

Danielle Potts Flinders University

Botswana an African success story: Liberal Democracy, a misconception?

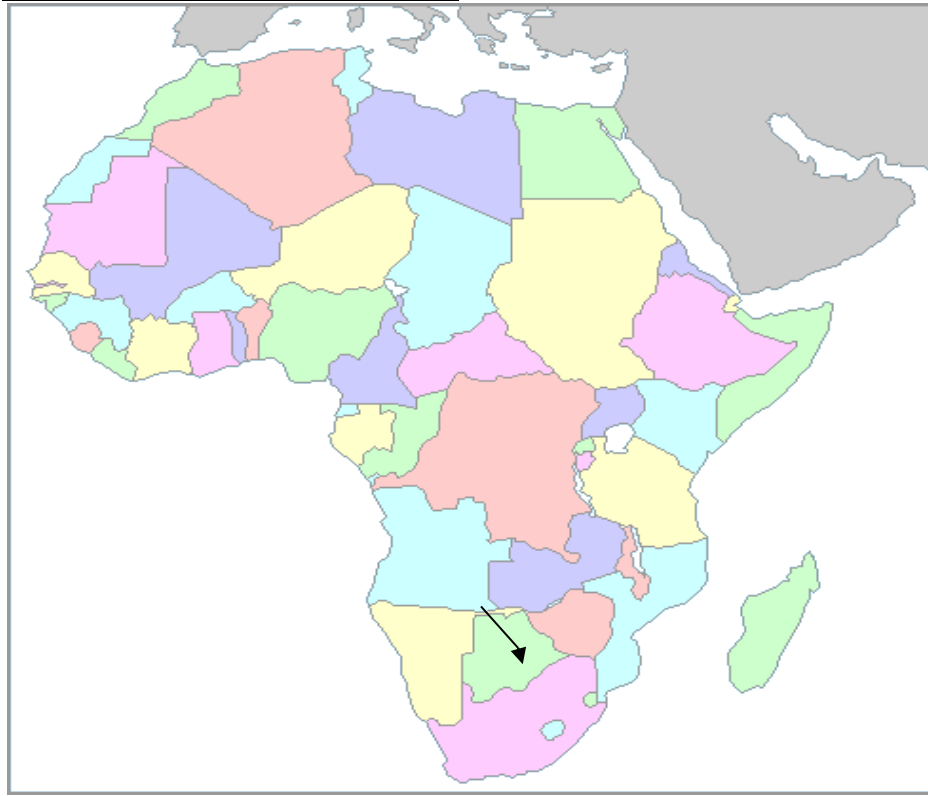
Botswana has long been viewed as a 'shining light' of democracy in Southern Africa. But, Botswana's "democracy" has produced a one-party rule by the Botswana Democratic Party since independence in 1966, and there has been much criticism and concern expressed in the last few years about the growing power of the executive parliament and the consequent weakening of democracy. This paper aims to look at the way in which democracy is diminishing in Botswana and whether or not Botswana is really as democratic as it is represented to be. It looks at how, Botswana acts a one-party party system in a multi-party state, and in this system, extensive powers are concentrated in the hands of a presidency that is not directly elected by the people. Throughout this paper we also see that Botswana is actually characterised by elitism, centralised political power and weak executive accountability (Good, 1999, p52).

Secondly, this essay looks at how Botswana can be seen as suffering from a paradox of peace: in that its transition to political independence was not only missing a national liberation struggle but any nationalist struggle at all, and this produced political stability at the cost of political consciousness. People residing in the rural areas of Botswana make up majority of the population and also act as a significant proportion of voters. These people saw independence as something done "for them" by wealthy and royal-family elites of Botswana and not something they had to personally fight for.

Thirdly, the paper will address the issue of how Botswana also suffers from a paradox of wealth. Here we see that Seretse Khama, president from independence until his death in 1980, is generally seen as having treated the government as a trust, using revenues from the young diamond industry to develop infrastructure and provide education and healthcare for the people, while gearing rural development programs to benefit large cattle owners rather than the rural masses. Too much of a dependence on diamonds has produced an authoritarian political elite, and the accumulation of such wealth and an authoritarian political culture have led to major inequalities in the perpetuation of poverty for many and also to missed opportunities to transform the economy from a wealth-rich to a job-rich system.

The combination of diamond dependency, an autocratic presidency, and a dominant party led by the rich has not only has threatened democracy, but has also compromised human rights, the independence of the courts, and patterns of equitable development in the country. This paper will explore the painful history of the San people in Botswana and the ways in which they have become subjects in the land of their birth. The paper will also make brief mention of the inequalities experienced by women in the country and at the current militarisation and personalisation of the Botswana government under the leadership of Ian Khama.

Figure 1: The Republic of Botswana



From Bechuanaland to Botswana

Botswana is a landlocked country, with a population of approximately 1.6 million people (Melber, 2007). Botswana borders Zimbabwe to the northeast, South Africa to the east and south, Namibia to the north and west, and touches Zambia at one point on the Zambezi River in the north (See Figure 1). Most of Botswana is uninhabitable with the Kalahari Desert accounting for 84 percent of Botswana's land mass. As a result, 80 percent of the population live along the fertile eastern border of the state (Parson, 1984, p4). In comparison with most other African countries, Botswana is ethnically homogeneous. Somewhere between 80 and 90 per cent of its population belong to one of the eight major Tswana tribes (Beaulier, 2003, p229).

As a result of the fact that Germany annexed South West Africa (Namibia) in 1884, British policy made a drastic change, and as a consequence of this change, Bechuanaland had come to be a region of strategic importance for the British (Acemoglu, et al, 2003, p 94). Bechuanaland acted as one of the main corridors to northern Africa and the British feared that if Germany were to gain access to this country, that this corridor would be blocked (Gann, et al, 1967, p203). Great Britain offered Bechuanaland protection against the Boers and Germans. Sechele, a Tswana chief accepted Great Britain's offer of protection and the Bechuanaland Protectorate was formed in 1885. Under the terms of the agreement, the British prohibited any invasions into Bechuanaland. Other than protecting Bechuanaland, the British showed very little interest in the way they managed Bechuanaland. They thought it to be a state that lacked valuable natural resources. Moreover, majority of the British Empire's colonial budget had been spent on India, South Africa and Rhodesia. Resulting

from the fact that the British had insufficient resources to take on another colonial project, they left Bechuanaland alone, in the hope that no military conflicts would come to pass (Dale, 1995). The British did not take many resources from Bechuanaland, and neither did they make a significant contribution in terms of social and physical infrastructure.

Essentially the only role the British played in Bechuanaland was to arm the people so that they may protect themselves from the Germans to the West and the Boers to the South (Parson 1984, p22). After World War II, the British attempted to combine the Bechuanaland Protectorate with their South African colony, but Bechuanaland was able to prevent this annexation attempt (Beaulier, 2003, p30). Firstly through the fact that after World War II there was a strong nationalistic current that took place in the country, secondly, the National Party, a well-organised party that advocated for an independent Bechuanaland Protectorate had been formed in 1948. Most imperative to the resistance against the joining of South Africa and Bechuanaland was the banning of Chief Seretse Khama from the Bechuanaland protectorate in 1948 (Beaulier, 2003, p32). Seretse Khama studied in England and was unable to return to Bechuanaland because he had married a white Englishwoman. The white leadership in South Africa was repulsed by the inter-racial marriage and they insisted that Khama be forbidden from ruling Bechuanaland. Khama had a lot of support from the people of Bechuanaland and this resulted in the complete division Bechuanaland and South Africa. It was in 1956 that Khama returned to Bechuanaland after he had repealed his claim to chieftainship. The Botswana People's Party (BPP) was formed in 1960 and this party acted as an anti-apartheid, anti-colonial party, and in response as an opposition, Khama helped to form the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP), which appealed to the rural people and tribal chiefs alike, in contrast to the urban based BPP. An increase in political parties and nationalism resulted in Britain having less control of the protectorate and soon after, Britain officially recognised Botswana's national independence and, in July 1965, elections were held. The BDP led by Khama experienced a landslide victory, and Khama became Botswana's first president (Parsons, 1999). Since 1965, the BDP has controlled the presidency of Botswana.

Explaining Botswana's Success

Botswana was the fastest growing country in the world from 1965 to 1995. During that 30-year period, Botswana's average yearly growth rate was 7.7 percent, and Botswana moved from being the third poorest nation in the world to being an "upper middle income" nation (Good, 2003, p7). Statistics have proven that diamonds have played an essential role for growth in Botswana and diamonds currently account for approximately 40 percent of the country's output (Bannon, et al, 2003, p23). What has Botswana done so right to make its resources work in the best interest of the country? Natural resource abundance appears to be a curse rather than a blessing in many other African countries (Sachs and Warner, 1995). Present day researchers are almost in complete agreement that Botswana has achieved this impressive growth as a result of its good policies. Botswana's basic system of law and contract has seemed to worked reasonably well. Even with the large income generated from diamonds, state and private predation is quite minimal and there has been little or no domestic political instability or conflict for the control of this resource. The minimal public service structure inherited from the British underwent some restructuring by the Government of Botswana and it has now developed it into a relatively non-corrupt and

efficient bureaucracy (Beaulier, 2003, p39). Furthermore, positive gains have been made in terms of the government's investment in education, health and infrastructure (Mokopakgosi, et al, 2003, p13). Economic policy has been cautious, the exchange rate has remained closely tied to fundamentals, and the inflation rate has always remained somewhat minimal.

However, not everything in Botswana is perfect. Research suggests that Botswana has one of the highest adult AIDS rates in the world with roughly 25%- 30% of adults being HIV positive. This almost certainly represents a serious public policy failure (Molomo, 2000, p76). Although growth has been rapid in Botswana, inequality has proven to be extraordinarily high and has been practically unchanged; the country also faces a high unemployment rate, especially of migrant workers from rural areas (Good, 1999, p62). Even though Botswana has held free democratic elections since its independence, one party has always won and there has never been an opposition that has proposed a credible threat to the BDP. Evidence also suggests that since independence, the government has portrayed various forms of inequality among the minority people of its country, with specific relation to the San (also known as Bushmen) (Good, 1997).

In spite of these limitations, the evidence demonstrates that there is something distinctly successful about Botswana's economic policy. According to Acemoglu, Johnson and Robinson (2001), Botswana's good economic policies, and therefore its economic success, reflect its institutions, or more specifically its *institutions of private property*. These institutions are said to protect the property rights of actual and potential investors, they provide political stability, and also ensure that the political elites are guarded by the political system and the participation of a wide cross-section of the society.

Paradox of peace

The historical lack of radical or working class consciousness is strongly rooted in the absence of a nationalist struggle for independence that could have radicalised both workers and people living in the rural areas. The white settler population, unlike that of surrounding countries, was not large enough to provoke radical political opposition (Parsons, 1999). Botswana achieved political independence through a transfer of formal power from the British colonial authorities to their preferred political formation, the Botswana Democratic Party, organised by Seretse Khama, the royal heir in the largest Tswana polity (Bangwato) and the wealthiest man in the country at independence. The BDP represented a non-racial political and economic alliance of wealthy Tswana cattle owners with a small number of wealthy white cattle owners. It was organised specifically as a counter to the first organised party (the radical Botswana People's Party, which had historical and ideological links to nationalist movements in South Africa) and was from the beginning extremely hostile to trade unions and had as a political measure imposed a ban on strikes (Good, 1999, p54).

"Democracy" in Botswana had therefore, come to be identified not with ideological notions or party competition, but with the Botswana Democratic Party. Suffrage, gained without struggle, did not come to be highly valued and never did Botswana witness those impressive long snaking lines of South Africans waiting in the hot sun to cast their first vote. This paradox of peace has resulted in majority of the population maintaining an apathetic attitude towards the government in terms of social, economic, political and environmental issues. This leaves little room for change. If there is no uproar from the grassroots, power

will continue to be held within the political elite of the country, and the wealth created from diamonds will not reach those that need it most (Good, 1994, p503).

Multi-party state with one-party rule

How democratic can Botswana really be, if it has been under the rule of the same party since independence? Surely, some light needs to be shed on the current status of the BDP government, its internal affairs, and its interaction with opposition parties and civil society. Lotshwao (2011, p104) argues that the opposition parties in Botswana are too weak to unseat the dominant BDP, and this can be attributed to poor leadership, especially within the main opposition (Botswana National Front). In order to consolidate democracy or guard it against gradual erosion under BDP dominance and autocracy, Lotshwao (p105) also argues that there is a need for more internal party democracy and political accountability in the BDP to substitute for weak inter party competition. This call for more accountability comes from the fact that the people of Botswana are not entirely aware of what goes on between members and their interaction with the community. In order for a government to be democratic there needs to be various forms of transparency and this is not the case in Botswana. For internal party democracy to substitute for weak inter party competition, BDP factionalism should shift from opportunism to principle and policy differences (Molomo, 2003, p301). Internal party democracy, as understood in the study of liberal democracies, emphasises the need for participation by party membership and lower party structures in the decision-making processes of the party (Molomo, 2000, p73). This sort of participation in decision making allows for the selection of more capable leaders and the adoption of responsive policies, as well as the development of a democratic culture (Scarrow, 2005, p3). For a governing party, intra-party democracy is particularly important as it makes government responsive to popular demands. Participation by party membership and lower structures in decision-making also imposes checks and balances against bad leadership decisions (Lotshwao, 2011, p107).

Where there is single dominant party, with little prospect of change of government through elections, as in Botswana, the absence of internal party democracy can become more important than the existence of democracy between parties and 'cohesion and efficiency' can become justification for executive control. Additionally, in the absence of checks and balances imposed by internal democracy, the party leadership is exposed to gross policy mistakes and bad decisions. Except for leadership elections, internal democracy in the BDP exists only in theory. In terms of the BDP constitution, the National congress which is comprised of delegates is the supreme policy-making organ of the party. The National congress also elects the Central committee which runs the party in between congresses held every two years (Mokopakgosi, et al, 2000, p10). Beside the National congress, there is the National council which reviews the party's programmes and National development policies (NDPs) (Constitution of the BDP, 2010). However, contrary to the BDP constitution, the National congress and the National council do not play any significant role in policy-making, except to endorse policies exclusively decided by the party leadership and senior state bureaucrats. In particular, BDP presidents who simultaneously serve as state presidents have in recent years come to dominate policy-making. Not only does this expose the leadership to policy mistakes and non accountability but it also creates an environment

conducive for the development of authoritarianism which threatens the consolidation of democracy.

Diamonds and distribution of wealth

Since their discovery in 1967, it is diamonds which has transformed Botswana from an undeveloped country into an Upper Middle Income Country (UMC). Diamonds remain the firm direction of development in Botswana. Jwaneng was supposedly the world's most profitable diamond mine at the start of this century, with an annual income of \$1.5 billion (Good, 1999, p63). Although Botswana seems to portray good governance strategies and a democratic society in the eyes of the investor, there is little to be desired about the way in which the income from diamonds is distributed. Not only does the income obtained from mining and exporting diamonds fail to reach marginalised groups/rural communities, but the dependence that Botswana has on diamonds also has a very high risk factor for the country.

Political stability has depended significantly on the credibility of promises made by the ruling party to bring the benefits of its diamond wealth to the masses, but Botswana has one of the greatest disparities of income and wealth in the world and some 40% of its people live below its own poverty datum line or soon will as a result of the HIV/AIDS epidemic (Good, 1994, p504). Revenues from diamonds had been successfully directed into national and infrastructural development. But the over-concentration on diamonds led simultaneously to the non-diversification of the economy, the worsening of poverty and inequalities, and the continuance of ethnic discrimination and other forms of social injustice.

In world terms, Botswana's diamonds-dependence proves to be extremely high. Bannon, Collier, and Ross (2003, p22), have attempted to measure resource dependency, particularly in terms of minerals and oil, they have done this by using commodity exports as a percentage of GDP, they see the effects of resource dependence "peaking with exports at around 30 per cent of GDP". Out of 20 of the world's resource-dependent countries, Botswana was at 35.1 per cent, as early as 1995, above Sierra Leone with 28.9, Zambia with 26.1, Mauritania at 18.4, Bahrain at 16.4, and Liberia on 12.5. Based on these figures, Botswana was the most minerals-dependent country in the world (Bannon, et al, 2003, p3).

The economic consequences of diamonds dependency are evident. There has been a steady deterioration in agriculture and agricultural production, as diamonds' revenue has been utilised for the importation of food from efficient neighbouring producers. Between 1970-80, when diamonds were still entering production, agriculture grew by 8.3 per cent, in the next decade by only 2.2 per cent, and then it declined, with an average of 1.2 per cent per annum, due not only to the recurrent problem of drought but also to relatively low investment in the sector (Sachs, et al, 1995, p186). By 2003-04, agriculture, where the majority of people were living, represented only 2.3 per cent of GDP (Good, 1999, p67). The United Nations Development Program and the World Bank published data in 2004, covering the 1990s in Botswana, this data showed that nearly half of the population survived on less than two dollars a day, and of those living in poverty, 97 per cent lived in rural areas (Acemoglu, 2003, p114). It seems to be universally agreed that Botswana has managed and

maintained its diamond revenues incredibly well, especially in infrastructure and economic terms. It was in fact diamonds that bought roads, airlines, railways, telecommunications, health facilities, education, balanced budgets by 1972, a strong currency and high foreign exchange reserves, and the imported goods which Botswana did not produce for itself to the country. Finance and infrastructure have played a significant part in the development of the country.

However, Bannon and Collier (2003, p22) inter-link resource dependency with social factors, in particular “ethnic dominance”; they maintain that societies in which the largest ethnic group accounts for 45 to 90 per cent of the population have a higher risk of conflict. The role of government is again important in moderating and equalising ethnic relations. The Tswana tribe constitute approximately 70-80% of the population, their numbers are around one million, compared with minority groups, in descending numerical order, such as Kalanga with 160,000, Kgalagadi of 35,000, Herero of 31,000 and Yeyi at 27,000 (Parsons, 1998). The government has officially portrayed Botswana over the years as ethnically homogenous which, while essentially true by comparison with examples of tribalism elsewhere, tends to erase the cultures and roles of minorities in the country. “Tribe”/ethnicity and specifically the Tswana were an institutionalised element in the Constitution and in the political system of the country and as a result of this, the high dependence on diamonds by the government has resulted in the further marginalisation of non-Tswana people.

Discrimination

The Government of Botswana has traditionally respected the independence of the court system and has often been compliant with rulings against it, as demonstrated by the landmark 1992 case, *Dow v. Attorney-General (Botswana)*, in which the Court of Appeal of Botswana determined that citizenship laws allowing only male citizens to pass on their citizenship to their children amounted to sexual discrimination (Geisler, 2006, p76). In its ruling, the court stated, “Botswana seeks to avoid violating international law where possible.”

However, there still seems to be limited discrimination in terms of women in politics in Botswana, as there are in fact no electoral quotas for women and relatively low percentages of women in parliament, local government and the ruling party’s structures and in the 2004 elections, when the Southern African Development Community (SADC) goal was 30% representation of women in member parliaments, the percentage of women in Botswana’s parliament actually dropped from 17% to 10% (Van Allen, 2007, p7).

Despite the fact that the *Dow* case expanded upon Botswana’s image as a liberal democracy and highlighted the country’s loyalty to the human rights agreements that it had previously signed and ratified, there is still much to be desired about the way in which the government of Botswana has treated (or mistreated) the San (Bushmen) people.

In July 2010, the High Court of Botswana ruled against the San, denying them the right to access water in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR), which is in fact their ancestral land (Sarkin, 2009, p1). In June 2009, the San appealed for the existing borehole situated on their land to be reopened or that they be given permission to drill another borehole at their

own expense. The Government of Botswana (GOB) turned this request down, however. In 1996, the GOB began its forced removal against the San living in the CKGR and since that time, the San have been fighting to regain access to their land (Sarkin, 2009, p3). During the ongoing trial, a highly controversial issue has taken place, and the GOB granted mining licenses in the CKGR on the condition that any water from the borehole be used solely for the mine (Good, 2003, p7). It is important that we see this issue concerning water in the context of the San's struggle to live on their land, while continuously butting heads with the GOB'S desire to allow diamond mining in the reserve.

The GOB have argued that the presence of the San in the CKGR is an impediment to conservation efforts, but in a report presented by the United Nations in 2010, the Rapporteur on Indigenous Rights stated that the GOB's position is "inconsistent with its decision to permit Gem Diamonds/Gope Exploration Company Pty Ltd, to conduct mining activities within the reserve." According to the mining company, this operation is planned to last many years and could involve an approximate influx of 500-1200 people to the site over its life span (Hitchcock, et al, 2007, p6). Without access to water, the San are unable to live on the land. So although in theory the GOB hasn't broken any of the laws as set forth in the constitution which forbid actions such as Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence, and the GOB in theory has also allowed for the freedom of movement within the country, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, but in practice this is really not the case. The law in Botswana also prohibits the forced exile of people, and the GOB did not use force per se in the resettlement campaign of the San people, but in refusing to supply them with water, this is an infringement of an internationally recognised basic human right.

Current situation- militarisation of Botswana

Since the succession of Lieutenant-General Ian Khama to the presidency in April 2008, there has been an escalation in the militarisation and personalisation of power in Botswana. Oppressive systems have been enforced, military personnel have unnecessarily entered government in increased numbers, and an informal posse of advisers has come to surround themselves around Khama. As a result of these issues, democracy and governance have been seriously undermined in what has generally been portrayed as an African success story. This section of the paper looks at recent events which are threatening the rule of law, peace, and human rights in Botswana.

In 1998 a Statutory Instrument which banned the serving of alcohol in restaurants except between 12 noon and 2pm and between 6pm and 11pm was passed (Good, 2009, p317). It was said that at that stage, Khama had heavily influenced that particular regulation as a result of his dislike for alcohol. At 11pm on New Year's Eve, 2008 not long after Khama had been elected as the new president in Botswana, the measures were enforced for the first time and police and parliamentary units flocked into entertainment centres throughout the country, ordering owners to stop selling alcohol and arresting customers for illegal consumption. Khama and his government enforced a tightening of trading hours in liquor shops and in 2008 also imposed a 30% levy on the price of alcohol, and in doing so failed to think about the effects this levy would have on the sales rates and employment at

Kgalakgadi Breweries (the country's largest brewery), on the entertainment sector or on the interference in people's private lives (Good, 2009, p318).

A directive instituted strict and detailed dress codes for civil servants in March 2009 and this was another way in which Khama, through his superior position in government could further tackle social behaviour by the means of military practices and methods. Khama stated that it was "mandatory for public employees to dress in a manner that reflects credit on the Public Service", this "law" threatened job loss and punishment if employees came to work in tight skirts, or pants, sleeveless tops and clothing that showed cleavage or backs, the underwear or stomach (Good, 2009, p320).

Frequently President Ian Khama has been quoted saying that democracy demanded discipline and over time we have come to see that the latter is certainly his principal concern. While problems of alcoholism in the country remain somewhat undefined, in his government's discourse, Khama appears to be convinced that moral weakness abounds. However, Khama's moral concerns are not what the people see as their major problems. In a sample survey involving 1200 adults across the country, Afrobarometer (2009, p2) found that unemployment was the first concern, and poverty second- it had risen, they noted, quite sharply since 1999 and it continued to grow. The third issue as concluded by the survey was raising food prices. Not only did this survey find that people attributed the economic problems presented above to the prevailing state system, they believed that Khama had issued more directives than previous leaders and popular dislike for rule by Khama was so strong, that it climbed from 86 percent in 1992 to 92 percent in 2008 (Afrobarometer, 2009, p3).

Ian Khama's presidency isn't only militaristic, but also highly personalised in its reliance on a group of trusted loyalists, often within the family: Tshekedi Khama, brother and MP; Defence Minister Seretse, cousin; Dale Ter Haar, nephew, trained at Sandhurst (where Khama did his military training), engaged in mining and resource projects; Johan Ter Haar, formerly married to Ian's sister, Jacqueline Khama, chair of the Business and Economic Advisory Council, Pelonomi Venson-Motoi, 'very close and trusted friend', Minister of Communications, in charge of the government's radio, television, and print networks, Sheila Khama, cousin through marriage and head of De Beers Botswana and the list goes on (Lotshwao, 2011, p110). President Khama's apparent reliance on close loyalists influences his leadership style, elevating his military and dynastic personality, and excluding others and especially established institutions and processes from the running of the country.

Conclusion

For many decades, Botswana has been well known across the world for its post-colonial achievements, these being political stability and economic growth. In terms of making a comparison between Botswana and the rest of Africa in relation to good governance and democracy, Botswana is according to the World Bank, still at the forefront of these issues. Since its independence in 1966, Botswana exemplifies the possibilities for economic prosperity, sustained growth, absence of conflict and free and fair elections. However, when we look more closely at the current state of government and the current laws in place as has been done throughout this paper, we were able to delve deeper into the issues

associated with this question and from the information obtained and presented, we see that Botswana is not as democratic as it is actually represented to be.

Despite all of Botswana's achievements, social and cultural human rights of minority groups in Botswana have been undermined and have regrettably evolved slowly. This can be seen historically and currently through the relationship between the San and the ruling Tswana in particularly in the case of the San's eviction from the CKGR. Although Botswana is a relatively rich country, with the resources to deal with the problems of inequality, poverty and unemployment, its centralised governmental system, and its elitist, restrictive democracy, facilitates their continuance. Wealth, stability and apparent success promoted complacency among the centralised elite, and social rigidity resulted, and the money made by the government of Botswana from diamonds never reached those that needed it most.

In educating the people of Botswana about the importance of politics, the importance of a multi-party democracy and the effect a socially inclusive government can have on their general health and well-being; this may well be what the people of Botswana need in order for things to change. Apathy on the part of Botswana people will never allow them to be able to remove themselves out of the paradox of peace. Changes can only take place if civil society fights for what they want. Currently in Botswana, even if people wanted to fight for these changes, the government and president prohibit the right to strike, the new militaristic changes to the law as enforced by Ian Khama minimise the people's freedom of speech. Change can only come slowly, and from the bottom up (Good, 1999, p82).

In terms of the way in which the country is ruled, a democratic Botswana needs institutions rather than militaristic and personalistic individuals, and the cult of Khama's personality will set Botswana's political system back to the feudal days.

The BDP has no real competition and because of this, it is important that there be more internal party democracy to substitute for weak inter party competition. Internal party democracy would enhance government responsiveness and accountability as the coalition outside government could manage the one in government. As this is not the case, however, the only option left is to try and reform the national constitution, as currently the constitution compounds the lack of internal party democracy in the BDP by centralising political power on the sitting state president and granting him or her absolute immunity from prosecution. In the hands of the wrong leader, this power creates an environment conducive for the development of authoritarianism which in turn threatens the overall idea of democracy.

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