

## **The Presidential ‘Rampeechane’ Rallying Cry: The Political Economy of Covid-19, Anti-Indian Rhetoric and the Discourse of Citizen Economic Empowerment in Botswana**

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I had to receive a deputation from the Indian inhabitants of the Bechuanaland Protectorate [colonial Botswana] who are full of grievances. They are a poor lot, no use to the Territory, living like and with natives and robbing them, spending no money in the Bechuanaland Protectorate but sending all they make away to India. I don't encourage them, so they complained to the Indian High Commissioner at Cape Town who complained to [the British High Commissioner Sir Herbert] Stanley who passed it on me. However, I was able to deal with their point satisfactorily and they accorded me a vote of thanks -rather to my astonishment.

—Resident Commissioner Charles Rey (1934)

Clearly, beneath the rhetoric of Citizen Economic Empowerment, there is a subliminally embedded Citizen Economic Disempowerment conspiracy that is probably target-specific. One Motswana of Indian origin candidly told me the reason he is successful is because of the colour of his skin and he was right: were he black like me, Government support through those multimillion tenders he chalks up every year would not have been readily forthcoming. His is the colour of money and mine is the colour of perpetual want.

—David Magang (2015)

We have spoken to some companies that this [Covid-19] is a catastrophe that has afflicted the whole world, but some of them have disappointed us. I am speaking about people who came here dirt-poor yet today they are super-rich, and they are demonstrating to us that they don't care about Botswana. However, we are going to show them that we are Botswana. In July I am signing the law of Citizen Economic Empowerment.

—President Mokgweetsi Masisi (April 2020)

### **Abstract**

The government of Botswana, like other governments worldwide, spent 2020 grappling with the Covid-19 pandemic. As part of the war against the contagion, President Mokgweetsi Masisi of Botswana instituted a Covid-19 Relief Fund for members of the public, the civil society and the businesses community to make contributions in cash or kind. However, in early April he launched a broadside against an unnamed section of the business community for what he said was its unwillingness to contribute to the Fund despite its members having come to Botswana dirt-poor, and made a massive fortune in the country. Soon a section of the citizenry pointed an accusing finger at the Indian community as being Masisi's target. It was strongly claimed that the Indian community had 'captured' the country's political leadership and in the process frustrated the government's longstanding policy of citizen economic empowerment (CEE), rendering it just a slogan. In other words, what was intended to be the indigenisation of the economy became its 'Indianisation'. This paper traces the anti-Indian sentiment to some quarters in the British colonial government and local tribal leadership before Botswana's independence in 1966. The impact of the Covid-19 globally and on Botswana in particular is discussed, after which the focus shifts to the contribution and different approaches of three relatively young Botswana; Kgosi Ngakaagae, Bissau Gaobakwe and Atasame 'ATI' Molemogi, in the debate on CEE derailment and the Indian 'othering' and 'scapegoating'. The paper concludes that government's drive for CEE, which was given the impetus by Covid-19, is likely to experience severe challenges and therefore have inconsequential impact on meaningful empowerment of the indigenes owing to the culture of entitlement, poor work ethic, entrenched elite corruption, and 'state capture'.

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### Introduction

Botswana attained independence from British colonial rule in 1966 ranked the second most poorest country in the world. However, by 1992 Botswana had registered rapid economic growth to the extent of it being ranked by the World Bank and United Nations as an upper-middle-income economy (Hope 1996). Impressed commentators even described the country as the ‘African Miracle’ (Samatar 1999), and the ‘African Success story’ (Acemoglu *et al.* 2003). Botswana’s macroeconomic performance and development management were hailed as enabling rapid growth. The government became the major provider of business to the private sector in terms of tenders. Thriving private business owned by foreigners and naturalised Batswana of Asian and Caucasian stock thrived on the back of government patronage. Among the beneficiaries of this scenario were people of Indian descent who became visibly wealthy and were able to influence the country’s political leadership, particularly the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) which has been in power since independence. However, by the 1990s serious concerns were raised about growing unemployment, high economic inequalities, dogged poverty and elite corruption (Good 1993; Good 1994 and Hope 1996). Efforts at coming up with policies and strategies that empower the indigenes had inconsequential impact. In the main government efforts or programmes at empowering the indigenes degenerated into a culture of entitlement and poor work ethic (Magang 2015 and Makgala 2013).

The political influence of the Indian business community and others as well as converging business interests of the indigenous political elite with these other groups dovetails with aspects of Mills’ Power Elite theory (1956) which we employ in this study. Mills categories the American power elite as made up of wealthy male White Anglo-Saxon Protestants (WASPs) predominantly with Harvard-Yale-Princeton background. He says they mainly belong to same clubs and have related or complementary business connections. Whereas the vastly different socio-cultural practices of the Indian and indigenous power elite in Botswana may limit their social interactions, they do have complimentary business interests.

The literature shows that strong anti-Indian sentiment, rhetoric and xenophobia or anti-Indianism has presence in numerous African countries. However, we will confine ourselves to just Uganda and South Africa in East Africa and Southern Africa respectively. In Uganda the dictator Idi Amin accused the Indian community of exploiting Ugandans and selfishly monopolising economic opportunities, consequently in 1972 he expelled close to 60,000 Indians from the country (Patel 1972 and Jamal 1976). Nevertheless, Amin’s so-called ‘the war of economic liberation’ proved suicidal as the Ugandan economy plummeted. When the guerrilla movement leader, Yuwari Museveni, toppled the government of Amin’s successor, Milton Obote, in 1986 he wooed the affected Indians and investors back to Uganda to boost the country’s economic growth (Abidi 1996).

In this section we focus more on the ‘Indian question’ in South Africa because of the country’s close proximity to Botswana and heavy socio-economic influence on Botswana. Moreover, the Uganda experience is just too extreme and not applicable to Botswana. There are lots of parallels that can help us understand the anti-Indian sentiment in Botswana such as the perceived Indian privilege during the colonial and apartheid periods in South Africa. Their formidable entrepreneurial spirit as well as their limited socio-cultural interaction and integration with and into other racial groups have to be taken into account. Indians, who initially came to South Africa largely as indentured labourers and later as workers and traders from the second half of the nineteenth century, are seen as the most hated and resented ethnic minority in post-apartheid South Africa (Nyar 2012). It should be noted that in both Botswana and South Africa the designation Indian is sometimes used indiscriminately to refer to people from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri-Lanka, the Middle East and even Mauritius.

The colonial and later apartheid system of ‘divide and rule’ encouraged and exacerbated hostile relations between indigenous majority Africans or Blacks and Indian immigrants in South Africa. We are told that from very early on ‘Africans and whites alike found it convenient to blame Indians for all manner of social ills’ (Hughes 2007:161). The famed Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, the Indian liberation struggle activist in South Africa in the first quarter of the twentieth century, is often vilified for his openly racist attitude towards Blacks and is seen as having contributed to the hostile Black-Indian relations in South Africa (Nyar 2012 and Ramsamy 2007). The National Party, which introduced apartheid in 1948, even had the slogan ‘Keep(ing) the Kaffir [Black] in His Place and the Coolie [Indian] Out of the Country’ (Nyar 2012:97). This complies with the sociological theory of ‘othering’ or discrimination and its related stereotypes (Appadurai 2006 and Bulhan 1980). The attitude of ‘us and them’ that results in prejudice and exclusion thrives in this environment. The government-engineered anti-Indian impulse resulted in the Durban race riots of 1949 between Blacks and Indians, and has had a long lasting legacy. In South Africa the Indians are pejoratively referred to ‘Coolies’ the Setswana rendition of which is ‘*Makula*’ (Otlogetswe 16 July 2020) with most people in Botswana using it but ignorant of its offensive connotations.

In post-apartheid South Africa, ‘Attitudes of hostility and resentment toward Indian South Africans, in terms of access to jobs and affirmative action, raise issues of entitlement to the resources of democracy. Affirmative action and access to resources are reproducing old stereotypes in new ways and in doing so, multiple forms of prejudice and racism are emerging’, writes Nyar (2012:90). This development undermines post-apartheid nation-building project in South Africa dubbed ‘The Rainbow Nation’ in reference to its multi-racial composition and milieu. According to Nyar (2012:101) ‘The visible success of the Indian minority may often signal cause for envy and resentment, particularly from the poor black majority who have been conditioned by apartheid to perceive the material success of Indian South Africans as evidence of their own deprivation’. Some prominent and influential South Africans have not helped in their country’s pursuit of the rainbow nation-building agenda through virulent anti-Indian declaration. For instance, ‘Just before the 1999 elections, Amos Maphumulo, former editor of the Durban based *Illanga* newspaper wrote, that Whites and Indians were responsible for marginalising and exploiting Africans. He was particularly vitriolic in his attack against Indians, claiming that “During the Black-on-Black riots, Indians were clandestinely inciting the clash by distributing weapons to African youths so that they could fight each other so that the Black nation could be exterminated [sic]”. Maphumulo continued his diatribe against Indians, “wishing that one day an African woman would give birth to another Idi Amin”’ (Ramsamy 2007:475). Although Maphumulo was condemned and pressurised by various political and other leaders into issuing an apology to those he offended, it was noted that his sentiment was widespread in South Africa.

Ramsamy (2007:476) further notes that the ‘Anti-Indian statements in popular culture appeared again in May 2002 when award winning Zulu musician and playwright Mbongeni Ngema ignited a major controversy with his song *Amandiya* (Indians). The lyrics of the song claim that “Whites are better than Indians” and calls for “strong brave men to confront Indians”. According to Ngema, “The reason [Africans] face hardship and poverty in Durban is because everything is taken by Indians. But they in turn exploit us”. The song ignited a major controversy and was perceived as a racist assault by the Indian community’. The anti-Indian rhetoric in South African goes unabated despite the country’s national leadership and clergy’s strong disapproval of the trend. For instance, in March 2019, Julius Malema, leader of the far left Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) party, attacked Indians at a political rally in KwaZulu-Natal Province accusing them of racism, exploiting and disrespecting their Black employees. Reports indicated that ‘[Anti-apartheid] Struggle veteran and ex-vice chancellor at the former University of Durban-Westville, Dr Sachs Cooper, believes EFF leader... was not entirely wrong in his analysis of the Indian Community in KwaZulu-Natal’ (Tandwa 27 March 2019).

The un-precedented outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic exposed strong anti-Indian sentiments in Botswana that had been latent for decades. President Masisi's robust condemnation of the perceived unwillingness and ungratefulness of unnamed Indians in helping during the period of national calamity became music to the ears of those who held anti-Indian views and responded with gumption. Their inflammatory rhetoric targeted at the local Indian business community forced President Masisi to respond with a conciliatory speech but it was too late.

In the main, what is labelled state capture in emerging democracies of Southern Africa seems to have become institutionalised in the region's democratic process and this is likely to remain intact while personalities or players change. A somewhat similar but regulated feature can be found in advanced democracies such as the United States and Britain where corporate lobbyists influence political leadership or public policy. Just like the underhand state capture in Southern Africa, lobbying is also highly controversial in advanced democracies where its critics dismiss it as a form of extortion and bribery. There is even mention of 'Machiavellian marketing' in reference to corporate lobbying in the United Kingdom (Harris and Lock 1996).

Perhaps, it is worth noting that prior to the recent debate on the Indian community's patronage and stranglehold over Botswana's political leadership, in the late 1990s the focus was on the South African multinational De Beers (Magang 2008 and Magang 2015). The corporate giant, which mines diamonds in Botswana, had even demanded and bankrolled the process leading to the retirement of President Sir Ketumile Masire in 1998 which has been seen as undermining the country's sovereignty (Gapa 2016). We now turn to the historical development of the anti-Indian rhetoric in Botswana.

### **The Indian Factor and Anti-Indian Rhetoric in Colonial Botswana and the Post-colony**

During the colonial period capitalist development and empowerment was the preserve of a small white settler capitalist class with Africans or Batswana prohibited from venturing into business of any consequence. This scenario stifled and subverted opportunities for indigenous private capital accumulation (Mogalakwe 2006). Nevertheless, the Indians, who had started coming into the territory in the late nineteenth century, were allowed to provide commercial services. As early as 19 July 1934 Resident Commissioner Charles Rey of Bechuanaland Protectorate, as colonial Botswana was called, said the following about Indians:

I had to receive a deputation from the Indian inhabitants of the Bechuanaland Protectorate who are full of grievances. They are a poor lot, no use to the Territory, living like and with natives and robbing them, spending no money in the Bechuanaland Protectorate but sending all they make away to India. I don't encourage them, so they complained to the Indian High Commissioner at Cape Town who complained to [British High Commissioner Sir Herbert] Stanley who passed it on me. However, I was able to deal with their point satisfactorily and they accorded me a vote of thanks -rather to my astonishment (Rey 1988:162).

However, it should be noted that Rey wrote negatively in his diaries about other colonial government officials and even *Dikgosi* (Chiefs) among others. Strong business acumen and unwavering commitment to their culture has led to Indians being perceived as opportunistic and clannish in many African societies including Botswana (Dodzi 1994). Anti-Indian sentiment was also expressed by at least one councillor during a meeting of Bangwato Tribal Council in August 1958 while discussing a business application by an Indian man called A Hassen. Whereas Hassen got sympathy from almost all members of the Bangwato Tribal Council, one member named Gaolese Koma strongly opposed Hassen's application on grounds that sounded xenophobic as recorded in the minutes of the Council:

Indians usually evince greed for business... Hassen, like most Indians he knew, would buy up African owned businesses one by one, until eventually all stores and other businesses are owned by Indians only in our country. He alluded to the way Indians have monopolised all businesses at Ramoutsa [Ramotswa], for instance, so much so that the Bamalete cannot get a chance in business in their own Tribal Territory...in the same way, too, Indians would through Hassen as the thin end of the wedge, oust us not only from the ownership of our own businesses like the buying of livestock, stores, restaurants, butcheries, etc., but we could be ousted even from our land, from ploughing and from rearing cattle... Indians are too exclusively clannish, non-mixers with any community... after helping Hassen he would later discriminate against us by employing Indians only in his stores or businesses (Makgala 2004:15).

Nevertheless, Koma's strong views were countered by the well-travelled and influential Tshekedi Khama who 'reminded Council of the discriminatory racial treatment obtaining in the Union of South Africa, that we would be emulating that sort of injustice if we also discriminate against persons solely on the grounds of race'. Tshekedi further said that '[an Indian] like anybody else is a man and he should be accorded equal treatment in our midst. Secondly discriminating against persons of Indian origin on the grounds of race could be a source of danger to ourselves, for the Indians are a numerous and powerful people while we are weak' (Makgala 2004:15). Tshekedi went further to explain that clannishness was a common human characteristic that can be found among Jews, English and Bangwato themselves among others. So influential was Tshekedi's intervention that when the motion was subjected to a vote 38 Councillors voted in affirmation while only one rejected it.

As already indicated above commercial success and wealth accumulation on the part of Indians in post-colonial Botswana has also led to strong sentiments against them possibly motivated by envy. For instance, a 2003 study by Eugene Campbell found out that 'Batswana are xenophobic; it appears that this attitude is influenced by a combination of nationalism and economic factors. There is a strong desire to preserve the "fruits" of economic prosperity for citizens alone' (Campbell 2003:71). Campbell further writes that 'Europeans and North Americans are most preferred in terms of being accepted as part of the Botswana society and among those who may apply to become citizens of Botswana. The second most preferred are Africans. Asians, especially Indians, are the least preferred. Indeed, Botswana citizens of Indian descent are viewed with considerable suspicion and dislike by other citizens of the country'.

Business support for the ruling party in Botswana can be traced to the time of the country's first democratic elections in 1965, and leading to independence in 1966. The BDP was formed in 1962 to counter the radical and anti-establishment Botswana Peoples Party (BPP). 'The BDP received unqualified logistical support from the colonial administration as well as considerable financial and organisational support from European and Asian [Indian] communities' (Mogalakwe 2006:84). The BPP soon split into bitterly opposed factions and performed wretchedly in the country's first democratic elections in 1965 as the BDP easily won 28 of the 31 parliamentary seats. It should be noted that business is pragmatic and normally backs a political group seen as favourite to win. A good example was when business or corporate entities which previously funded the ruling National Party in apartheid South Africa switched to the African National Congress (ANC) seen as government-in-waiting leading to the country's first democratic elections in 1994 which the ANC easily won. Moreover, the 'National Party (NP) has traditionally relied on funding from Afrikaner business though at least one important former backer, the insurance giant Sanlam, has switched its support to the ruling party' (Lodge 2001:56).

Prosperous Indian businessmen have contested and won positions of influence in the BDP Central Committee. The most notable being Satar Dada who has been the party Treasurer since the early 1990s. Hence, he controls the ruling party's purse strings. For decades he has bankrolled the party's general

election campaigns by donating brand new utility vehicles to all constituencies in the country. Other Indians fund the party from behind the scenes for both general elections and internal central committee elections. The latter elections sometimes involve funding a faction or individuals. There are many top BDP leaders who are in business partnerships with Indians. Nevertheless, even the opposition Botswana National Front (BNF) has had Batswana of Indian extraction in its top leadership even though they appear to be of modest means compared to their BDP counterparts. The parties are also funded by businesses and individuals who are not necessarily Indians.

The most recent BDP central committee elections in which the Indian factor was reported to be quite pronounced was in 2017 held in Tonota. The contest was between two factions led by the then Vice President Mokgweetsi Masisi and Cabinet Minister Nonofho Molefi respectively. The two faction leaders were vying for the party chairmanship position of which Masisi was the incumbent. The position was historically held by the Vice President and in 2017 it got added significance by virtue of the looming succession on 1 April 2018 as President Ian Khama's term was coming to an end. Initial media reports indicated that Molefhi was doing well in his campaign and poised to wrestle the chairmanship from Masisi. Nonetheless, before long Molefhi's followers were reported to be furious that 'Indian businessmen hide when they see Molefhi' (Lute 8-14 April 2017). Masisi's team put up a robust campaign raising funds from the Indian business community among others, and it was alleged that the funders were strongly warned against funding the Molefhi faction. There were also hints and allegations that Masisi was in business partnerships with some Indians. Hence, Kesitegile Gobotswang (6-12 May 2017), Vice President of the opposition Botswana Congress Party (BCP), described the BDP funding by some sections of the Indian business community as 'The Guptarisation of the BDP' after the Indian Gupta family's influence of top South African government and business personalities during the presidency of Jacob Zuma (Myburgh 2017). In the South African political parlance this came to be known as 'state capture' and the terminology found its way into the Botswana scene. The heavily funded Masisi faction easily beat the cash-strapped Molefhi outfit in the 2017 central committee elections, and Masisi went on to succeed Khama as President of Botswana on 1 April 2018.

### **Empowerment or Entitlement? The Pre-Covid-19 Discourse on Citizen Economic Empowerment**

The literature indicates that citizen economic empowerment was implied in Botswana's very first national development plan known as 'The Transitional Plan for Social and Economic Development of 1966-1971' (Lekgowe 2016:138). Soon after independence the government started the cooperative movement for empowerment of the citizenry for acquisition of entrepreneurial skills and business ownership. During the first two decades the cooperative societies seemed to do quite well but with time they declined quite drastically owing to government control (Edge 1988). We are told that 'the legislative framework subjected the movement to excessive control and manipulation, which stifled the development of the movement' (Seleke and Lekorwe 2010:vi).

Other than the cooperative movement and numerous indiscriminate grants for arable agriculture, which did not bear fruit, no serious citizen economic empowerment took place. The rhetoric was restated in 1982 through Presidential Commission on Economic Opportunities chaired by Peter Mmusi, the then Minister for Finance and Development Planning. Nevertheless, the commission's recommendation to thrust the citizens into the centre of economic activity from the margins got nowhere as government had other priorities (Magang 2015). The government came up with Financial Assistance Programme (FAP) which provided grants to citizens and foreign entities in a bid to create an industrial base. The funds/grants provided did not lead to any meaningful industrialisation with some foreign entities acquiring funds and soon skipping the country. Failure of FAP and related programmes led to a National Conference on Citizen Economic Empowerment held in Gaborone on 5-7 July 1999. One of the papers at the conference was by

Abdalla Gergis from Botswana Institute for Development Policy Analysis (BIPDA). Gergis points out that empowerment has been dominant in development discourse owing to the lack of success of modernisation and trickledown economics of the 1970s and 1980s. Therefore, in order to address poverty, which continued to increase owing to ineffective intervention measures, he advises that:

To be empowered, it is important to be aware of one's own capabilities and creative energies. Empowerment is as much about taking charge of the process of making decisions, as it is about the achievement of empowerment goals. Government, therefore, should not impose empowerment from above, because empowerment has to be an objective the individual must strive to achieve. There is a difference between entitlements (hand-outs) and empowerment. International experience shows that entitlements create dependency. In discussing who needs to be empowered, the paper argues for the empowerment of those who are disempowered, including the disabled, children, the elderly, women, the poor, and the unemployed. Because education and training are fundamental to citizen economic empowerment, they should be reformed to promote creativity and competitiveness (Gergis 1999:8-9).

Just like Campbell (2003), Gergis observes that in Botswana empowerment was driven by programmes and policies meant for economic upliftment of the citizenry who lagged behind 'temporary residents' with higher technical skills and entrepreneurial acumen, hence their greater involvement in economic activity. The point of economic empowerment was meant to create an indigenous business elite to compete with the aliens dominating the business space. The economic empowerment in Botswana was also understood to mean exempting the inexperienced local entrepreneurs from some rules and regulations. As indicated above to many Botswana empowerment was equated to entitlement and dependence on the state which has been an enduring attitude among many.

David Magang, former long-serving cabinet minister and a successful citizen entrepreneur, writes at great length about the government economic policies and how they have failed Botswana in terms of meaningful economic empowerment. He observes that 'Government, by virtue of it being infinitely richer than its people, is by far the guarantor of everybody's survival. Players in the private sector largely, in fact overwhelmingly, thrive on government expenditure. Without it, they are doomed: period' (Magang 2015:13). In other words, in Botswana it is extremely difficult for business to thrive outside of state sponsored 'tenderpreneurship'. Magang notes that the country's economy has created multi-millionaires for foreigners, mainly naturalised citizens from Asia and South Africa. Asia here refers predominantly to Indians. 'Not so for the indigenous Botswana: they seem destined to wallow in perpetual want. To them the "African Miracle" that is their country is actually African Mirage' (Magang 2015:13). He elaborates on how for about a decade the country's political leadership frustrated his efforts to develop his Phakalane farm near Gaborone into a upmarket township in order to alleviate acute shortage of serviced land and housing in Gaborone. He indicates that he suffered lack of government support by virtue of him being a Black Botswana or indigene while an Indian or White entrepreneur would have been assisted by government with ease.

The citizen economic empowerment conference mentioned above resulted in establishment of Citizenship Entrepreneurship Development Agency (CEDA) in 2001 with Magang as its founding board chairman. CEDA's brief was to provide subsidised loans to business projects owned by Botswana. However, Magang (2015:172) concludes that 'Over a decade since its establishment, CEDA is wracked with problems not unlike those that dogged the two schemes [FAP and SMMEs] it absorbed notwithstanding training and mentoring initiatives pre and post implementation'. He ascribes CEDA's challenges to the entrenched culture of entitlement among recipients of loans who also mostly lack entrepreneurial acumen, and ethic

of delayed gratification. Whereas CEDA strictly prohibits fronting Magang counts it as one of the major challenges the agency faces.

He also laments and gives examples of failure by government to support indigenous citizen property developers whose office blocks are overlooked by government departments while suspiciously leasing office blocks belonging to Indians and others even before the construction of the buildings was complete. Magang (2015:251) further laments that:

If my own experience in relation to Phakalane is anything to go by, Government's commitment to empower the citizenry is so wobbly as to be plain hypocritical. In point of fact, what I see is Citizen Economic Empowerment in reverse, a phenomenon I call Citizen Economic Disempowerment.... Clearly, beneath the rhetoric of Citizen Economic Empowerment, there is a subliminally embedded Citizen Economic Disempowerment conspiracy that is probably target-specific. One Motswana of Indian origin candidly told me the reason he is successful is because of the colour of his skin and he was right: were he black like me, Government support through those multimillion tenders he chalks up every year would not have been readily forthcoming. His is the colour of money and mine is the colour of perpetual want.

Magang also writes that in the past he operated a car dealership in Gaborone hoping to get government patronage but could not get it while his competitors thrived on government support (Magang 2008). What should be borne in mind here is the old-age perception and belief that Batswana do not support one another in commercial ventures. The so-called pull-him-down syndrome is believed to be rampant in the society as Batswana do not want to see fellow Batswana prosper but do not seem to have problems with Indians and other racial groups succeed commercially. The result has been some savvy Batswana strategically forming business partnerships with Indians or Whites in order to overcome prejudice and get business and other advantages from their own government.

Lekgowe (2016) in a piece entitled 'The Trajectory of Citizen Economic Empowerment in Botswana after 50 Years' concludes that this was 'An Endless Road to Hapless Policies'. He also sees the Citizen Economic Empowerment Policy promulgated by the government in 2012 as suffering from the age-old failure to deliver. 'It is argued that the main problems reside in the implementation of the citizen economic empowerment policy, and therefore the solution to a sound implementation of the citizen economic empowerment policy can only be found in the promulgation of a law in citizen economic empowerment with institutions focused on delivering the policy' (Lekgowe 2016:138).

Interesting, as noted above in an effort to mitigate the impact of Covid-19 outbreak President Masisi established a Covid-19 Relief Fund into which individuals, institutions and business entities were requested to donate in cash and in kind. It was alleged that Indian owned businesses, which thrived on government patronage, were not forthcoming with donations much to President Masisi's annoyance. He even threatened that in July 2020 he would sign the citizen economic empowerment law to deal with the owners of business entities that ignored his clarion call to assist the nation in times of desperate need. In the build-up to the 2019 elections President Masisi did candidly acknowledge that Batswana had very little control over the country's economy and promised to reverse the situation if elected back into office. However, what Lekgowe seems to miss are subtleties that even with citizen empowerment law in place, Indian entrepreneurs and others benefitting from government projects would not readily give way to the indigenes but are likely to put up resistance in collusion with their connections in the system. The whole citizen economic empowerment initiative could even be made untenable by the funding business gives to the political elite or 'state capture' as indicated earlier. Once this nexus has taken root it becomes a tall order to uproot as the South African experience demonstrates. This is can be explained by the Power Elite theory as indicated by Mills.



Nevertheless, Magang provides a comparative assessment of citizen economic empowerment laws in other countries such as South Africa, Malaysia and Zimbabwe. He also acknowledges that these otherwise well-meaning instruments were hijacked by the politically connected elites. In the case of South Africa, a self-made Black multi-millionaire Richard Maponya, who defied apartheid restrictions to become a successful entrepreneur almost like Magang in Botswana, became a strong critic of the Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) meant to uplift racial groups previously disadvantaged by apartheid in his country. Maponya, believed that ‘While BEE was designed to empower black people, it had in a sense done the reverse by taking away the incentive to start their own businesses and fostering a culture of entitlement’ (Kane-Berman 13 January 2020). Hence, as Kane-Berman says, to Maponya BEE was a Black business’ false friend. As noted above Magang holds similar views for Botswana.

Therefore, being on the margins of the country’s ‘prosperity’ may explain why the Happy Planet Index report for 2012 on the happiest and saddest societies in the world indicates that Botswana had fallen down the global pecking order of happiest people in terms of sustainable well-being (Happy Planet Index 2012). Potgieter (28 March to 3 April 2020) reflecting on the Happy Planet Index report for 2020 states that ‘Since the first World Happiness Report was published in 2012, Botswana has slid down the ranking from 22nd from the bottom to our current placement of 7th from the bottom’. It seems this is how the mood was among Botswana when Covid-19 struck.

### **Global Outbreak of Covid-19 and the New Normal**

In late December 2019, a previously unidentified corona virus, currently designated 2019 Novel Corona Virus or Covid-19 emerged from the city of Wuhan in China’s Hubei province and resulted in formidable outbreaks in many cities in China and expanded globally. ‘Corona virus causes respiratory infection including pneumonia, cold, sneezing and coughing while in animals it causes diarrhoea and upper respiratory diseases. Corona virus is transmitted human to human or human to animal via airborne droplets. Corona virus enters in human cell through membrane ACE-2 exopeptidase receptor’ (Kumar *et al.* 2020:8). Experts say person to person transmission occur through droplets or contact transmission, and if there is lack of stringent infection control or if there is lack of proper personal protective equipment (PPEs), it may jeopardise the first line health care workers. With no cure or vaccine for Covid-19 available preventative measures recommended by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and national public health authorities included washing of hands with recommended sanitizer or with water and soap for about 20 seconds and as frequently as possible. Wearing a recommended mask covering one’s mouth and nose to prevent infection is another preventative measure. The third measure involves social distancing of minimum of one metre from other people.

Within three months of the outbreak, more than 125,000 people were infected and the death toll had reached over 4600 worldwide (WHO 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic has not only caused social disruptions but has also put tremendous strain on health care systems worldwide. The Covid-19 contagion has far outstripped all pandemics that broke out in the new millennium, and on 11 March 2020 the World Health Organisation (WHO) officially declared it a pandemic.

As the contagion escalated medical authorities advised people to avoid non-essential travel and to stay at home. Fast global aviation travel helped spread the coronavirus rapidly from one corner of the world to another. By early 2020 outbreaks and deaths in European countries such as Italy and Spain were massive and overwhelmed public health facilities and medical staff or frontline workers. In worse case scenarios whereby infections and deaths spiralled out of control stringent measures of lockdowns in parts of countries were instituted to help curb further spread of the disease. By the second quarter of 2020 the situation was worsening in most countries worldwide. Countries such as the United Kingdom, France and the United States of America experienced major surges in the infection rates and deaths leading to lockdowns.

Quarantining of infected persons and self-isolation of others were measures most countries resorted to in a bid to curb the spread of the virus.

Most businesses had to close and so did schools and other facilities. Sporting activities, public transportation systems including air travel, and other crowd-pulling activities or super-spreaders were suspended in many countries to avoid relentless spread of the virus. Many countries closed their borders in order to curb the spread of the virus. In most countries only essential service workers such as those in the medical, telecommunication, food and other critical goods and services among others were allowed to go to work. In the meantime production of PPEs in the form of masks, face shields, protective clothing, latex gloves, and footwear among others had to be ramped up worldwide owing to acute shortage. Some leading industrialised countries such as the United States evoked laws compelling industries such as motor plants among others to switch to production of PPEs, ventilators and critical resources for use in hospital intensive care units (ICU) which were being overwhelmed by large numbers of patients. Production of sanitizers for washing hands at homes and public places such as shops among others was intensified. The wearing of masks in public became mandatory in most countries. In a dramatic twist of events, the incidence of reported cases in China dramatically reduced to as a result of strict social distancing.

The selling and consumption of alcohol and tobacco in public were outlawed by many governments worldwide. Testing of large numbers of people to determine the infection rates for appropriate response were undertaken in most countries. In some instances testing went hand in hand with what came to be known as contact tracing of those who tested positive to have them placed in quarantine or self-isolation. This was done even to national leaders and presidents of countries such as France, Britain, Germany, and the United States. In Botswana President Masisi had to go into self-isolation about four times –something of a record. The massive disruption of normal life as people had always known it came to be referred to as ‘the new normal’. The world over pharmaceutical entities stepped up research in the race to find possible vaccine for the corona virus.

The impact of Covid-19 on national economies in the heavily interlinked global economy was catastrophic. Airline companies had to stop travel and lay-off staff. Just one example, the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO 2020) estimated ‘that by the end of 2020, the COVID-19 impact on scheduled international passenger traffic could reach reductions of up to 71 per cent of seat capacity and up to 1.5 billion passengers globally. Airlines and airports face a potential loss of revenue of up to USD 314 billion and USD 100 billion respectively, for 2020’. Shops and other business entities were also affected. Those that opened for business had to operate with skeletal staff owing to lockdowns. Governments which could afford it resorted to partial payment of salaries of some workers for a brief period of time. In countries such as the United States food banks had to roll out food to long queues of desperate souls. Almost all sectors of national economies suffered one way or the other. Greatly reduced travel meant that the global demand for petroleum was hugely curtailed and related industries suffered massively. This development led to widespread talk of the global economy experiencing a deep recession.

The new normal in the form of quarantine, self-isolation and lockdowns led to serious problems of psychiatric and psychological nature to some individuals. An observation in South Africa is that ‘the manner in which dire poverty and overcrowding have been highlighted as a standard part of the daily experience of many South Africans, both at home and aboard public transport; the attitude of finger-pointing beginning to emerge towards “others” who have been identified as COVID-19 positive, in the course of which the mantra of social cohesion has been superseded by that of social distancing’ (Phillips 2020:2). Cases of gender-based violence (GBV) and marital discord also become rampant.

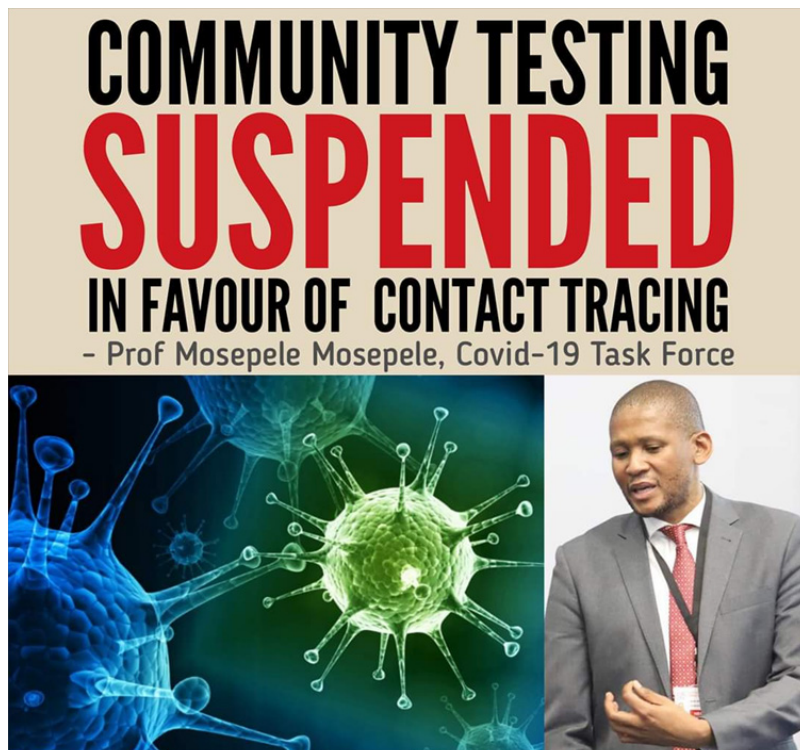
As time went on it appeared that some countries that had been badly affected by the surge in infections were finally flattening the curve for hospitals to cope but later they reported resurgence in infections and deaths in what was described as a second wave. By mid-November 2020 the Coronavirus Resource

Centre at the Johns Hopkins University in the United States stated that global infections had reached 54,068,330 with 1,313,438 deaths (Johns Hopkins 2020). However, some countries were also recording high numbers of recoveries some with serious side-effects. Although projections were that the vaccine would not be available possibly until sometime in 2021 or even 2022, by early December 2020 British authorities had approved the use of vaccine that was deemed safe.

### Outbreak and Impact of Covid-19 in Botswana

In Botswana the government did a fairly good job of controlling the Covid-19 situation despite obvious challenges. The government was able to ensure that the supply of most essential goods such as food and medication, which are mostly imported from South Africa, was not affected. With the exception of petroleum, which ran out for a few months leading to abnormally long queues at fuel stations and forcing the government to ration it, almost all essential goods were available in the shops. For a few months the government also subsidised salaries of some citizen employees in the private sector. It also pleaded with private companies to be compassionate and not to resort to layoff or retrenchment of staff. The government also provided food rations to disadvantaged citizens who could not provide for themselves. Among these were street vendors who were hit hardest by the lockdown, and mostly with no alternative sources of income. President Masisi set up a Presidential Covid-19 Task Force consisting, among others, of leading experts in infectious diseases in Botswana who reported directly to him in assisting the government on tackling the spread of pandemic through lockdowns, and provided regular updates on the Covid-19 situation (for example see Figure 1). It also played an important role in countering the stigmatisation of people who tested positive for coronavirus.

Figure 1: A social media announcement of the change of strategy recommended by the Presidential Covid-19 Task Force



Source: Courtesy of the Sunday Standard

The number of people attending funerals, weddings and church services were greatly curtailed in a bid to prevent the spread of the virus. Moreover, and critical to this study, the government set up a Covid-19 Relief Fund with investment of P2 billion as seed money. The President pleaded with private individuals, business entities, the civil society and others to donate funds in cash or in kind for the war against Covid-19. Many individuals, corporate entities, and civil society groups made contributions to the Covid-19 Relief Fund. For instance, public universities namely the underfunded University of Botswana (UB) and Botswana International University for Science and Technology (BIUST) rose to the occasion by manufacturing PPEs, sanitizers, drones and others which were donated to the national Covid-19 effort. This gained the two universities plaudits from the general public with some social media commentators slamming private universities of failing to assist the nation in time of desperate need. The fact that some Indian owned private tertiary institutions were even retrenching staff or suspending salaries led to some members of public calling for end of provision of tertiary education by private institutions as they were seen as hell-bent on profiteering at the expense of employees. It was also argued that these institutions benefit only their owners and their captured political associates while offering education of suspect quality to students (*Sunday Standard* 31 May to 6 June 2020).

For some time Botswana was commended by the international organisations, media and independent commentators for keeping the numbers of infections relatively low. In at least one instance, as early as March Botswana, which did not have the necessary vaccine, was prematurely praised as ‘winning the war against the Coronavirus’ (Uchend 2020). For instance, in a space of five months the death rate had remained just below 10 individuals. Tests in Botswana indicated that most of the infections were imported cases from outside the country. Therefore, a lot of care and attention was directed to the country’s points of entry in the form of international airports and border posts. For a while cases of local or community transmission remained relatively low. It was not until around mid-March that the surge in infections in the neighbouring South Africa led to President Cyril Ramaphosa ordering a Level Five lockdown which prohibited non-essential movement in the country and also closed the country’s borders. As cases went up slightly in Botswana, it did not take long for President Masisi to institute a national state of emergency (SOE) and ordered national lockdown from 2 April to 30 April 2020 with what he called ‘extreme social distancing’ (Masisi 31 March 2020). Further spread of the virus locally led to the SOE being extended by six months from October 2020 to March 2021.

Like elsewhere the impact of this development had an adverse impact on the economy at the national and household levels. The United Nations ‘Socio-Economic Impact of Covid-19 in Botswana’ published on 6 May 2020 projected the country’s economy to contract by 13.1% (United Nations Botswana 2020). The severity of the economic contraction forced many countries to relax their lockdown measures to encourage economic activity and job creation. For instance, despite rising cases of infection by October South Africa had eased travel by opening the country’s borders and international airports. Botswana also allowed some resumption of several economic activities but did not open the borders until 9 November for international air travel and 1 December for border posts. By 15 November 2020 there were reported 8,225 Coronavirus cases, 27 deaths and 5,559 recoveries in Botswana.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, like elsewhere the authorities continued trumpeting the message of continued observance of Covid-19 protocols. The issue of citizen economic empowerment, to which we now turn, raged on in the media and government circles.

### **Presidential ‘Rampechane’ Rallying Cry: Covid-19 and Debate on Citizen Economic Empowerment in Botswana**

As discussed above the debate on citizen economic empowerment in Botswana was an emotive issue that the indigenes had complained about in the past but it reached fever pitch as the nation grappled with the

1 <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/botswana/> accessed 15 November 2020.

Covid-19 pandemic. It was taken to a new level following President Masisi's speech in April 2020 when he complained (speaking from the heart in Setswana to drive the point home to the indigenes in their indigenous language but here translated into English) that 'We have spoken to some companies that this [Covid-19] is a catastrophe that has afflicted the whole world, but some of them have disappointed us. I am speaking about people who came here dirt-poor [wearing humble *rampeechane* sandals] yet today they are super-rich, they are demonstrating to us that they don't care about Batswana. However, we are going to show them that we are Batswana. In July I am signing the law of Citizen Economic Empowerment'. Although President Masisi did not mention those he accused by name, the private media, general public and social media commentators concluded that he was attacking members of the Indian business community. As indicated above some of their businesses issued letters of non-payment of salaries to their employees despite the government's salary subsidy which caused a great deal of anti-Indian outburst in the social media. The public outrage forced such business entities to retract the letters to their employees and a few even issued public apology. However, there were other non-Indian companies which had also issued letters of non-payment of salaries to their employees.

The relentless anti-Indian vitriol spewed in the social media led to President Masisi making a measured and conciliatory pronouncement imploring the people to be tolerant to other sections of the society. It was alleged that he had been confronted by influential members of the Indian business community about his first '*Rampeechane* speech'. In particular, it was claimed that his Indian business partners and political funders had taken serious offence at his utterances which they saw as a reckless stab in their back. He was claimed to have apologised to the Indian community for his *Rampeechane* slur after which they started making donations (Chida 9 June 2020). Interestingly, President Masisi's second or damage control speech was delivered in English. Nonetheless, it was the case of closing the stable door after the horse had bolted. His declaration that '*We are going to show them that we are Batswana*' fell on 'fertile ground' in many young minds. Below we share responses to the '*Rampeechane* speech' by three young Batswana firebrands from different professional backgrounds who targeted their anger and fury at members of the Indian business community. However, it suffices to indicate that it was not fair for the critics to paint all members of the Indian business community with the same brush because some of them 'hustled' and struggled with no influence on the political leadership just like some indigenes.

*Kgosi Ngakaagae: Sustained and erudite engagement*

Kgosi Ngakaagae is an attorney and independent social commentator with a weekly column in the private *Mmegi* newspaper. His analytical approach through his column and social media videos was direct in terms of anti-India sentiment but also supportive of individual Indian position where he felt necessary. Ngakaagae heaped the blame on the ruling elite's capture by the Indian community as the source of the economic marginalisation of the indigenes. His support for an Indian business was when in late May 2020 he called for the authorities to address what he felt was growing racial tensions over the economy in Botswana. 'Over the past week, we witnessed a collision between private property rights, race and poverty', he wrote (Ngakaagae 29 May 2020). What had happened was that an Indian hotel owner was heavily condemned and abused in the social media after he erected a fence around the area of his hotel at the usually bustling Gaborone bus station. Hawkers had long erected their kiosks (*dimausu*) in the area and when they were away in conformity with the Covid-19 lockdown the hotel owner erected the fence closing them out. Upon return the hawkers found the strategic place inaccessible and this caused a great deal of commotion which soon translated into a racial conflict and bitter exchanges in the social media. Ngakaagae's take was that 'The fury, directed at the hotel owners had nothing to do with any wrong on their part. Frankly, any property owner would have done it and few, would have judged, their acts. It had everything to do with pent-up anger that continues to simmer between government and a section of the

citizenry that feels frustrated with failing citizen empowerment efforts’.

He further argued ‘That anger is taking the path of least resistance. It is taking a racial route. This section of the citizenry is beginning to see people of other races as the reason for their pitiable economic state. It is not looking good’ (Ngakaagae 29 May 2020). He worried that the hawkers, whom he said ‘were not even included in the COVID-19 wage subsidy intervention by government’, had remonstrated with the authorities for many years with no solution forthcoming. He, therefore, pleaded with the government to come to the rescue and economically empower these hard working but marginalised section of the society, and to avert conflict motivated by race. He also condemned the racist and xenophobic poison directed at the Indian hotel owners whom he said had not broken any law. In dissecting the country’s Power Elite he noted that while racism was directed at Indians, Chinese and Whites, the Indians bore the brunt of intolerance ‘because of the perception that they have corrupted our politicians and taken up the entire retail sector. Chinese, because of the perception that they have corrupted our politicians and taken up the entire mega procurement sector. Whites, because of the perception that they have corrupted our politicians and taken up the entire tourism and hospitality sector’. However, he was grateful that the hawkers and Indian hotel owners did find an amicable solution to the matter.

The Power Elite dynamic in Botswana or business dealings between the political leadership and Indian owned businesses became a subject of deep probing by journalists. For instance, in late May the Ink Centre for Investigative Journalism reported that President Masisi had ‘business interest in at least 10 companies with several highly connected businessmen of Indian origin, including controversial businessman and Choppies Chief Executive Officer, Ramachandran “Ram” Ottapathu, according to details gleaned from the Companies and Intellectual Properties Authority’ (Centre for Investigative Journalism 31 May 2020). It was further reported that ‘Choppies, a retail chain store, is a beneficiary of government business –it is a major supplier of groceries to the Botswana Defence Force, the Prisons Department as well as other government departments. The revelations come at a time when there is a public outcry for a citizen economic empowerment law’.

As would be expected the revelation caught Ngaakaagae’s attention and soon he commented on it under the title ‘Behind every Botswana President, there is Ram’ (Ngakaagae 5 June 2020). He argued that President Masisi’s business association with Ramachandran Otapathu was problematic. ‘It was President Festus Mogae. Then followed President Ian Khama’s right hand man, Isaac Kgosi [then Director General for the Directorate of Intelligence Services]. Now it is President Mokgweetsi Masisi. Whoever the next President or Vice President is, they must proceed to Ram to demand their shareholding as a presidential entitlement. Better still, let’s just put Ram’s business enterprises in the green book’, he declared. ‘The President... is the man in whom all executive power vests. Ram’s business competitors know exactly where they stand with him when the President is on his side. The civil service knows exactly where it stands with him when the man who directs it is on his side. Even law enforcement, are no less aware. He cannot, conveniently, be equated to any other being’. Ngakaagae demanded that the relationship between the presidents and Ram be ended as it was irresponsible even in the absence of a legal prohibition because it was a matter of ethics as opposed to law (Ngakaagae 5 June 2020). He also mentioned former Vice President Ponatshego Kedikilwe who was chairman of the board of Sefalana as we mention below.

The long-standing issue of marginalisation of poultry businesses owned by indigenes at the hands of Indian businesses did not escape his critical pen. He made reference to a Competition and Consumer Authority’s (CCA) market study which he said revealed unfair practices in the country’s poultry industry.<sup>2</sup> ‘The abuse of a dominant position by key players in this sector has ensured that this market is nearly, the exclusive preserve of a racially identifiable cabal that runs the ruling [party] and has colossal influence in the high echelons of power’ (Ngakaagae 10 July 2020). His argument was that the issue had been in exist-

2 <https://www.competitionauthority.co.bw/> accessed 10 October 2020

tence for decades but the government had failed to resolve it which he interpreted as lack of seriousness on the part of the government. As he pointed out, in the past the emotive issue mainly involved the Islamic practice of *'Halaal'* whereby Muslim owned shops, some of which belonged to the Indians, demanded chicken slaughtered through the *Halaal* ritual. This was strongly condemned by many indigenes as a strategy of squeezing them out of business. According to Ngakaagae 'Modest efforts were made by the last President to ensure that this religious condition does not constitute a hindrance to the many Batswana who only plead for fair competition, in this sector. Retailers were required to have non-Halaal shelves in order that those who are obligated, by virtue of their faiths, are not prejudiced. Looking back, one wonders whether that was intended to achieve meaningful reform, or it was just tokenism meant to have palliative effect on the suffering small-scale chicken farmer' (Ngakaagae 10 July 2020). He said the measures were too inadequate to resolve the problem which was the control of the value chain, from hatchlings to feed. As far as he was concerned the CCA had failed the indigenous chicken farmer owing to state capture by the big business or cabal, as he called them, in the industry. 'We will not tire. If government does not do something, and do it in a hurry, this issue shall be a key reference point in 2024 [national elections]'

Professor Thapelo Otlogetswe, a linguist at the University of Botswana, argued that the anti-Indian sentiment was racism (Otlogetswe 16 July 2020). However, in support of the *Rampeechane* clarion call Ngakaagae said that 'There is too much economic racism among our Indian brothers and sisters and there is no need to tiptoe, around the issue. This must stop. Those who believe that they have a right to practice economic racism must ship out. They cannot and will, never be welcome. In fact, they must not only be made to feel unwelcome but must be shown the door.... For a fact, Batswana opened their country to Indian immigrants, and allowed them to be a part of the journey of national development. When His Excellency [President Masisi] spoke of "bo rampeechane", he was conveying the pitiless logic of fact' (Ngakaagae 17 July 2020).

*Bissau Gaobakwe: 'The natives are coming for their share'*

Bissau Gaobakwe, a flamboyant businessman or 'hustler' claimed that the lockdown had opened his eyes in terms of purported Indian monopoly of business and marginalisation of indigenous Batswana or 'natives' as he called them. He vented his spleen on the Indian business community and called for a revolution of sorts to turn the tables on the status quo. In his interview conducted by veteran journalist, Mesh Moeti, it opened with the declaration that 'There is something in the air, and it smells so much like a version of the Arab Spring. As with most popular and spontaneous revolutions that result from long suppressed disenchantment, this one is led by a most unlikely individual... Bissau Gaobakwe... He is driving a concept that seeks to finally change the colour of business and wealth in Botswana -for indeed business and wealth in Botswana do have colour, and it's not the colour of the indigenous Motswana, and they manifest in a face that's not representative of the majority' (Moeti 31 May to 6 June 2020). Moeti further noted that 'Gaobakwe may have been the one to finally take the decisive step, but the mood is evident all round. There is a new awakening by a generation that is not content with merely singing the national anthem and carrying the national ID card, while wealth is not in their hands'.

As far as Gaobakwe was concerned, Batswana were 'economic slaves in their own country'. He said he had found it deeply embarrassing that during the lockdown the 'natives' had formed long queues at Indian-owned shops and this motivated him to embark on the crusade for 'meaningful change'. 'If ever there was a moment for Batswana to come together to reclaim the wealth of their country, he says that time is now'. His suggested solution was for the indigenes to pool their money together by way of 100,000 families contributing P100,000 each and raise at least P10 billion (Moeti 31 May to 6 June 2020). He said the P10 billion would be immediately used to buy or set up businesses that were lucrative in terms of cash generation, such as those that support communications. He even indicated that he had already identified a

commercial law firm and another one for accountants to be the custodians of the money once contributions commenced. He did not appreciate the scenario whereby Mascom, a company he said generated money out of conversations of Batswana, was owned 57% by a South African company MTN, and 7% by a Zimbabwean national, leaving Batswana with a minority stake. Therefore, according to Gaobakwe this made Mascom one of the early targets for takeover by the natives. He also indicated that there were many other business entities he targeted which were mostly Indian owned.

He recounted an allegedly widespread tale in every village in Botswana whereby Indian owned supermarket chains of Choppies and Sefalana had opened next to native owned shops. The consequence of this, he said, was collapse of local shops as clients abandoned them to buy in Choppies and Sefalana where goods were cheaper. He also claimed that where Indians held distribution rights for different products they never gave credit to the natives saying they were not credit worthy yet they gave each other credit. What he said he found most painful was that it was the same native who enriched the Indians. He also bemoaned what he said was a sad situation whereby throughout the country desperate farmers sold their produce to Indian shops at fixed throw away prices. He singled out Satar Dada's alleged monopoly of the chicken industry as suffocating native chicken farmers.

Gaobakwe was emphatic that the natives should join hands to reverse the prevailing 'hostile environment' since no individual could survive in it. He went to great lengths extolling the virtues of the traditional extended family system saying it had always helped Batswana survive and the same approach could be used in the business model he preached. He also advised that politicians across party lines, including his beloved President Masisi, could not be relied on for the economic emancipation because they were already captured by the same Indian forces. Surprisingly, he did not mention that for years the chairmen of the boards of Choppies and Sefalana were the former President and former Vice President of Botswana respectively.

He was worried that if the domination or monopoly of every aspect of business in Botswana continued with the natives only playing the role of consumers, they would have no answers when 'our children ask us why they are slaves in their own country and all the wealth is in the hands of Indians' (Moeti 31 May to 6 June 2020). He argued against the government pronouncements imploring the youth to be self-employed instead of looking up to the government for employment. 'How do we create jobs when we can't enter industry because one race can decide to just lock you out of business?' he charged. Gaobakwe also cautioned Batswana to be 'vigilant so as not to be hoodwinked by those who may want to stem the tide, or even frustrate the effort to effect genuine change'. He advised for lessons to be learned from post-1994 South Africa in what he claimed to be a scenario whereby the rolling out of the BEE 'white owned businesses co-opted a few politically connected black faces, gave them token shares, and thereby ensured that real wealth remained where it always resided'. He claimed that the Indians would do the same here using the natives for fronting.

Gaobakwe dismisses the notion that 'Batswana are not born entrepreneurs' saying historically they were not given a chance for meaningful empowerment. It should be noted that his emphasis on people pooling their resources together could be a result of him being a business 'hustler' who operated largely outside of the captured government tender fraternity. However, he seems rather naïve or ignorant in thinking that the traditional extended family support structure can be relied on for economic empowerment. It has been observed that the traditional extended family support structure has disintegrated (Maundeni 2009) giving way to individualism in the past generation or so. He also seems naïve or takes lightly the age-old lament that the work ethic of Batswana leaves a lot to be desired and is routinely cited by the World Economic Forum and Botswana National Productivity Centre (BNPC) as the major impediment to doing business in Botswana making the country less competitive globally (BathoPele 31 October 2018 and Makgala 2013). Moreover, as 2020 neared its end no ground seemed cleared for Gaobakwe's radical



ideas of 'genuine' citizen economic empowerment tellingly titled 'The natives are coming for their share'.

*Atasaone 'ATI' Molemogi: 'From Botswana's Nelson Mandela to Judas Iscariot'?*

Atasaone Molemogi, a young singer popularly known by his stage name 'ATI', was a completely different 'activist' in comparison to Ngakaagae and Gaobake. A recovering drug addict, he became an aggressive grassroots rabble-rouser who resorted to confrontational militancy. In June 2020 he went on the rampage shooting a video at Dada's Motor Centre complex in Gaborone ranting and denouncing his domination of business using harsh words and posted on Facebook which went viral. In the process ATI's escapades earned him a legion of loyal followers among the country's young people also frustrated with sky-rocking levels of youth unemployment, and their lack of meaningful participation in the economy. His defiant anti-government message on Facebook was 'Our government is the image. Puppet masters take cover. Citizen empowerment nada' (Thankane 22 June 2020). While some people dismissed ATI as a drug-addict who had squandered his fortune on hedonistic pursuits, other young artists, who were hit hard by lack of business during the lockdown, threw their weight behind him. The ruling BDP officials indicated in the social media that they listened to ATI's grievances and felt that some of them were valid, and said that they had pleaded with the Minister of Youth, Sports and Culture and his deputy to give him audience (Thankane 22 June 2020). Nonetheless, he refused to meet with the minister believing that he was above him. ATI also suggested that he could form his own political party and threatened to approach President Masisi at the State House uninvited, and even called for President Masisi's resignation.

Whereas abuse of the Indian community and disrespect for the President cannot be condoned, there is a context to ATI's demonstrations and the bid for intervention by the BDP hierarchy. Job creation and creation of an inclusive economy had been key campaign issues in the build-up to the 2019 elections and the BDP manifesto had pledged to generate employment for the youth (BDP 2019) who were becoming desperate and restless. They only needed a brave young leader to confront the powers that-be and ATI provided that 'leadership'. As Mesh Moeti noted above, the Arab Spring featured in the discourse of youth frustration. According to Statistics Botswana report released in January 2020 the country's unemployment had risen to 22% by December 2019. It was also indicated that 'Labour force increased 12.4 percent between 2015/16 and the third quarter of 2019. This was accompanied by increases of 8.1 percent and 32.5 percent of the employed and unemployed labour force, respectively. This resulted in an increase of 3.3 percentage increase in the employment to population ratio over the period, from 47.4 percent in 2015/16 to 50.7 percent in quarter three of 2019' (Statistics Botswana 2020:8). Worryingly, the report goes on to state that 'Unemployment rate went up by 3.1 percentage points between the two periods, from 17.6 to 20.7 percent. The youth labour force increased by 12.7 percent, from 427, 089 in 2015/16 to 481,441 in the third quarter of 2019. This was accompanied by an increase of 1.6 percentage points increase in youth unemployment rate, from 25.1 to 26.7 percent'. Therefore, the grim situation was becoming a ticking time bomb as far as the youth and the society were concerned.

Nonetheless, ATI insisted on meeting President Masisi and not his underling, and when no appointment was forthcoming he drove to the gates of the State House causing a scene. He shot a video of his antics and posted on Facebook. However, he was arrested and held at the police station. A large crowd of youths gathered at the police station to support their new-found 'hero' and demanded his release. He was later arraigned before the Magistrate Court with the crowd of loyal supporters making a strong showing. He was even described as the 'Nelson Mandela of Botswana'. Opposition politicians quickly capitalised on the 'opportunity'. Ian Khama, former President of Botswana and Masisi's predecessor and now patron of Botswana Patriotic Front (BPF) 'called ATI a "brilliant" and "creative" young man. And called the government "out of touch" with a majority of citizens. "I think he is a talented young artist and a patriot who has a great passion for his country and its people. The manner in which he went about his demands reflects

the feelings of a vastly growing majority who are angry and frustrated by the deteriorating state of affairs in this country' (*The Telegraph* 24 June 2020). Advocate Duma Boko, President of the main opposition UDC, volunteered his legal service to assist ATI. On 24 June 2020 the Magistrate Court dismissed the matter against ATI who was charged on a count of failure to take orders from an authorised officer guarding a prohibited area. 'The Magistrate said the prosecution had rushed the case before arranging their charge accordingly. She said the charge was fatally defective as it was confusing' (Molosi 24 June 2020).

The private *Sunday Standard* (25 June 2020) newspaper had the headline 'Botswana government can ignore ATI, but not his message'. In terms of the Power Elite dynamic the newspaper went further claiming that:

A one-man campaign is taking on a whole government machinery and is taking it to the cleaners.... Government has promised a Citizen economic empowerment law. That no longer elicits excitement because the fear is that when it comes it will be so watered down that it could be irrelevant. That has happened with a law on declaration of assets, which by the way it is still to pass. Despite many promises to empower indigenous Batswana, the economy remains in the hands of naturalized people especially of Asian heritage.... Botswana government and the ruling party face a brutal test. The split personality that has sustained the two – where they are voted by indigenous Batswana and financed by Indians who go on to get government contracts and business patronage is no longer sustainable. Political parties can no longer make electoral pledges and promises during campaigns only to abandon those once in power. Those in power today have to demonstrate the extent of their sense of public duty and service. To enrich themselves while leaving the economy of the country in the clutches of Indian industrialists will be an unforgivable sin.

While it was being said that some people in government circles dismissed ATI as a nuisance induced by drugs 'But he defied such criticism by staying focused and delivering a message that resonates with many people', charged the *Sunday Standard* (25 June 2020). 'The message is non-conventional and non-conformist', it further lauded him. However, by October 2020 ATI had unceremoniously left his legion of followers in the lurch after finally meeting with Tumiso Rakgare, the Minister of Youth Sport and Culture. He instantly turned his back on the struggle. His incensed former supporters vilified him seeing him as a mercenary who had capitulated to the system. For this 'betrayal' they no longer equated him with Nelson Mandela the liberator but branded him 'Batswana's Judas Iscariot', one of Jesus Christ's disciples who sold him to his enemies for 30 pieces of silver (Motome 17-23 October 2020).

### **Countering Anti-Indian Rhetoric and the Quest for Citizen Economic Empowerment**

As already hinted earlier, some people responded to the accusation of Indians monopolising government patronage and state capture by arguing that the problem was lack of necessarily discipline and business acumen on the part of most indigenes. A deep-rooted culture of poor service delivery and production of low quality goods was also cited as a serious concern. Aspects of this were shared by Satar Dada himself in an interview with one of the local radio stations. Some members of the Indian community, who were angered by the accusations and abuse hurled at them hit back in the social media. They pointed out that they had contributed to the economic development of the country, and if they were to end their participation the economy would collapse like that of Zimbabwe. Some indigenes also argued in the social media that the radical economic empowerment envisaged or demanded by Ngakaagae, Gaobakwe, ATI and others of their ilk would collapse the economy and lead to massive joblessness. The aggressive campaign against Indians was also seen as racist (Otlogetswe 6 June 2020).

Nevertheless, the citizen economic empowerment proponents responded to their critics whom they

portrayed as uncritical apologists of the status quo or state capture. For instance, Ngakaagae indicated that ‘When discussing this issue [*Halaal* induced marginalisation of native-chicken farmers] on social media, I was greeted with pitiable, self-hate excuses such as the employment role these key players perform in our economy. I dare say that Batswana would employ even more people, if we were to unlock the value chain and allow all to play’ (Ngakaagae 10 July 2020). Also as noted above, Gaobakwe had also dismissed the sentiment or stereotype that the indigenes did not have the necessary discipline and business acumen to run sustained and successful enterprises.

The government undertook some initiatives meant for citizen economic empowerment. For instance, Parliament debated the citizen economic empowerment law and announcements were made that starting on 1 June 2020 the government would pass a new law on business reserved 100% for Batswana citizens only. However, it was not indicated whether this meant people carrying national identity cards (*Omanang*) or the indigenes. The communiqué announced that ‘All licenses for foreign owned businesses will NOT be renewed’. It was announced that an industrial licence to operate any of the following manufacturing enterprises shall be reserved for citizens in terms of section 5 (5) (a) of the Act: bread and confectionary; ice making; meat processing; peanut butter; purification and bottling of water; traditional sour milk and sorghum. Furthermore, it was declared that a registration certificate to operate any of the following manufacturing enterprises shall be reserved for citizens in terms of section 16 (2) (a) of the Act: bricks; bugler bars, gates and windows; candles; fencing material excluding gum poles; floor polishing; packaging; protective clothing; roof trusses; school furniture; school uniforms; screen printing and embroidery; signage, including electronic signage; traditional craft; and traditional leather products. The communiqué further declared that the following businesses registration certificates shall be reserved for citizens or for companies WHOLLY owned by citizens: agents business; auctioneers business; car wash business; cell phone shop business; cleaning services business; curio shop; dry clean depot business; florist business; general dealer business; general hire services; IMPORTED PRE-OWNED MOTOR DEALER BUSINESS; Internet café and copy shop; and laundromat business. While it was not explained why IMPORTED PRE-OWNED MOTOR DEALER BUSINESS was emphasised in capital letters, this business is believed to be predominantly in the hands of Indians particularly in Gaborone’s peri-urban area of Mogotshane. Furthermore, in July 2020 President Masisi launched with pomp and ceremony revised and simplified CEDA guidelines with greatly increased ceiling meant to boost the push for economic empowerment.<sup>3</sup>

Ngakaagae also touched on a critical issue of the marginalisation of local communities in the country’s tourism Mecca of Okavango Delta and Chobe region where the tourism industry is largely monopolised by investors from Western countries (Ngakaagae 9 October 2020). Citizen involvement is said to be quite limited. However, it is well documented that former President, Ian Khama, has a significant investment in partnership with the Western investors in these regions. Therefore, during his presidency this was a sub-Power Elite dynamic with a different complexion. Ironically, the local communities in the Okavango region (Ngamiland West) are said to be among the most severely impoverished in Botswana primarily as a result of the ‘enclave’ and ‘internal colonial character’ of the high-end tourism industry there (Mbaiwa 2017). Therefore, one of the much talked about pledges of Masisi’s government was to help Batswana penetrate this exclusive tourism market which primarily caters for Western and South African White billionaires and millionaires.

Nonetheless, these efforts were seen by some critics as merely nibbling at the edges of economic marginalisation of the indigenes. As indicated above the capacity to provide goods and services of the quality demanded by exclusive foreign franchises where the country’s elite shop, was seen as likely to

3 <https://www.ceda.co.bw/sites/default/files/Revised%20CEDA%20Guidelines%20June%202020.pdf>, accessed 15 October 2020.

become a serious challenge to the citizen owned enterprises. Poor work ethic and entitlement were not adequately addressed. Furthermore, Ngakaagae also raises a critical issue that severely undermines efforts at empowering the citizens namely the entrenched and pervasive corruption in government (Ngakaagae 9 October 2020). Efforts at fighting corruption do not convince many people as ‘the long arm of the law’ seems short when it comes to some well-connected accused with those arraigned before the courts routinely and predictably emerging victorious. The continued stay of the Directorate on Corruption and Economic Crime (DCEC) under the Office of the President instead of it being a genuinely independent entity has raised serious doubts about its effectiveness in fighting the notoriously difficult to tackle elite corruption (Mogalakwe and Nyamnjoh 2017 and Ngakaagae 9 October 2020). BDP activists who campaign against corruption are marginalised by the party hierarchy. The entrenched Power Elite in the form of the nexus between politicians and the business community, whether Indian or not, could prove problematic to break down as will be the indigenes’ penetration of the high-end Western driven tourism in the northern part of the country as business owners.

### Conclusion

Using the prism of the Power Elite theory this paper attempted to explain the Indian factor in the Botswana body politic from a historical and political economy perspectives. This was at a time when the Covid-19 contagion was ravaging the whole world with Botswana being no exception. The impact of the pandemic in Botswana brought to the fore the old debate on citizen economic empowerment which had cropped up sporadically in the past. The failure of meaningful citizen economic empowerment was blamed squarely on the Indian business community’s influence and financial support for the country’s political leadership, the so-called state capture.

Covid-19 also saw the government of Botswana taking some initiatives meant for citizen economic empowerment. However, the major challenge going forward will be how to eradicate self-defeating attitudes and practices that undermine business and commercial undertaking by some indigenes. These include elite corruption and weak institutions meant to fight it, state capture, poor work ethic and the culture of entitlement. However, the fight against elite corruption in Botswana appears to be a lost cause. Moreover, state capture seems to be an integral part of emerging African democracies and only personalities are likely change while the architecture or infrastructure remains largely intact. More often than not, the interests of the Power Elite have primacy over public or national interests.

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