

Thomas Tlou and Alec Campbell, *History of Botswana*, Macmillan Botswana, Gaborone, 1984, pp.278, Maps, Illustrations

Despite the great advances made in the study of African history over the past twenty-five years, national history still remains a neglected area of African historiography. And yet histories of the nation-states that are a legacy of the colonial carve-up of the continent, precipitated by the Berlin West Africa Conference of 1884-1885, are of vital importance to nationals who seek to establish their identity in terms of their past. For the most part they have had to reply on histories that are a by-product of the old colonial historiography. Few African historians have tackled the difficult task of writing the history of the particular country in which they were born. Even Nigeria, whose historians staff some twenty University history departments, has not yet produced one who has ventured to write a history of his country. A few states have at least been fortunate to have their history written by expatriate historians who are products of the new African historiography, the outstanding example being John Iliffe's *A Modern History of Tanganyika*. But many still have to make do with histories written before independence, often by colonial administrators themselves. Thus this magnificently produced and illustrated *History of Botswana* by Thomas Tlou and Alec Campbell is a really welcome event. The fact that it is designed primarily for use in secondary schools makes it doubly welcome, since nowhere else is a balanced approach to the past more essential.

Until the publication of this volume the only history of Botswana available at any level was Anthony Sillery's *Botswana: a Short Political History*. The difference in the approach of the two books is immediately apparent from a study of their respective Tables of Contents. Tlou and Campbell devote over half of their book to the pre-colonial history of Botswana, while Sillery devotes less than a quarter. The colonial period, which is the principal concern of Sillery's volume, is not neglected by Tlou and Campbell but is put firmly in the perspective of the pre-colonial as well as the post-colonial history of the country, to which their last three chapters are devoted.

The authors make use of the very considerable research that has been undertaken on Botswana's history over the past twenty years, to which they themselves have each made their distinguished contributions. For this reason their book, though designed for a secondary school audience, will be useful for students studying the history of Botswana at a higher level. It will also prove an admirable introduction to the country for those who have no specific motive other than an interest in understanding its past.

The authors seem to be on surest ground when dealing with the earlier periods of Botswana's history. Their clear and original account of the peopling of the region, and the relationship of the early inhabitants of the country to the development of states in the region, is based on the most recent archaeological research. Indeed much of the material here cannot as yet be obtained elsewhere even in the learned journals. Curiously, it is when the authors approach the nineteenth century, about which so much more is known, that their footsteps are not so steady. In dealing with the *difaqane*, for instance, they seem to be more at pains to detail the travails of each of Botswana's present-day peoples and how they came to be where they now are, than to explain the underlying causes of this great upheaval and its long-term consequences. They come perilously close to a history that is one of "unrewarding gyrations" of peoples, to use Trevor-Roper's notorious phrase.

Their account of the colonial period is straightforward and fair, and told without rancour though the British record in the Bechuanaland Protectorate was certainly not a matter for pride. They contrast the stagnation under British rule with the imaginative developments that have taken place in a country which, at the time of independence, seemed to have no other future than its colonial function as a labour reserve for South Africa. They show how mineral revenues and the boom in cattle exports have been used to build schools and roads rather than being frittered away as has been the case in so many African countries that experienced a post-independence bonanza. They also explain the problems faced by a front-line state whose economy is deeply dependent on that of South Africa in trying to follow an independent foreign policy.

There are some factual errors in the period with which this reviewer is familiar that should be corrected in a second edition: autonomy and independence are not one and the same thing (p.160); the Bangwato formally joined the Advisory Council in 1939 not 1940, and attended meetings before that date on an ad hoc rather than a regular basis as suggested on p.183; Charles Rey succeeded Resident Commissioner Daniel in 1930 not 1929; in 1941 the British High Commissioner to South Africa was Lord, not Sir Edward Harlech; John Mswazwi was exiled to Serowe, not Mafeking, in 1930.

This all may seem to be nit-picking, but facts taught at school lodge firmly in the brain, as do interpretations. In this respect the account of the flogging of McIntosh in 1933 needs considerable revision.

In the first place McIntosh was brought before Tshekedi's kgotla and sentenced to a flogging for assaulting a Mongwato youth, not for sleeping with Bangwato women, though a dispute over one of them was the occasion for the assault. While on moral grounds Tshekedi may 'rightly' have tried McIntosh, such an interpretation does not help us understand the ensuing crisis nor its resolution. Under the terms of the British Protectorate the Tswana chiefs had no right to bring Whites before their courts, even those resident in their territories. Any complaints against Whites had to be placed before the Resident Magistrate, to whom Tshekedi had indeed frequently complained without result about the behaviour of McIntosh and another youth given to the same wild ways. It seems that Tshekedi brought the young McIntosh to justice in desperation since the British would do nothing to control him, though Resident Commissioner Rey believed he was deliberately provoking a constitutional crisis as part of his resistance to measures designed to restrict the powers of the Chiefs. Tshekedi was suspended (not deposed) on the grounds that he had exceeded his jurisdiction, not principally because of White South African pressure as implied here, though this obviously lay at the root of the over-reaction by the Acting High Commissioner, Admiral Evans, who sent his marines to Serowe in a display of British military might. Tshekedi was reinstated not because he threatened to take the Administration to court but because he formally acknowledged that he had no right to try a European under the Protectorate dispensation. Not least of the problems the British faced in suspending him from Office - and Charles Rey would have liked it to have been on a long-term if not permanent basis - was the fact that no one else would take on the chieftancy which meant that the British were unable to continue to operate indirect rule in Gammangwato. Tshekedi's ostensible climb-down therefore got off the hook an Administration that was under increasing pressure from Press, Parliament and Public Opinion in Britain for its mishandling of the affair.

This reviewer would not be belabouring these details of interpretation if he did not know how difficult it is to persuade students that what is printed in a text-book does not have biblical authority. Furthermore, this otherwise excellent textbook will no doubt deservedly go into many further editions so that suitable corrections can be made.

Overall, both publishers and authors are to be congratulated for a book that marks an important new departure in the approach to Botswana's history and which, in the tradition of Neil Parsons' A New History of Southern Africa, demonstrates how our understanding of the African past can be enriched by carefully chosen visual evidence in the form of contemporary paintings, drawings and photographs.

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