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## "The Last of the Queen's Men": A true story of a Lesotho experience?

David Lucas, The Australian National University

"The Last of the Queen's Men. A Lesotho Experience " by Peter Sanders was reviewed by David Goldsworthy in the December 2001 issue of the *Australasian Review of African Studies*. This paper considers what contribution the book has made to the social history of the white community in what was then Basutoland.

The book covers the author's time as a District Officer in the Basutoland Administration from 1961 until 1966 the year when Lesotho gained its Independence. Sanders (2000:3) has three objectives: to recapture what it was like, "to work as an administrator in the last days of British rule in Basutoland, and then as a scholar in the early days of Lesotho's independence." He was also trying to place his experience, "as a small and atypical part of the extraordinary history of contacts and relations between black and white in southern Africa, and in Lesotho in particular."

Sanders (1989:194) read Greats, alias Latin and Greek, at Oxford and after Basutoland went on to get a PhD in African History, to write *The Life of Moshoeshoe*, and become Chief Executive of the Race Relations Board in Britain from 1988 to 1993 (Glaze 2001:53). He therefore seems highly qualified to write his book. My qualifications for writing this piece are less impressive. I am a demographer, I have read a lot of autobiographies, and I was there. I have known Peter for over forty years and in signing my copy of his book he kindly credited me with the title of Chapter 9, " Leribe: the King and the Cardinal." In spite of all this I found sections of the first half of his book to be rather annoying; hence this article.

As a demographer who worked on the planning of the 1966 Census of Basutoland, I cannot resist including a few statistics. The census shows a de facto population of 1,582 Europeans, 766 Asians and 850,013 Africans (Lesotho 1969: Table 2). In addition, 117,273 Basotho were absent (Lesotho 1969: Table 1), many of whom were working in the mines in South Africa. The number of Europeans varied from 14 in Butha Buthe District to 1017 in Masuru District which contained the capital of Maseru and the University at Roma (Lesotho 1969: Table 2A). The 1956 Report (Taylor 1958) is more informative about the non-African population. This shows that 948 of the Europeans counted in the 1956 census of Basutoland were born in South Africa, compared with 206 born in the United Kingdom, and 180 in Canada (Taylor 1958:98), with the latter including the *baruti ba Canada*, the Catholic priests. The major occupations of European males were trader or missionary (Taylor 1958:107).

### Methodology and Sources

At some stage, I thought of calling this paper, "Demography and Autobiography". As a demographer the title of the book appealed to me, for the Last of the Queen's Men are, in demographic parlance, a cohort, that is persons who experience the same event around the same time, in this case young officers who were recruited into pensionable posts.



Until recently demography has been a very quantitative discipline. Only in the last 20 years have qualitative methods, involving words rather than numbers, become more fashionable but still words are subordinate to numbers.

A major source of qualitative data is the focus group, which consists of, say, 6-8 participants of roughly equal status. The researcher organises a discussion of a particular topic, records the interactions of the group, and is searching for a consensus. Since I couldn't arrange such a group I sought the opinions of a similar number of contemporaries who had read the book. I shall persist in calling them a group although they now live in different parts of the world and did not interact. This group consisted of former Basutoland (a term applied to white residents of Basutoland), who had lived in what is now Lesotho in the early 1960s and are now aged under 80 years.

There are several points pertinent to the social sciences. The first is that social scientists are supposed to be looking for the significant, rather than being overwhelmed by the insignificant. Secondly, because we are usually using numbers we can search for significance using statistical tests, and we make allowances for errors, since we recognise that we are unlikely to find the "true" value. With qualitative data such as memoirs I assume that historians and demographers are hoping to get words that accurately represent the truth.

Thirdly, the social sciences make use of triangulation which "entails the overlapping the results at several points to enhance reliability." (Grbich 1999 :18). A similar process of checking in historical research is apparently known as validation. One aspect of validation is thwarted by Sanders who, in contrast to Smith (2000), does not give names to many people, especially those aged under 40 around 1960. The selectivity and/or anonymity starts early on in the book when he refers to "Three of us destined for Basutoland ..." (Sanders 2000:11). The other two Probationers, one single and one married, are never heard of again, except the latter when Sanders (2000:17) mentions that he and his wife will be sharing his house in Maseru with "another couple".

Thus my group of contemporaries could not identify the persons described. For example:

- Which District Commissioner who put a sign saying "The Residency" outside his house and proposed a toast to the Queen ? (Sanders 2000:46).
- Which senior officer left after constantly abuse by Congress officials? (Sanders 2000:34).
- Which African politician accused the Government Secretary, Gordon Hector, of being "power mad and Fascist gone" and rushing "to get his hands on all the free booze" when the Resident Commissioner was on leave ?(Sanders 2000:28-29).

However, this does provide an opportunity for validation, since at least two Basutoland confirmed that Hector, who was a principled but frugal Scot, would order large quantities of duty free whisky through the Government Stores whenever he was



Acting Resident Commissioner for a few days. This was within the rules but may well have come to the notice of, and been exaggerated by, the politicians.

### Written Sources

In addition to the book review by Goldsworthy (2001), there was a critical review by Chris Dunton (2001), kindly sent to me by Peter Sanders, and an uncritical one by James Glaze (2001), another former Administrative Officer. Glaze stayed on after Independence, and later become the British Ambassador to Angola and then Ethiopia.

Dunton (2001) considers the book to be "oddly structured" and that "the last 80 pages are the most durable. In the first part "the succession of anecdotes, fiascos and absurdities wears thin." This provides a justification for this paper to concentrate on the first and possibly less durable part of the book.

Sanders (1989) has described his school and university days in a very professional history of an ordinary family. Coincidentally Colin Smith (2000), a doctor in Basutoland from 1960-1963, also published his memoirs in the same year as Sanders. However, Smith's book gets a totally different type of response in a review by Squires (2001), another medic, who suggests that Smith's experiences as a "green" doctor "provide a useful insight into some of the problems faced by healthcare in Africa today." Both Smith and Sanders and other Basutolandians kindly corresponded with me on particular points.

### Memoirs and Memory

Since the value of qualitative methodology is quite well covered in the demographic literature I assumed that established historians would be able to direct me towards a text that instructed tyro historians how to interpret and evaluate memoirs. In fact no one did although one told me that he didn't put much trust in memoirs, while another implied that memoirs were not expected to be as reliable as autobiographies or biographies. The *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (2001) was informative linking 'memory', 'memoir', and 'memorandum' and indicating that 'memoirs' could be "a record of events, not purporting to be a complete history."

Who writes colonial memoirs? The answer is largely administrators. Kirk-Greene (1999: 145-150) devotes about six pages of his book *On Crown Service* to "Biography, Autobiography, Memoirs". About three and a half pages concern works by the Administrative Service, with the residual written by the other 12 Colonial Services. This lack of balance is unfortunate: for example, colonial auditors might have great deal to say about corruption.

Both Sanders and Smith are recalling events that happened about forty years ago. Both relied on letters home but such letters often avoid the unpleasant. As Smith notes (2000:13), his brother's letters home, "...made the Korean War sound like a jolly romp...".



Whereas Sanders admits that some things have been totally forgotten, Dunton (2001) is convinced that Sanders "seems to enjoy total recall." Yet, as one distinguished social scientist wrote recently "Stretching memory back 50 years is always dangerous, if not distorting, as Proust discovered in his anguish." (Goldstein 2003). Author Anthony Burgess has described his colonial experiences in Malaya, but Lewis (2002) in dissecting the autobiography seems to conclude that Burgess is often a fraud or liar.

Graham Greene (cited in Hefner 2003) in discussing his novel *The Quiet American* said that he had rearranged the historical events since "This is a story and not a piece of history." Similarly Smith (2000:5) admits to having "moved the events around in time, but they all actually occurred...".

Moreover, recent research has confirmed that long-term memory is unreliable. Memories are fluid rather than static, and "Simply retelling a tale may be enough to change it for good." (McCrone, cited in Pearson 2003). Whereas Woolton (1959: xii) was able to use his wife and secretary to check his record of events, Sanders was able to use the Public Record Office and two of his contemporaries, Gordon Hector, and an academic, David Ambrose.

Possibly a diary would be superior to one's memories and to letters home. Rolling Stone Mick Jagger was apparently unable to remember enough of his little of his youth to write his autobiography. In contrast, the meticulous Bill Whyman kept a diary which formed the basis of his autobiography *Stone Alone* (Murray 2003). However, Woolton (1959:xi) has written that when he became Britain's Minister of Food, he was "warned of the dangers of keeping a diary.... ". He continues that "Diaries are generally written up at night ... and not all of one's friends welcome such nocturnal reflections." The same can be said about memoirs written even forty years after the event since many friends will still be alive.

In thinking about what Sanders wrote I became more tolerant. This book is certainly self-censored and I would do the same myself unless I was sure the others were dead. The review by Glaze contains no criticism of the book or the author. Furthermore, I also realised that a book is unlikely to be a good read if every sentence is prefaced by, "As far as I can remember,..." or " I think I am correct in saying,..", or "To the best of my recollection,..".

I have read at least four autobiographies when I was in the same place at the same time as the authors, and I have noticed errors in all of them. A common error is to write names as they sound, and Sanders, without the benefit of the Basutoland Government *Staff Lists* does this on occasions. Sanders (1989:194) wanted to go to a soccer school but finished up at a rugby school. As a rugby enthusiast I was disconcerted to see that he reports Springbok defeating the British and Irish Lions in a Bloemfontein test match by 44-4 (Sanders 2000:57). Not only is the winning margin exaggerated but a score of four points was an impossibility.



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## Assessing the Author and the Book

### The three reviewers.

Goldsworthy (2001) compliments the author on his "lucidity, his reflectiveness and his powerful sense of commitment to his subject".

Dunton (2001) considers the book "..worth it for its alertness and insight .... and for its sincerity."

Glaze (2001:53) writes: "One of the nice things about this honest book by an honest man is the way he pokes gentle fun at that young and impressionable Englishman who 'prided himself on his liberal outlook ' "

### Comments from the group of contemporaries:

"The most engaging aspect of this book was the author's clear affection for the Basotho..."

"Its real weakness is its failure to describe the crucial role played by women...Their only appearance is as maid or queens."

"I found myself getting quite annoyed.."

"...I found it irritating....I found his comments about every South African he ever met very petty.."

"...a charming and very personal memoire "

"I've never read a book by a new arrival to colonial Africa and it struck em how differently he saw things - things we took for granted (houses, servants, etc.)"

"All his little narratives build up the overall perception of a bunch of eccentric idiots"

"I didn't have a clue what was happening.... I suppose politics didn't interest me much..."

"He preferred the eloquent radicals and didn't know much about the other side of politics."

Colin Smith (personal communication) found the book,  
".. particularly interesting, because it gave some insight into what was going on at the centre of things, whilst rather inexplicable things were going on in Qacha's Nek, where we were very isolated, and relied on the Basutair pilots for fragments of gossip and news....The Basutoland he describes rings true to me: I hope mine did to him"



The two contemporaries who had read both Sanders and Smith preferred the latter, feeling that he had captured the essence of life in Basutoland.

### **Schools and the Power Structure**

Sampson (1962:189), in *The Anatomy of Britain*, says that "Since the war the public schools have become slowly aware that there is no longer an empire to which to send their sons." Sampson (1962:217) continues that "the rift between Oxbridge and Redbrick, deepened by the rift between schools cuts right through this book." According to Sampson (1962:169) there were about 190 British public schools but 64 of these were grammar schools and "usually a public school is taken to mean one which is independently financed- that is the other 133." Within these 133 there are nine top schools. During the 1960s the Basutoland Administration contained at least two Old Etonians. Professor Killingray (2000), in a book review of *Britain's Imperial Administrators 1858-1966* by Kirk-Greene (Rugby, Cambridge and Nigeria), surmises in since he had been to a secondary modern school he "would have been no more than one of the NCOs of Empire, at best perhaps a foreman platelayer!"

Dunton (2001) considers three of Sanders' characteristics as being usual: Sanders was a Nonconformist, had been to a state school and had a liberal outlook. Glaze (2001:53) also seizes on these. Goldsworthy (2000:71) does not, referring instead to the "generations of Oxbridge graduates" who had joined the Overseas Civil Service (formerly the Colonial Service).

When a chief greets him as "Dook", Sanders denies being one. He writes "I was, or so I thought at the time, the only white administrative officer in the country who had not gone to a public school. I voted Labour, I prided myself on my liberal outlook, and not being a duke, and not being a duke was important to me. But whites in Basutoland were people of importance simply by virtue of being white. "

Unfortunately the last sentence is not developed further. Not all whites were really important and some were much more important than others. At the top of the colonial power structure were the Resident Commissioner, initially Chaplin and then Giles, and their deputy, the Government Secretary, Gordon Hector (Sanders 2000:24). Both Giles and Hector were Scots, and both had been educated at Edinburgh Academy and Oxford around the same time. How powerful were they? When I applied for a transfer from the Audit Office to the Bureau of Statistics my boss refused to release me, but was overruled by the Resident Commissioner. When I secured a central site for the new Statistics office, the Resident Commissioner decided that this was a more appropriate location for the new British High Commission. Whites with rather limited power probably included the bank clerks (known as the bank boys) and some traders who were managers rather than owners.

As Sanders implies that he subsequently found out that others had not been to public schools. His own school, however, had been founded in 1573 and had been a public school until "shortly after the war" (Sanders 1989:194), presumably just a few years before he got there. Since the British class system was extant in Basutoland, perhaps



more pertinent is that on his way to his school interview his mother had warned him not to mention that she worked in a factory. It should be emphasised here that people like Sanders had only narrow window of opportunity about six years. He needed to be aged between 5 and 10 years at the time of the 1944 Education Act so that he could join the meritocracy and have graduated by 1960 when the Colonial Office stopped serious recruiting of pensionable staff.

### **The Civil Service**

The Civil Service was divided into two parts the Junior Service which was African and the Senior Service which was almost entirely white in 1959, and less so as 'Basothisation' proceeded prior to Independence. Senior Service housing in Maseru was in Maseru West, quite separate from the Junior Service housing. Sanders (2000:24) alludes to the toilets in the Secretariat as being in "a little building at the side, and were no more than buckets with wooden seats." In fact, for the males at least, there were two identical buckets, one for the Senior Service, one for the Junior.

Sanders (2000:47) ranks the Government Departments;

"Some branches of government, like the administrative, the legal, carried more prestige than others, like Posts and Telegraphs or the Public Works Department". The Administration in 1959 was all white (Basutoland Government 1959: 18-21). About one third were Oxbridge graduates, one third graduates of other (mostly British Universities and one third had been officers in the Armed Forces or, to use Sanders description had little formal education. Several of the last category had been to superior public schools, including Harrow in England and Hilton in South Africa (Colonial Office 1963:420, 432).

In contrast the 17 Medical Officers included eight trained in South Africa, five of whom were Africans. The 17 also included two white doctors from Basutoland's missionary families. The Judiciary and Legal officers law had mixed backgrounds, with one piece of legislation allegedly, "drafted in a hurry over a radiator in the railway hotel in Bloemfontein ..." (Sanders 2000: 28). The Posts and Telegraphs was entirely white, and locally recruited, either South Africa-born or educated in South Africa.

One of the few examples of validation from the books by Sanders and Smith refers to the character of Gideon Pott, the Senior District Officer in Leribe. The *Colonial Office List* (Colonial Office 1963:395) shows him to have been educated at St. Andrew's, Grahamstown, and Trinity College, Cambridge. Sanders (2000:71) says Pott, "was one of the last of the squirearchy, 'a real gentleman' we were told." Smith (2000:24) says Pott "was a true English gentleman....always perfectly groomed, he had an excellent seat on a horse."

There were also two unions, one for the expatriates, another for the Africans although one European officer belonged to the latter for a short while. Sanders does not mention their activities at all even though these increased in intensity as Independence approached,



particularly when a salary supplement was given to expatriates deemed to be overseas recruited in contrast to the locally recruited Europeans who were mostly South Africans.

Sanders does not say much about his conditions of service or on the material benefits of life in the Overseas Service in Basutoland. Smith (personal communication) says that he was paid less than that of a British GP and that,

"...certainly no gravy trains came my way! Nobody was getting rich at the country's expense and there was no apartheid."

Presumably he would not agree with Killingray's (2000) remarks that "The rewards of colonial service were considerable, certainly when compared with many a home civil service post...".

The 'line' Departments were not headed by Oxbridge graduates: for example the Director of Agriculture was a Reading graduate.. Traditionally most Colonial Administrative officers did a one year course at Oxbridge as Probationers but were not taught Administration (Kirk-Greene, 2000:41). As generalists the District officers could find themselves in fairly senior positions in specialist areas such as training and finance.

### **Religion and Morality**

According to Sanders (2000:47), Maseru society was, to his "...Puritanical eyes, rather a loose society.." He continues (2000:48), ".. many of the women were bored out of their minds. They had no work themselves and there were servants to look after their homes and children. The Anglican Church in particular was torn apart by scandal, and two officers had to be posted to different ends of the country because one was having an affair with the other's wife."

Was Maseru really "loose"? Sanders makes it clear that this was his own opinion, but unfortunately is the only definitive view of the white morality in Maseru and makes it sound like the southern Africa's version of eastern Africa's Happy Valley, epitomised by the phrase, "Are you married or do you live in Kenya?" Conversely other memoirs give an impression of colonial Happy Families where "looseness" either does not exist or is not mentioned (see, for example Bevan, 2001). By extension, South Africa had thousands of white mothers who did not work. Were they equally "loose"?

Some of the contemporaries tended to think that Maseru was no better and no worse than anywhere else. For Leribe, his judgement is that, "There were the inevitable alcoholics and the inevitable affairs." (Sanders 2000:88). What were his sources? Certainly the affair he is probably describing could easily be confirmed and he might well have known through official channels about the posting of the two officers. Unless of course he was referring to another affair when two officers allegedly swapped wives for a while. Perhaps his general impression was based on hearsay and gossip, which admits was rife (Sanders 2000:48) and may or may not have been reliable. One wife who was critical of loose behaviour told me she had been the subject of gossip because she would sometimes spend a weekend in South Africa, leaving her husband in Maseru. Another provoked comment when seen cooking breakfast for a neighbour when his wife was away.





Sanders (2000:52) says that his faith was dwindling and stopped attending the Lesotho Evangelical Church. Elsewhere (Sanders 1989:195) writes that although he had been accepted for the Methodist Ministry he had lost his faith at Oxford. In spite of his lack of contact with any church he claims that the Anglican church was split asunder. Although not an Anglican I regularly attended the Anglican Church and I was unaware that the Anglican church had been "torn apart by scandal". The two offices in which I worked were not touched by such scandal. Since the Administration was involved in several scandals, including one that reached the national press, why wasn't the Administration torn apart?

Sanders comments were directed to the married. What of the unmarried whites, when I asked one of the bachelors from the 1960s about this, he said the if the society was loose, he was one of the loosest.

### **Military Service**

It would be an interesting experiment to ask Basutolandians to come up with one word to describe white society in the same way that Sanders picked on "loose". My word would be "tough". Whereas one contemporary referred to Basutoland as being like Gilbert and Sullivan; when the TV series MASH appeared it all seemed very reminiscent to me.

The white males population largely consisted of two cohorts: those old enough to have served in the Second World War, those who had done National Service either in the UK or South Africa after the war. There was a very small cohort, including Sanders and Smith, who were still at University when National Service was abolished in the UK. Smith (2000:13-14), however, had been a Senior Under Officer in the cadets at Charterhouse and had learned to fire a howitzer at Oxford, although his pistol shooting left much to be desired (Smith 2000:133).

The 1961 Mokitimi riots were one of the most significant events of the early 1960s. In describing these riots Sanders (2000:30) mentions that the wife of one official was cut by stone thrown through her car window. She was not the only white injured. He then implies that the Administration's response was prompt "That night all the young men in the administrative service had to take turns in patrolling western Maseru in pairs to make sure that there was no more trouble." He also implies that this response was ineffectual: "It seemed absurd that two unarmed young men should have wandered around Maseru at night, and I have no idea what we would have done if we had stumbled on anything serious."

I find this all very perplexing. The patrols I remember were well-organised, not by the Administration, and carried out by a large part of the white male population in the part of Maseru West, an area that was quite separate from the location where the Africans lived. I was at one stage in the same patrol as Peter. I was not in the administrative service and I was not given whisky by Gordon Hector. There was criticism of the senior officials, including Hector, for doing nothing. The plaudits given to Hector by Sanders on page 27 are well deserved but as well as being a "painstaking draftsman" he was considered by some to be a ditherer. I remember the wife of one of my superiors saying, "We are



British, after all!" The key organisers of the of the patrols were drawn from the cohort of war veterans, one leader being Doug Campbell, the Director of Agriculture, who had won the Military Cross at Arnhem. We were initially enrolled as NCOs in the Basutoland Mounted Police and some of the patrols carried their own firearms. Later when things became more formal we were demoted to the rank of Trooper and armed with wickerwork shields and truncheons.

### **Date of Arrival and Departure**

Another demographic characteristic is the date of arrival and departure. Both Smith and I arrived before Sanders so to some extent he missed the acceleration of the 'winds of change'. When I arrived in Basutoland in December, 1959, I was told by Alan Wilson, my immediate superior, that I could safely leave my brief case in his unlocked car outside the Secretariat. Yet around 1962 Smith (2000:132) thought it prudent to buy a pistol on his return to Maseru, "As time went by, we realised that Maseru had changed quite a lot since I arrived, two and a half years before. ... as independence approached ...this seemed to breed a number of people prepared to take up arms to get their hands on political power." (Smith 2000:132)

Sanders (2000:50) writes that the Maseru club had four African members. When I arrived in 1959, the Basutoland Club (its correct title) was all white and someone I didn't know put his signature on my application form saying that "It'll help keep the blacks out." Another white bastion was the primary school and I heard a socially superior English couple who supported integration described as communists.

The first African admitted was a medical doctor, Dr Lebona. In 1959 the African doctors were still paid less than the whites although this was soon to change. Towards the end of the colonial era, staff who were recruited overseas were given a salary supplement, to the chagrin of the locally recruited whites.

Perhaps surprisingly, Dr Lebona was deemed to have been recruited overseas, and received the supplement. I last saw him in Lesotho in the early 1990s having dinner at the *Lancer's Inn* in Maseru with a group of white traders and their wives. The Afro-American owner of the hotel told me of his difficulties in persuading the military to hand-over their semi-automatic weapons when entering the hotel.

I am sure that many Basutolandians never returned after Independence. Smith went back to Lesotho several years after his departure. His place at the Qacha's Nek hospital had been taken by a Korean (Smith 2000:159). He returned again this century, meeting inter alia, Dr Lebona and Professor Ambrose.

Peter Sanders is still involved with research and has co-authored a book with Colin Murray on medicine murder in Lesotho. They have discovered a completely new set of archives in Hanslope, the secret and confidential files sent back when Lesotho became self-governing in 1965.



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At Independence many of the whites civil servants dispersed. Some came to Australia. Many returned to their country of origin, often the UK or South Africa. Some non-South Africans, who almost certainly did not support apartheid, settled in South Africa

### **Conclusion**

Sanders (2000:60) is obviously right when he says that his "own account is very personal and others would write very differently." This view is shared by some of the contemporaries. He obviously differs from Smith in the way he spent his working hours and his leisure time, with Smith (2000:128-9) making it quite clear that he enjoyed a beer and a party. In contrast Sanders and his wife did not socialise much at the Maseru club (Sanders 2000:51) and he spent much time studying the history of the Basotho (Sanders 2000:91). In spite of the limitations of memoirs as a historical record I think Dr Lebona should have written his.

A minority of the contemporaries felt that he had failed his first objective, achieve his first objective, of describing what it was like to be a young administrative officer. Two objected to his lack of balance in his anecdotes and narrative. To selectively quote South Africans making racist remarks is not a hard task, even in Sydney today, as shown by Fraser (2003).

My most basic comment is that Sanders should have kept a diary. As a demographer I was pleased to deduce that Sanders remembered and what he wrote was heavily influenced by his demographic characteristics, including his age, education, family composition, religion and date of arrival in Basutoland. He has quite rightly written to me that, "there is a wonderful book to be written on colonial memoirs.

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