves as a reminder that if the ugly

monster, ethnicity (sic), is making inroads into our society, it needs to be fought resolutely.... Vision 2016 comes out very clearly that the vision is to create a tolerant society in which citizens will accommodate and appreciate a divergent cultural milieu but this vision looks a long way off from that goal when deep seated cultural intolerance can still take hold in this day and age.

Though we find tribalism distasteful we are convinced that government is caught in her own cobweb, for a long time there has been constant advise to repeal sections 77, 78 and 79 of the constitution that discriminate on the basis of tribe. We are still not sure whether the recently established Presidential commission on the House of Chiefs and tribes will bring about the sought for equality before the law.

Our education system, both formal and informal, as a primary socialization agent, has been identified as a sore area that is not positively contributing to our cultural plurality and tolerance. Our contention is that our education system should be reflective of our cultural diversity and all efforts should be made to achieve this to avoid tragic results. We condemn the writers of this ridiculous story and call upon all right thinking citizens to condemn all divisive notions.

One contributor, Tobokani Chilume while against the newspaper for publishing the anonymous letter made 'a clarion call to the offended to exercise great restraint and tolerance for such sick members of our society' and 'To those for whom "Spoko" professes to speak, (whom he terms proper Batswana), I also urge you not to take the vice bait being dangled.... His views are of a morally debased man which do not contribute to nation-building' (Chilume 18-24 July 2000). To Bugalo Chilume (18-24 July 2000), the newspaper could have published the letter because 'Being the latest and one of about seven privately-owned newspapers in a limited and fiercely competitive market, the newspaper decided to publish the letter in order to beef up its sales despite the potential repercussions it might have on inter-tribal relationships in the country'. He also suspected that the appearance of the diatribe in *Mmegi Monitor* could be that the editorial team sympathized with it.

Nonetheless, some contributors supported the newspaper for publishing the letter since it was already in the public domain and even presented to Parliament. Lebogang Lekgotla was one such supporter and said, 'I do not condone or endorse tribalism and I would like to condemn the writer(s) of that letter with the strongest of words. Such elements do not have a place in this peace-loving society' (Lekgotla 15-21 August 2000). Lekgotla noted that it was important for the letter to be discussed because 'you cannot solve a problem by denying its existence'. He or she continued, 'Batswana should guard their democracy jealously so that the carnage which is taking place in Burundi, Rwanda and other countries will not find its way here. People who harbour tribalistic feelings ought to be exposed and reprimanded thoroughly'.

Interestingly, *Mmegi Monitor* of 25-31 July 2000 observed that 'With the nation still reeling from embarrassment of a hate letter against the Bakalanga... some people are pointing accusing finger at the Francistown MP, Tshelang Masisi as the first public figure who legitimized tribal hate'. It was reported that on 17 February 2000 in Parliament 'Masisi had uttered similar sentiments to those expressed in the letter.... But is it unfortunate because he represents the very people [Francistown West constituency] that are now being vilified at his instigation', these words were attributed to one Francistown West resident. The newspaper even reproduced the Hansard of the same date to compare similarities between what Masisi had said in Parliament and the contents of the hate letter. 'When Mmegi contacted Masisi on the allegations that he could have either encouraged or even participated in the writing of the letter he flatly denied it. "I have never made any reference to Bakalanga as a domineering group. I only said there are instances of tribalism in the workplace carried out by different tribes and one particular tribe".' As for the contents of the hate letter Masisi was reported to have said he did not see anything untoward about it, and said it was only an individual expressing his or her opinions and feelings. Masisi was from Tswana-speaking Bakgatla

baga Mmanaana.

Gabriel Komboni, attorney and Kalanga, wrote in the *Mmegi Monitor* expressing disappointment at MPs Sebege and Masisi for saying that the hate letter writer was only expressing his or her personal views. Komboni explained how the hateful views expressed in the letter contravened the legal and constitutional provisions of the country:

Honourable Members of Parliament who subscribe to the contents of the letter should know that Panel Code outlaws such tendencies as Section 92 thereof states that ‘Any person who utters any words or publishes any writing expressing or showing hatred, ridicule, or contempt for any person or group of persons wholly or mainly because of his or their race, tribe, place of origin, colour or creed is guilty of an offence.

Some MPs including Mr Masisi, have said the author of the letter was entitled to his freedom of expression in terms of the Constitution. One wonders whether they ever consulted the Constitution on this point. For their information, Section 12 of the Constitution, which guarantees the freedom of expression, further states that such freedom of expression can be limited by law in the interests of public morality, as well as for the purpose of protecting rights and freedoms of other persons etc. Section 92 of the Panel Code, already referred to above, and other provisions of other laws, such as those outlawing publication of obscene literature, are such laws limiting the right to freedom of expression (Komboni 01-08 August 2000).

To Christopher Dambe, Kalanga businessman, ‘The malicious, provocative, contemptible and abusive letter... was definitely not just the design of a lunatic’ as it was guided by expert writers. He believed strongly that ‘The scatterbrain is made out to be courageous and daring. Hence, he was made to produce a very effective document in rather disjointed language to avoid revealing the real origin of the idea. He is Don Quixote. Presidents of nations have been easily assassinated because of the influence on scatterbrains by some rabble-rousers’ (Dambe 01-08 August 2000). Dambe argued that by naming the country Botswana, which reflects ethnic identity of one of the tribes in the country, by the founding leaders at independence had misled some Tswana-speakers to think of themselves as the only rightful owners of the Republic. To Dambe given such a scenario ‘one cannot help but imagine that there will, one day, be unwarranted conflicts. A senseless letter like that, written by moron, misguided by daydreamers, could easily result in riots’. His advice as that the general public ought to be informed that while the country was named after a tribe it belonged to all its citizens, failing which the name should be changed.

Confrontation in Contributions to the Balopi Commission

All over the country ethnic minorities welcomed the Balopi Commission and made both verbal and written submissions arguing for repealing of the offending sections 77, 78 and 79 of the constitution. There were also suggestions that the House of Chiefs be reconstituted to include groups hitherto not represented. Others argued for a more inclusive house of representatives or delegates to cater for all other interest groups in Botswana. However, there was a general consensus that the institution of chieftainship should be maintained for cultural continuity. In some bigger tribal territories, most notably in Bangwato territory or Central District, many groups demanded independence from Bangwato hegemony and control from Serowe. Nevertheless, this development provoked what Werbner (2004) calls ‘neo-conservative backlash’ from Tswana-speakers who saw no discrimination in the above cited clauses of the Constitution and argued strongly for the maintenance of the status quo. The editorial of *Mmegi Monitor* (22-28 August 2000) observed that ‘Cultural bigots argue that in Botswana nobody has been denied an opportunity on the basis of their tribal origin and thus the constitutional change is inconsequential. Little do these prophets of doom

realize the magnitude of psychological damage that hangs like shackles around the necks of the so-called minority tribes. We support the envisaged changes and call upon everyone, who swears by national unity, to ensure that the constitutional amendments are made’.

In Serowe the Bangwato leadership were quite disturbed by the new development and felt that the minority groups were ungrateful of ‘Bangwato hospitality’. Some Bangwato aristocrats even demanded that those tired of ‘Bangwato hospitality’ should pack their belongings and leave the territory. At a well-attended and emotionally charged *kgotla* meeting in Serowe one person, Dr Bontshetse Mazile, a Kalanga and University of Botswana (UB) academic, was reported to have been the solitary voice against Bangwato’s militant and conservative stance. Dr Mazile and President Mogae (who instituted the Balopi Commission) were praised by MA Lebang from Mokobeng village in Tswapong region of the Central District. ‘These are the only two people so far who have a long term vision, who have seen on TV and listened to the Radio about the situation in Rwanda and they do not want this to happen to our country, unlike Kgosi Sediegegeng Kgamane and other Bamangwato’ (Lebang 29 August -04 September 2000). Nevertheless, Mogae, who himself came from Serowe and had the Chief of Bangwato (Ian Khama) as his Vice President, had openly declared that he saw no discrimination in the constitutional clauses.

In the Bakalanga village of Masunga in the North East District, Kgosi Christopher Masunga, who was also a member of the House of Chiefs, was said not to have minced his words. When making his contribution to the Balopi Commission he ‘took a swipe at the ex-officio members of the House of Chiefs whom he said are treated like demigods. To show their superiority over others, he said that they stay in the Parliamentary flats until their retirement whereas others move out when parliament is dissolved. That is not all, they even continue to get some allowances after parliament dissolves’, Masunga charged. He accused the eight of abusing their voting privileges, which he said worked against the wishes of the other members’ (Sekokonyane 12-18 September 2000). We are also told that at the same *kgotla* meeting in Masunga:

Prominent businessman Richard Mannathoko was the toast of the day. His address was in three languages; Ikalanga, Setswana and English. He also did not beat about the bush. ‘None of the eight tribes have ever ruled this area. This is our area’, he said to rousing approval from the audience. He said traditionally, Bakalanga did not have a paramount chief. He said instead they were spread in small localities and ruled by chiefs. ‘We are not interested in paramount chiefs. What we have is enough. What we are talking about is human rights’, he said....

He said the House of Chiefs be abolished because it divided the nation. He said a new institution that would recognize other tribes, should be set up. Mannathoko said, according to the Constitution, Bakalanga do not exist. But said they traced their history, to the 1600s, adding that the Bangwato found them here. ‘We only merged with Bangwato through an alliance. Khama [III] was a great diplomat. The issue of land only arose during the reign of Tshekedi who was a terrorist’, Mannathoko charged.... He said since there were less than 30 tribes in Botswana, they could be represented in the House of Chiefs. There are 120 councillors in the Central District but no one complains’, he said (Sekokonyane 12-18 September 2000).

A group of 17 Bakalanga professionals and businessmen made lengthy written submission to the Balopi Commission against sections 77, 78 and 79 of the Constitution. They called for replacement of the House of Chiefs with a House of Delegates. The proposed House of Delegates ‘will serve as a balance to check the power of the National Assembly and the Executive, and it will contribute to nation-building, reflect modern international trends, and be truly representative of a cross-section of Botswana society’ (*Mmegi Monitor*, 05-11 September 2000). In addition to the abolition of the three sections of the Constitution they called for review of discriminatory legislation arising from those sections, such as the Tribal Territories

Act, the Chieftainship Act and the Tribal Land Act, and other discriminatory policies and practices which they believed only served to entrench tribalism. Their argument for replacement of the House of Chiefs was predicated on the observation that it 'has had no real effect on the policies adopted by the National Assembly, has been criticized by some of its own chairmen, and has served no useful purpose'. The 17 members of the Bakalanga elite also presented the history and linguistic development of their people from their own perspective, and argued that some non-Tswana speaking minorities had occupied the land before the arrival of Tswana-speakers.

Among letter writers supporting the status quo was SS Gaadingwe who wrote from Mogoditshane in the outskirts of Gaborone. He claimed that 'We have been listening to all the deliberations made to the Balopi commission. None of these deliberations has ever clearly come out and demonstrated how the sections are discriminatory. What only surfaced is that the people need some autonomy to run their local affairs, which the government tried to provide through a management structure called Districts. If these management structures are not sufficient people must say so and not to try to find discrimination which is not in existence' (Gaadingwe 05-11 September 2000).

Puso Bothata writing from Tlokweng near Gaborone expressed similar sentiments to that of Gaadingwe, and made reference to the Rwandan genocide, and took serious issue with Tshekedi Khama being labelled a terrorist. His view, held by many other Tswana-speakers, was that despite complaints of constitutional discrimination the ethnic minorities had done quite well in the Botswana body politic:

Somewhere in Central Africa the Hutus and the Tutsis are butchering one another for no other reason other than that the Tutsis do not want to be under a Government in which the Hutus are predominant. The Hutus use the same kind of argument.

We in Botswana have never had this mindset until Parliament passed a motion calling on Batswana not to perceive themselves as many tribes and that as a measure of nation-building we should have a constitution which is tribally-neutral. The response has been the exact opposite.

The same ethnic divisions tearing the Hutus and Tutsis apart are being proposed by some people in this country. Old wounds are being opened up so much so, that a respected leader of the Bangwato, Tshekedi Khama, was described as a terrorist. Richard Mannathoko and his fellow travellers are sowing the seeds of destruction in this country.

All of a sudden, after many years of relative calm, peace and stability in a country once described as an 'island of sanity in a sea of madness' some Batswana have suddenly woken up to the fact that they are being oppressed and discriminated against....

In Botswana our Chief Justice and our Attorney General are all members of the so-called 'minority' groups not listed among the eight in the Constitution. The chairman of our Law Society is a well-respected member of a 'minority' tribe.

The 'minority' groups are well represented in government the parastatal and private sectors. This is because the so-called 'principal' eight never entrenched discriminatory laws, like the whites in South Africa did on the Bantu Education Act.

All of us should be proud of the staff of our foreign mission which is predominantly made up of members of the 'minority' tribes who are not listed in our constitution. We owe our popularity abroad to their efforts. Long live the so-called 'minority' tribes (Bothata 26 September -02 October 2000).

'War Talk' in Response to Submissions to the Balopi Commission

The written submission by the Gaborone based Bakalanga elite and oral submission by those upcountry provoked a harsh response from some Tswana-speakers, and equally acerbic counter-response from

some Bakalanga contributors. The most controversial response to the contribution of the 17 members of the Bakalanga elite was by Metlhaetsile Leepile from the media fraternity. Like other pro-status quo commentators he argued that there was no discrimination in the Constitution, and neither did the phrase 'principal tribe' nor 'paramount chief' appear in the Constitution. To Leepile the submission by the 17 influential Bakalanga, which he contemptuously called *Idokumente* (his rendition of Ikalanga corruption of 'document'), was just propaganda motivated by selfishness and tribalism. In his polemical broadside he stated that:

It is a figment of their imagination, their flawed interpretation of the Botswana Constitution, which they fed the public as fact.

It is all right to debate the Constitution. It is all right to be proud of one's ethnicity. However, in doing so people should avoid making emotive, false, divisive and provocative statements. Which distort our history. They should also avoid playing the supremacist card because that is the stuff that can easily inflame the emotions of other inhabitants of this land. While the authors of the *Idokumente*, appear to promote egalitarian values on the surface, they clearly harbour deep-rooted prejudices against ethnic Batswana –the people they call 'principal tribes'. They view the latter as usurpers of their land, latecomers who constitute a tiny percentage of this population....

My last word goes to the authors and signatories of the Bakalanga *Idokumente*, I, a peace loving Motswana, am very concerned about their bigotry. I am concerned about the chauvinistic and supremacist sentiments expressed in their document. I am concerned about the way they are trying to distort our history in pursuit of their selfish agendas. It is one thing to preach ethnic pride and quite another to preach hatred and ethnic chauvinism. Many of the signatories of this terrible document hold or have held high ranking positions in government and have therefore had ample opportunity to positively enhance change since independence.

The leader of this group, Gobe Matenge, is by his own account, a close friend of the current president. He has been in government with Mogae and other Batswana leaders whose ethnic groups he likes to malign since independence. Before he and his clique of rabble-rousers could pass the buck, they should ask themselves what is it that they have done to promote peace and harmony in this country. If they can stoop so low as to publish an inflammatory that debases our history, a document that depicts Bakalanga as a super people... they will find it increasingly difficult to defend themselves against criticisms that they are nepotistic and dangerous (Leepile 15-21 September 2000).

Naturally, Bakalanga felt quite offended by Leepile's contribution in *Mmegi*. The first to respond was Ndi Denjebuya writing from Tutume in the Central District. To him Leepile was the author of the outrageous article that appeared on 17 June 2000 in *Mmegi Monitor*. According to Denjebuya, Leepile in his 'second article' was trying to manipulate history and statistics to preach and justify 'Ngwatu Imperialism over the minority groups'. By 'Ngwatu' he referred to Bangwato (Leepile's tribe) specifically and Tswana-speakers in general. Denjebuya then brought down the polemical sledgehammer:

He sees nothing wrong with the Constitution. He has the backing of the former President [Masire] and the Ngwatu tribesmen (*Mmegi* 22-28th Sep. 2000). The latter's article is very instructive. They are telling the whole world that the Constitution should not be tampered with or else all hell will break loose! Well, well, well! What a pathetic scenario. There might not be outright apartheid like in South Africa where facilities were only reserved for the whites, but discrimination is conspicuous....

Now turning to the concerned Motswana (*Monitor* 17/07/2000) who insulted everybody

from the highest office, asked how the Bakalanga got so educated more than Tswana speakers (especially Mungwatu). Well here is the answer: Leepile because of your sadistic blood-sucking terrorism (Tshekedi), we were pushed to the limit, Tshekedi was so fond of rounding the Kalangas into a Kraal and flogging them, that was his sport, period. It is said that one Kalanga lady gave birth in a kraal while Tshekedi was dragging her by her leg in order to satisfy his sadistic appetites. May her soul rest in peace and his (Tshekedi) rest in hell!

Therefore, when the missionaries were preaching Christianity and introducing education, Tshekedi got bored. One morning he decided to round all the Kalanga into a Kraal and flogged them all the way to school! So that they (Kalangas) can go crazy (that way he would have completely got rid of the 'repulsive' Kalangas. After he had driven all Kalangas to school so that their minds could be driven into oblivion, he and his warriors stayed behind to enjoy the Kalangas wealth because Mungwatu never knew the meaning of hard work. They stole cattle and other agricultural products from Bakalanga and Batswapong, while the school teachers were busy making the Kalangas crazy, they (Ngwatu) were busy drinking milk from the Kalangas' cattle (Denjebuya 03-09 October 2000).

In a way Denjebuya seemed to be borrowing a leaf from Resident Commissioner Charles Rey in 1930 when he lashed out at Bangwato and exonerating Bakalanga before somersaulting to lay the blame squarely on Kalanga leader, John Nswazwi. Denjebuya continued saying 'Now because of this, the Ngwatu will stick to the only thing they have left –their psychological grip over the minorities –denying them their basic human rights'. He also resorted to war talk by producing a line similar to one written before by Christopher Dambe as indicated above about the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, 'It took one bullet to kill a President of one of the Balkan states to throw the whole world ablaze. It will happen here'.

A swift response came from the elderly Mmualefhe Raditladi, a Gaborone-based Mongwato aristocrat. 'For too long the Bangwato have been a subject of rebuke and insult, pinprick and provocation but tunes have come that as you brandish so shall Mongwato, brandish', he charged. Raditladi said that Leepile's contribution 'hinged on Bakalanga leaders fanning trouble' and not on Ngwato hegemony over the Kalanga. He gave a long list of Bakalanga who had peacefully worked with Bangwato in various projects for the benefit of their communities. 'Seretse Khama's witness when he married Ruth Williams at the Kensington Registry Office, London, was Philip Sechele –a Kalanga from Tutume' (Raditladi 10-16 October 2000). He went on to say:

It is by right of birth that you are a Mperi just as I am a Mongwato Earl of the House of Sekgoma. Just as you should not regret who you are so should I. As far as the naked truth goes, you and I are first among equals and therefore there is no reason to be at daggers drawn....

The Mokalaka and Mongwato have co-existed before you were born: they have intermarried from time immemorial –e seng jaaka o rojana jaana [not as you insult us]. Rre Peter Mazebe Sebina was (terrorist) Tshekedi's Secretary and latterly his nephew Monametsi Chiepe ([Dr] Gaositwe's [Chiepe] brother) succeeded his uncle in the post. When the BDP [Botswana Democratic Party] candidate for Nkange parliamentary seat, Rre Obed Chilume was introduced in Tutume it was Rre Amos Dambe who, in the company of Seretse Khama, pleaded (in allusion to Seretse) that bygones be bygones and the Nswazwis should reconcile with Ngwato.... I was there....

At the height of what became known as the 'Seretse Affair' when he was banished to the United Kingdom, his age mates, Malekantwa, among them Phenyamere Mazile, left their beards unshaven in protest against the banishment. They vowed to shave only on his return.... Rre Mazile is father to Mmaetsho Tebelelo Seretse (Minister of Commerce and Industry) and Dr Bontshetse Mazile, a UB lecturer.

The grandson of (terrorist) Tshekedi married a Nkalanga lady and the sun did not rise from the West that day.

The old man went further to castigate Denjabuya and even cast serious aspersion on his mental fitness as he felt he had insulted his late chief and relative, Tshekedi Khama:

I have read, with interest, what Denjabuya, in his insane megalomania imagines to be history, which to him starts with Tshekedi. Shame on you Denje-biba. 'After he had driven all the Kalangas to school so that their minds could be driven into oblivion, he and his warriors stayed behind to enjoy the Kalangas wealth because a Mongwato never knew the meaning of hard work'.

Midsummer madness is all I can put down to this hate-talk as the guy is a psychological study and I am not sure whether to put him in the same class as the demented or imbeciles. Read the following irresponsible hotch-potch: 'it took one bullet to kill a President of one of the Balkan States to throw the whole world ablaze. It will happen here'.

The ecstatic non-entity is reveling in the joy of ignorance nursing his brand of prejudice while the storm outside is gathering in intensity (Raditladi 10-16 October 2000).

Dr Changu Mannathoko, daughter of Richard Mannathoko, lecturer at UB and a signatory to the Bakalanga submission to the Balopi Commission, responded to Leepile's article by saying 'Our submission is about equality and the strengthening of our democracy.... Nothing on our submission is an attack on any individual or community... Leepile's Idokumente is... hurling insults at us, the individuals who made the submission in fulfillment of our democratic responsibilities' (Mannathoko 22-28 September 2000). She also linked Leepile's contribution to the demagogic letter by the 'Concerned Motswana' that triggered fiery exchanges in the media as indicated above. Raditladi was not spared either for 'his muddled opinion'.

Another UB academic, Dr. Amos Thapisa, also took a swipe at Leepile's contribution saying that it lacked the balance needed from a media practitioner in its portrayal of Bakalanga as tribal supremacists. He enumerated several instances of oral presentations to the Balopi Commission by Tswana-speakers and media articles which demonstrated their tribal supremacy but Leepile did not factor these in his article. Like others before him, Thapisa saw striking similarities between Leepile's contribution and the letter by 'Concerned Motswana Citizen' (Thapisa 22-28 September 2000).

Elmon Tafa, a graduate student at University of Birmingham in the United Kingdom, was of the view that 'ethnic bigots, with their hands on the reigns of power, supported by accommodating intellectuals –the likes of Leepile –are clearly determined to ensure that' ethnic equality 'does not happen' in Botswana. 'Tragically, save for meaningless gyrations and expensive commissions of inquiry which are no more than public relations exercises geared towards hoodwinking the nation into believing that something is being done, Botswana has yet to come to grips with this ticking time bomb' (Tafa 22-28 September 2000). Tafa also accused Leepile and his ilk for claiming to be patriotic 'peace lovers' and dismissing those 'demanding a fair deal as "rabble-rousers" and trouble-makers'. He concluded his lengthy article in *Mmegi* by saying 'With the barbaric ethnic cleansing in Rwanda and Burundi still vivid in our minds, it is the duty of students of history like Leepile to warn the ruling classes of the grave consequences of discriminating against ethnic minorities rather than to waste time indulging in wistful fantasies about some allegedly hunky-dory bygone era of feudalism'.

Futile Intervention against Bigotry and the Ill-fated Government White Paper

Attempts were made to try and contain the explosive situation and potential damage caused by tribalism to the country known globally for being a bastion of peace. UB's Directorate of Research and Development convened a major international conference on the subject in May 2000, and this resulted in a book with the title *Minorities in the Millennium* edited by Professor Isaac Mazonde (2002). Other papers constituted a special issue of the respected *Journal of Southern African Studies*, volume 28, number 4 for 2002 edited by Richard Werbner of the University of Manchester.

Although the Bakalanga tried quite hard to argue that they were only interested in promotion of their language and culture in the country's democratic space, their Tswana-speaking opponents were not convinced. SPIL was accused of masquerading as a Kalanga cultural association while clandestinely pushing for empowerment of Bakalanga takeover of the country's political and economic power. By late 2001 the Tswana-speakers had registered their own organization they called Pitso ya Batswana (PYB) to counter SPIL pound for pound in accusations and counter accusations of tribalism. The hostility between the two organizations was so serious that some political leaders advised that President Mogae should intervene. For his part Mogae blamed the UB-based academics, who made a significant portion of the leadership of these organisations, as promoting tribalism in Botswana. He also said that people who pursued such a cause were bored with peace that prevailed in Botswana.

In late 2001, a local non-governmental organization Ditshwanelo Centre for Human Rights organized a conference where representatives from different stakeholders including SPIL and PYB made presentations. The journalist, Tutwane Letshwiti, made an interesting observation of the proceedings:

Ditshwanelo... scored a major victory this week when it brought the two main rival ethnic organisations in the country face to face.

Despite the acrimonious exchanges between Pitso Ya Batswana and SPIL that has been featuring prominently in the media, the two sides emerged from the confrontation in a more amicable mood.

Despite the occasional raising of voices and clenching of teeth, the seeds for further dialogue were, in the end, created. In fact, a representative of SPIL, Batshani Ndaba, urged the convenor of the debate, Alice Mogwe of Ditshwanelo to think about a follow up conference. Credit must also go to Ndaba and representative of Pitso Ya Batswana veteran BDP politician Moutlakgola Nwako. Both men massaged their tempers and made the best of a bad situation. It was Nwako's whimsical style and timeous jokes that prevented a potential fire.

However, in large measure, various professionals who attended the conference made a huge difference. The elderly Leonard Ngcongco, professor of history from the University of Botswana impressed the audience with his analogy of ethnicity in Botswana and how it was handled...

He said it was not only a problem in African as could be seen from the example of Yugoslavia and Spain. He urged the nation to unite to defend the ideals of Vision 2016. He warned that ugly incidents such the Tutsi-Hutu genocide of 1994 in Rwanda could erupt here if care was not taken (Tutwane 26 October – 01 November 2001).

Nevertheless, the Ditshwanelo conference served mainly as a public relations exercise as hostilities between SPIL and PYB continued, and even intensified in some instances. So serious was this development that SPIL mandated its Secretary, Dr Richard Tabulawa (UB academic), to write an open letter to President Mogae in the media explaining what SPIL stood for. This was also meant to dispel what Tabulawa said was the often adverse portrayal of SPIL as a conspiratorial entity and purveyor of tribalism (Tabulawa 30 November -06 December 2001). This had no effect.

In 2002 PYB instituted legal proceedings at the High Court in a bid to block or postpone a planned national referendum on reform of an aspect of the country's judiciary. They believed that the country's judiciary was a bastion of Bakalanga and the referendum served to further entrench their interests. PYB lost the case, and for the impending referendum tried to warn the population through newspaper advertisement of a drawing of a vicious looking cobra snake ready to strike which depicted Bakalanga's alleged hidden agenda.

After a long delay government finally produced a draft White Paper on recommendations of the Balopi Commission. One of its recommendations was the removal of controversial sections 77, 78 and 79. House of Chiefs was also recommended to be given Setswana name *Ntlo ya Dikgosi* with membership increased to 33 designated members with three specially appointed ones. Previously the House of Chiefs had eight *ex-officio* members and four specially elected members. However, the draft White Paper was rejected outright by ethnic minorities as failing to achieve what they had fought hard for. For instance, Dr Lydia Nyathi-Ramahobo, UB academic and coordinator of Kamanakao Association of the Wayeyi dismissed the draft White Paper 'as mere game of word changes, and a mockery of the intelligence of the citizens of this country' (Mooketsi 22-28 February 2002).

However, the 'modest' recommendations of the White Paper were brutally dismissed by Tswana-speakers. In Serowe, where President Mogae addressed a meeting, the hostility was so severe that he had to shift his position in selling the document to villagers in his hometown. In Molepolole it was said that 'When President Mogae descends on the Bakwena capital on Thursday, he will find sharpened daggers waiting for him. Bakwena tribesmen who ferociously attacked Mogae and the government White Paper on the Balopi Commission at the Molepolole kgotla on Saturday, are itching for a face-to-face repeat come Thursday' (Nkala 19-25 April 2002). It was said that speakers were livid that Mogae was bent on pleasing *meratshwana*, a condescending term for tribal minorities.

Unsurprisingly, PYB made a press release which 'supports all those who are opposed to the main recommendations of the White Paper which tend to marginalize the institution of chieftainship which is widely accepted in this country as a unifying factor in our culture' (Pitso Ya Batswana Secretariat 19-25 April 2002). The organisation made a declaration that was a thinly veiled assault on its adversary, SPIL:

We are not convinced that what is contained in the draft White Paper is a consensus position since we are aware of the fact that a small and gullible group followed the Commission from place to place in some cases to create the impression that their minority view was being championed by an overwhelming majority. This minority even wrote to the President after the Balopi Report was submitted to government condemning the report's findings. We find a strange co-incidence that the draft White Paper has thrown out some of the main findings of the Balopi Report and aligned itself with those minority's views of marginalizing the Paramount Chiefs of the eight tribal territories. We are struck by the similarity between what the said minority wrote to the President and the position adopted by the White paper.

The PYB position seemed influential in government's eventual adoption and implementation of heavily watered down recommendations. Needless to say, the government's position greatly disappointed minority groups throughout the country. For instance, Chelwa ya Shekgalagari, a cultural organization for the Bakgalagadi people, could not hide its disillusionment. Its Publicity Secretary, Noah Salakae, wrote in a press release that 'This new development is not a unifying factor but rather a divisive strategy to destroying peace and stability purported to be prevalent in the country. We want to affirm that a comprehensive, lasting and just peace in Botswana can only be achieved if the government's role would be to facilitate the

implementation of people's resolutions and not recommend what to be done. The voice of the people is the voice of the Lord' (Salakae 03-09 May 2002).

Interestingly, it was not until almost two decades later that the debate on tribalism and reference to Rwanda would appear in public discourse in Botswana during the build-up to the 2019 general elections. Following the much publicised 2018 fallout between former President Ian Khama (2008-2018) and his handpicked successor, Mokgweetsi Masisi (the late MP Tshelang Masisi's younger brother), Khama embarked on a spirited campaign to dislodge Masisi and the BDP from power. He even helped form a new party called Botswana Patriotic Front (BPF) just before the 2019 general elections which enjoyed significant following among his Bangwato subjects in the Central District. On the campaign trail Khama was roundly condemned by many, including President Masisi, accusing him of peddling tribalism that could lead to the repeat of Rwandan genocide in Botswana (Makgala *et al.*, nd). Khama counter-accused Masisi of fomenting tribalism in Botswana which could plunge the country into a Rwandan style genocide. Part of Masisi's election plank was to give official recognition to marginalised languages and their introduction into the education system in their communities. By the time we were writing this piece some effort was being done by his government but it was obvious that a lot more needed to be done. However, introduction of community radios, which government had resisted in the past, did not seem to be firmly placed on the agenda.

Ironically and interestingly, post-genocide Rwanda has recorded impressive economic growth that is said to surpass that of Botswana. In some instances Rwanda has even been labelled the 'Singapore of Africa' while Botswana is now seen as the 'African Mirage' and not 'the African Miracle' (Magang 2015). Nowadays it is Botswana that benchmarks on Rwanda in terms of economic development. In June 2019 President Paul Kagame of Rwanda made a state visit to Botswana in what was possibly the first ever such visit by a Rwandan president to Botswana. Whereas critics accuse Kagame as a despot in Rwanda it was also observed that 'Rwanda's economy has averaged seven percent growth every year since 2000. Rwanda is the second easiest place to do business in Africa after Mauritius and ahead of Kenya, South Africa and Botswana. Poverty is in decline and perceived corruption is the lowest compared to other African countries' (Masalila 28 June 2019).

Conclusion

The government's refusal to set up a commission to investigate claims of nepotism and corruption allegedly peddled by the Bakalanga was instructive. Over the decades corruption scandals have been reported in the newspapers with a few cases involving cabinet ministers and senior government officials tried in the courts of law. However, there does not seem to be a discernible preponderance of Bakalanga or any other ethnic group in such cases that could have attracted attention.

Unfortunately, the nature of Botswana's government dominated economy and the executive's resolute stranglehold on the legislature also made it difficult for the elites of ethnic minorities to maintain steam in campaigning against government policy. Otherwise they would have struck at the very heart of their own economic interests and survival.

The bitter disappointment of the ethnic minorities was summed up by MP for Letlhakeng West (Bakgalagadi area) who declared that he did not sing the national anthem in Parliament in protest to the government's response to the recommendations of the Balopi Commission.

Nevertheless, it seems by the end of the twentieth century and by the turn of the twenty-first century nation-building in Botswana, despite its imperfections, was sustainable as a result of the country's democratic order, ancient tradition of open debate of issues of serious national concern through *kgotla*, multiple and layered ethnic identities, and academic as well as media symposia. The country's civil society despite

it being perceived as weak in relation to government in some quarters also played a commendable role. Therefore, talk of repeat of Rwandan genocide in Botswana was far-fetched as this was highly unlikely but the people's anger was understandable.

Interestingly, despite troubled Bangwato-Bakalanga history, Gobe Matenge, the influential and highly respected Kalanga leader and headman of his village, who was spoken about in uncomplimentary manner by Leepile above, indicated in his biography that his hero was Tshekedi Khama because he was a decisive and productive leader (Dingake 2011). Generally, indications are that Botswana will continue enjoying relative peace for the foreseeable future but heated ethnic issues could flare-up once in a while. The tribal associations had also become inactive or had hibernated.

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