

The University in Botswana and the liberation struggle in southern Africa (1973–1980)

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This article documents key aspects of the role played by University students in Botswana in the liberation struggle, from the early years of the University in the mid-1960s to the year of Zimbabwe's independence in 1980. Three demonstrations by University students are analysed, and the article concludes that, contrary to the received literature, the University contributed to the liberation struggle in a meaningful way. Although students at the University continued to play a part in the liberation struggle after 1980, this period is not discussed as the liberation struggle became just one of the key agenda items in a broadened political programme that focussed on local concerns of the students such as fees, allowances, institutional governance and democratisation.

Keywords: governance; democratisation; guerilla; liberation struggle; refugee; freedom fighter; racialism

Introduction

Student strikes, protests, class boycotts and demonstrations have long been common phenomena in universities across the world and especially in Africa (Nyamnjoh and Jua 2002, pp. 1–26). While not necessarily negative in intention or goal, student protest activities can be disruptive and costly to higher education institutions. In some instances, as in Kenya and Nigeria, prolonged disturbances have led to some students taking longer than required to complete university courses. A good example is the 1974 students' protests and class boycotts in Kenya that resulted in the closure of higher education institutions for six months. Other well-known causes of student protests in Africa include concerns about failure rates, the introduction of student loan systems to finance university studies and issues relating to apartheid (Mathabatha 2004, pp. 108–129). Akilagpa Sawyerr, the Secretary General of the Association of African Universities, has noted that student protests speak to the collapse of African economies and the accompanying 'destabilisation of social structures, that have thrown all state institutions, including those of higher education, into a prolonged crisis' (Sawyerr 2002, p. 8). Almost all African students have seen the gradual decrease and withdrawal of state funding of higher education, which has led to the erosion of student benefits and privileges, including the replacement of student grants by cost-sharing and loan schemes, and a deterioration in the conditions of student housing and its availability. The withdrawal and decline in state funding of higher education has also prompted concerns with the quality of University education, including the declining standards of teaching and overcrowding in classrooms and libraries (Amutabi 2002, p. 167).

The issue of democratisation within the university and society at large has been a centrally important issue in Africa (Oliver 2005).¹ In the 1960s and 1970s, students across the world pressed for greater representation in the governance structures of institutions. Frustrations with the governance of universities often led them to strike or boycott classes. Students expressed concern with the treatment of minority students and students with disabilities, and with the recruitment policies and practices of higher education institutions.

Unrestrained by policies of any political party or employer, students have always seen themselves as the vanguard in the society's struggle against repressive legislation and practices of governments, students have seen themselves as the vanguard in the society's struggle against repressive legislation and the unfair practices of governments. The anti-Vietnam protests that engulfed North American university campuses in the 1960s and early 1970s are a notable case in point (Doods 2000). For Africa, the public role of students as social and political critics was effectively executed in South Africa in the struggle against apartheid and in Kenya in opposition to Arap Moi's repressive regime (Amutabi 2002, p. 167). Even in relatively democratic societies on the continent, such as Botswana, University students have continually assigned themselves the roles of watchdogs and critics of the excesses of government.

The University of Botswana

The University of Botswana provided a unique forum in the country for debates on the liberation struggle in southern Africa. It was one of the few places where open support of the struggle was possible. As the only University in the country, the University of Botswana played host to several students and academics who had fled the brutal regimes of South Africa, Mozambique, Angola, Rhodesia and Namibia, many of whom were to assume top leadership positions in their countries in the years following liberation. As part of the student movement in the region and not restrained by the rules of political parties or employers, the students saw their mandate as going beyond the boundaries of Botswana. However, the roles played by the University in the liberation struggle have not been sufficiently documented. This article is a first attempt to trace the role of the University College of Botswana campus community in the liberation struggle for southern Africa. The article discusses three students' demonstrations that took place between 1975 and 1980 and analyses how the demonstrations related to the struggle. By participating in the student movements and demonstrations in the region, and participating in international conferences, the students believed they could influence public opinion and the foreign policies of key players in an effort to benefit the struggle for freedom in the region. The article will also consider the roles played by some lecturers at the University and the views of the government of Botswana towards the University.

The three case studies should be interpreted as part of the evolving political situation of the 1970s and in terms of the politics of a young, developing University. The 1960s in Botswana was a relatively quiet decade. A few incidents however, disrupted Botswana's tranquillity during that time. These included: the influx of refugees from the Zeerust District of South Africa, who had clashed with the South African Police over the extension of passes to women and the introduction of native authorities (Zondi 2004, pp. 147–152); the blowing up of the Francistown Refugee Transit Centre in 1964; the small number of refugees who fled South Africa following the Sharpeville massacre and the activities of freedom fighters who strayed into Botswana following clashes between the Rhodesian security forces and joint ZIPRA/MK guerrillas in Wankie game reserve and Sipolilo (Ralinala *et al.* 2004, pp. 500–513). At the time, some of the exiles who entered Botswana either returned to their countries voluntarily, settled in Botswana as refugees, or moved north to join their exiled movements for military training (Ndlovu 2004, pp. 420–422). The greatest concern for the Khama government in Botswana at the time was over

the freedom fighters who were returning to South Africa through Botswana and the Zimbabwean guerrillas who escaped into the country. Initially President Khama appeared unconvinced that the freedom fighters were capable of bringing down the South African and Rhodesian regimes, and was more concerned about how their activities within and around Botswana endangered the security and stability of the country. He was particularly concerned with clashes between the Botswana police and foreign nationals in the event of the guerrillas resisting arrest. Such actions were suicidal in his view. In a desperate and confidential letter for assistance to President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia, President Khama stated that:

Our policy towards these men is that in illegally entering the country they are offending against the Immigration laws, and by doing so while in possession of arms, ammunition and explosives unlawfully, they are offending against those relevant laws. They are being apprehended by our police, without reference to the South Africans or Rhodesians. We are not handing them over to the South African or Rhodesian authorities as we are strictly entitled to do, but dealing with them ourselves. We are in effect saving their lives, because no one could really believe that their isolated, small efforts can really achieve much against the organised strength and weight of the Rhodesian and South African security forces. And the only results of their efforts are violation of this country's integrity and the endangering of the safety of our people. I do not know in what way you can help, but I do hope that in some way you can influence matters. I believe them to be as great a nuisance to you as they are to us. But I also believe you will see that they are a greater danger to us than you.²

By contrast, the 1970s was a period of intense political activity in the region. For South Africa, the independence of Angola and Mozambique in 1975 meant the collapse of a 'protective buffer zone' for the white-ruled states. New governments in Maputo and Luanda were supportive of the liberation movements, a development that troubled the white regimes in Rhodesia and South Africa. The independence of Mozambique was an opportunity for Zimbabwean freedom fighters to launch attacks into Rhodesia from the Tete province. The political developments in South Africa and Rhodesia led to a new influx of refugees into Botswana. Following the Soweto student protests against the use of Afrikaans in schools in 1976, large numbers of school children fled to Botswana. As a result of political movements in Rhodesia, students and their teachers and nurses from Manama Lutheran Mission Primary School crossed into the Bobiwra district of north eastern Botswana (Progress report on oral data collection in Botswana 2007). The changed situation led to a profound shift in the execution of the war against the liberation organisations, especially by South Africa and Rhodesia. For example, Botswana started experiencing an infiltration of agents from the South African and Rhodesian security forces in the pretext of pursuing freedom fighters. As the murder of Onkgopotse Tiro with a parcel bomb in Gaborone in 1974 would show, the agents were prepared to kill their opponents across the borders (Houston and Magubane 2006, p. 373). Those who fled into Botswana included members of the African National Congress (ANC), Pan African Congress (PAC), Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), Zimbabwe African Peoples Union (ZAPU) and Namibian liberation organisations, as well as children and ordinary people in search of peace and educational opportunity. It was not surprising that the students at the University felt part of these developments and wanted to partake in them.

As a young and developing institution, the University was still grappling with issues of governance and the role of the state in higher education. The University of Botswana and Swaziland (UBS) was established in 1976 following the dissolution of the tripartite University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland (UBLS) in October 1975. The UBLS had been developed as a manpower-producing institution for the three countries. The UBS, in contrast, was developed as a less centralised institution with fairly autonomous colleges in Botswana and Swaziland. Although a local Governing Council was established for the University College of Botswana (UCB), the government appeared to hold the view that things could only work if the government

was directly involved in its affairs. The legal document that established the institution was done in a manner that made intervention possible. The government viewed the UCB as a national project that was part of a nation-building strategy, and did not welcome matters that threatened such plans. The situation was also not helped by the fact that for a larger part of this period, the UCB was led by N.O.H Setidisho, who, as Rector of the College, had previously been a senior education officer at the Ministry of Education.

The University in Botswana had a serious shortage of human resources from Botswana at the time and employed many academics from countries involved in the liberation struggles. It also had a diverse composition of students from all over Southern Africa. Some of the foreign students were ordinary refugees, while others were aligned to the different liberation organisations. The result was the development of an extremely radical student movement at the University, which was not driven by a single political ideology. The composition of the student body and staff of the University led to the government viewing demonstrations by the students as politically imported activities, in which foreign academics were blamed for playing a hidden hand in them. One example was the student demonstration of November 1976 which resulted in Cabinet closing the Gaborone campus. While the grievances of the students – poor communication by University authorities, the need for the establishment of an Office of Student Affairs, the extension of library hours – appeared reasonable, the demonstration was condemned as politically motivated. The interventionist posture of the Botswana state runs through the three case studies that follow:

Disturbances at the Roma Campus of the University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland (UBLS)

On 27 January 1975 students at the Roma campus of the UBLS embarked on a series of peaceful protests, which included the boycott of classes. The protests continued to the following day and made it impossible for a management meeting, which involved the Pro-Vice Chancellors from the Botswana and Swaziland campuses, to be held.³ The disturbances were taken seriously by management of the institution and the Governing Council, and a commission was urgently appointed to investigate them and make recommendations.⁴

This event, which took place some thousand kilometres away from Gaborone, may initially appear to be of little relevance to a discussion of the University in Botswana and its relevance to the liberation struggle in the region. However, the Roma campus was the headquarters of the three-nation UBLS. Located in Lesotho, in the centre of white, minority-ruled South Africa, the UBLS hosted a significant number of staff and students who were fleeing from oppressive white minority regimes in the region, including South Africa. It is understandable that the UBLS developed a vibrant and rich anti-racialism and pro-liberation history from its earliest years, which engrossed the students of the three hosting countries. Their interactions with staff and students from countries still under colonial rule or from white minority regimes implanted a widespread sense of responsibility and commitment to the liberation struggle of the region. The students from Botswana and Swaziland who took part in the 1975 disturbances returned to their countries when the UBLS dissolved in October that year. Given what subsequently happened, particularly in the case of Botswana, a strong argument can be made for continuity between the pro-liberation tradition that was established at the UBLS and that at the UBS and then the University of Botswana.

The grievances and demands of the students in 1975 were numerous and diverse, reflecting the complex political climate in the region and the state of flux that the UBLS was in. The 1970s was a period of rapid decolonisation on the entire continent in which colonialism, racialism and neo-colonialism were seen as the antitheses of human progress and dignity. The University too was going through a complex and painful period in its development. A main source of contention

was the development model chosen of the institution, which involved the devolution of the University to Botswana and Swaziland. While Botswana and Swaziland saw devolution as an inevitable and necessary stage in the development of the three-nation institution, Lesotho saw it as a strategy to hold back development at the Roma campus and those who supported the devolution, including its Vice Chancellor, Cyril Rogers, were viewed as disloyal and anti-Lesotho (Mashologu 2000, *ibid.*).⁵ Devolution to Lesotho also meant holding back developments in Lesotho, while new facilities were developed in Botswana and Swaziland. It is within this context that the disturbances of January 1975 should be interpreted.

Many of the students' grievances and demands were genuine. The attempts to democratise the institution in particular demonstrated how the institution was significantly out of touch with developments in higher education governance in other parts of the world. The students demanded representation on all major committees of the University, including the Senate, Faculty Boards, Council and Appointments Committee. Though it was considered outrageous for the students to demand representation on the Appointments Committee, as indeed the commission of enquiry concluded, representation on other committees had become global practice by the time. The students' demands for representation on the Appointments Committee arose out of a perception that appointments, promotions and the allocation of positions of responsibility, such as Headships of Department and the Deanships of Faculty, were determined on racist lines. The students also felt that the processes lacked transparency.⁶ It was further demanded that the appointment procedures were tightened by advertising vacancies widely and reducing the employment of friends and relations, who did not necessarily qualify for appointment. In addition, the students demanded that those who had been improperly appointed be removed; those who had been forced out unfairly be reappointed and those who had been favoured through promotion or appointment to administrative responsibility positions because of their colour also be removed.

A close analysis of the student disturbances at Roma elicits two running themes of racialism and anti-colonialism, which helps to connect the activities to the regional struggle against colonial oppression. The Botswana Government had long been concerned about the politicisation of student politics at the institution and became suspicious that staff members were responsible.⁷ The commission of enquiry discovered that a Black Staff Association had been formed at the University, in competition with the official staff association, 'to frustrate the officially recognised and predominantly white Academic Staff Association'.⁸ The Black Staff Association called for the speeding up of the localisation of senior administrative positions, including Vice Chancellor, University Registrar, Personal Assistant to the Vice Chancellor, University Librarian and Financial Controller.⁹ It appeared that while the three governments that owned the University were pursuing multi-racialism and non-racialism as policy and as practice, black staff and students saw the situation differently. Racialism was viewed by the Botswana government as divisive and attempts to import it into the country were to be resisted, particularly given the dominance of whites in the public sector at the time (Masire 2006, p. 47). There were, in particular, public concerns over the powerful role played by Phillipus Steenkamp as the Permanent Secretary to the President.

The events were also significant because the disturbance went beyond the University and began to affect matters of regional importance. The involvement of Joel Moitse, former Pro-Vice Chancellor of the Roma campus and then Minister of Commerce in the Lesotho Government, established the broad context for an otherwise small and local event. The commission described him as 'a crusader who must at all costs endeavour through whatever means at his disposal to stem the tide of white hegemony on the Roma Campus'.¹⁰ Moitse made important statements on Radio Lesotho in support of the students. According to a Cabinet Information Note on the disturbances:

On Friday 31st January 1975, the Minister of Commerce, Mr Moitse made what can only be described as inflammatory broadcast on Radio Lesotho. In the broadcast he praised the students, describing their demonstration as a 'tremendous advance in fighting neo-colonialism' and bitterly attacked the Vice Chancellor for racialism.¹¹

It has been claimed that Moitse went further and labelled the Vice Chancellor a colonialist who worked to sabotage the University's Africanisation programme. The governments of Botswana and Swaziland considered the remarks irresponsible and, though unsuccessful, called on the Lesotho Government to reprimand him.

On 20 October 1975, Lesotho withdrew from the UBL and the Botswana students at Roma and some lecturers relocated to Gaborone. Armed with the militancy of Roma, the students and staff would later participate in the student political activities in Gaborone, much to the discomfort of the Botswana government.

Bishop Abel Muzorewa visits Gaborone (April 1978)

The last quarter of the 1970s saw the acceleration of the decolonisation process in Zimbabwe. The combined impact of the armed struggle executed by Robert Mugabe's ZANU and Joshua Nkomo's ZAPU, and the international economic sanctions on Rhodesia were forcing Ian Smith and his government to find an alternative solution to the conflict. The Frontline States were simultaneously pushing ZANU and ZAPU to merge and negotiate as a block – the Patriotic Front – and called on the British government to assume its 'colonial' responsibility and decolonise Zimbabwe (Masire 2006, p. 281). As this was happening, the Rhodesian security forces continued to raid northern and eastern Botswana, to hunt and kill Zimbabwean refugees and some Botswana. The most affected areas were Francistown and Selebi Pikwe where most of the 20,000 refugees resided in 1979. For the Smith government, the alternative solution was an internal settlement and elections in April 1979. The idea was to cooperate with internal moderate black political organisations, including Bishop Abel Muzorewa's United African National Council and Sithole's ZANU. The purpose of the settlement was to forestall a Patriotic Front victory (Mandaza 1987, p. 36).

The agreement between the internal political organisations was signed on 3 March 1978. The result was the establishment of Zimbabwe-Rhodesia, which lacked political legitimacy in the region and internationally. In the search for political recognition in the region, Abel Muzorewa travelled to Gaborone on 21 April 1978.¹² The purpose of the visit was to confer with President Khama on the internal situation in Zimbabwe and to explain to him why the internal African political organisations agreed to enter into discussions on Zimbabwe's future with the government of Ian Smith.¹³ What bothered the students of the UCB was why President Khama, a key member of the Frontline States, would invite a man widely considered to be part of the white minority regime for discussion. The visit came soon after the Lesoma massacre, in which 15 Botswana Defence Force soldiers were killed by the Rhodesian security forces in the pretext that they were following ZAPU guerrillas who had crossed into Botswana. The actions of President Khama were widely viewed as shameful and not promoting the cause of the liberation struggle. As the students stated in a memorandum:

Muzorewa, as a member of the Executive Council is now directly involved in the directing of terrorist forces which are now continuously committing atrocities against the people of Zimbabwe and neighbouring states ... Welcoming Bishop Muzorewa to Botswana is tantamount to recognising the illegal regime in Salisbury (now Harare), which only a few weeks ago ambushed and cold-bloodedly murdered members of our Defence Force. (*BDN*, 24 April 1978)

By comparison with others before and after it, the anti-Muzorewa demonstration was small, but it should be viewed as equally important in the struggle against settler colonialism

in Southern Africa. Classes were disrupted on campus that day, but the demonstration did not lead to any serious confrontation with the law enforcement agencies and no arrests were made. Small skirmishes did occur when the students started throwing raw eggs at the police and official vehicles, which arrived at a small airport behind the University campus. The eggs were meant for Muzorewa and his entourage, but he was whisked out of the airport under the escort of the Botswana Defence Force.¹⁴ To further frustrate the students, Muzorewa was not taken to meet the President immediately, but was driven out of the city to the Cumberland Hotel in Lobatse, where he met and had lunch with the Minister of External Affairs, Archie Mogwe, and the Administrative Secretary in the Office of the President, Charles Tibone.

It was subsequently discovered that the meeting had been requested by Muzorewa and not President Khama. Khama had agreed to the meeting reluctantly. Muzorewa had proposed to brief Khama on the internal political situation in Zimbabwe and explain why political parties inside the country should cooperate with Ian Smith. Muzorewa hoped that Khama would convince his colleagues in the Frontline States of the efficacy of the internal settlement and pressure the Patriotic Front to participate. Khama, however, saw the plan as an act of desperation on the part of Muzorewa. When they finally met at the Office of the President, Khama made it clear to Muzorewa that his government would not support him.¹⁵ The demonstration provided an opportunity for students to act in support of the liberation struggle.

The 1978 disturbances at the University of Botswana and Swaziland (UBS) Gaborone campus

During the early hours of 11 September 1978, students of the UBS in Gaborone woke to find the entire campus surrounded by the police, armed with batons, sticks and canisters of teargas. The students had decided the previous night at a meeting of the Student Body to embark on a peaceful demonstration march to the Office of the President to protest the arrest of Sergeant Ompatile Tswaipe of the Botswana Defence Force. When the students retired to their dormitories that night, the police set in motion a plan to stop the demonstration. The Special Branch and police informers must have been busy on campus to know of the decisions of the students that had been made late at night. By 4 o'clock in the morning, student activists and organisers had to go around the campus to wake up the students to inform them about the new developments. Scores of police officers had been brought in from all the surrounding police stations, including Mochudi, Ramotswa, Molepolole, Lobatse and Kanye, to assist in an operation that was to last for three days. What may have worried the authorities most were the plans of the students to mobilise the general public to join the demonstration.¹⁶

The incidents were sparked by the arrest and trial of Sergeant Tswaipe. Tswaipe commanded a small section of the BDF operating in the Tuli Block area of eastern Botswana. It was a farming area dominated by white farmers, some with origins from South Africa and Rhodesia, and seen as sympathetic to white minority regimes in those countries. They were suspected to be aiding the security forces from these countries to infiltrate Botswana with ease. Tswaipe is said to have arrested three white men in this area suspected to be part of the foreign security forces or of aiding their activities. When the men attempted to flee, they were shot dead. Given the hostile and unstable political situation in the region, Tswaipe and his section were widely congratulated across the country for defending the country and assisting the liberation of southern Africa. However, following an investigation by the Attorney General Moleleki Mokama, Tswaipe was arrested and charged with murder.¹⁷ The concerns and objectives of the University students were articulated in the placards that were displayed on the day of the disturbances, which included:

Release Sergeant Tswaipe now – The nation needs him
 Don't succumb to imperialism
 Sergeant Tswaipe is a hero
 Drop the charges and free the Sergeant¹⁸

Two of the killed insurgents, William De Beer and Michael Arden, were South African, and one, Nicholas Love, was British (*BDN*, 22 August 1978). Inevitably, the shootings received strong condemnation from South Africa and the United Kingdom. The Botswana High Commissioner to the United Kingdom, A. W. Kgarebe, wrote to his Department of External Affairs about the coverage of the incidents in the British press. The explanation for the killing of the insurgents in the Tuli Block was initially not believed at all, yet surprisingly, the story of the Rhodesian security forces who crossed into Botswana and massacred Botswana Defence Force soldiers that they were pursuing guerrillas, was accepted as true without difficulty.¹⁹ The arrest of Sergeant Tswaipe also coincided with the visit of President Khama to the United Kingdom for a medical check-up. To the students, it appeared that Khama had ordered the arrest of Tswaipe as a result of pressure put on him by the British and South African authorities. The Khama government was therefore, popularly seen as selling out to racist regimes in the region and working against the liberation movements. The decision was also in line with Botswana's policy to not do anything that could upset the South African regime. The students planned to demonstrate against the decisions of the Khama government, but the District Commissioner for Gaborone denied them permission. The students resolved to embark on the demonstration with or without permission, at which point, the Botswana government resolved to stop the demonstration at all costs.

What distinguished the 1978 demonstration from others before it was the excessive force used by the police on the students. As the students attempted to get off the campus to deliver a petition to the Office of the President, violence erupted. The police charged and showered the students with teargas. As some students fainted and fell to the ground, the police beat them with batons and sticks and loaded them into police vans. Confrontations occurred throughout the day between the students and the police, but the police stood their ground and ensured that no students left or entered the campus.²⁰ By late afternoon, the police ordered all employees of the University College to leave the campus. Some students escaped by borrowing uniforms of the refectory staff, at which point the police charged and used excessive force. They beat the students, and threw teargas canisters into their bathrooms, toilets and dormitories so that students would come out to be beaten and arrested. Over 200 students were arrested and detained at the Gaborone Prison and urban police stations. Several had been thrashed and had visible signs of beatings on their bodies. It was not clear if the police had been instructed or not, but foreign students, particularly Zimbabweans and South Africans, were singled out for severe beating. It was claimed that they were the instigators.²¹ There were rumours that some female students had been raped, but this was never confirmed because no students came forward to report rape to the Student Representative Council or the police (SRC).

Seven students were detained at the Central Police Stations for three days, and were denied food for the duration of their detention. The police version of the incident was that the seven had decided on an impromptu hunger strike. It was later discovered that the students had to share their cell with a young boy who urinated in the food bucket on the first night. In the morning some food was brought to the students in a bucket, but it is not clear if it was given to the students in the same bucket. The students decided that they would not eat anything contained in the bucket.²² The police would also not allow food to be brought in by family or friends. On the last day of detention, fresh bread from the University was allowed in. All students were released from detention on the third day without legal charges, though eight students were expelled from the College on suspicion of being the ringleaders.²³

The Botswana Government later deported two academics from the University on the ground that they incited the students to protest and aided them during the disturbances. Professor Bob Leshoi, a Professor of English literature, and Reverend Dr Gabriel Setiloane, the Head of Theology and Religious Studies at the University, were originally from South Africa. Declaring a person a prohibited immigrant in Botswana was and still is the prerogative of the Head of State and reasons for such an action need not be given. In these cases, no reasons were given for the deportations, except that they concerned the disturbances at the University. There remains no evidence linking the two professors to the disturbances. It seems more likely that the police misread the actions of the two gentlemen on the day. As Setiloane explained later in a confidential letter to the President: 'I played the role of priest, chaplain, academic and friend to all on campus, academic, administrative and maintenance staff and students'.²⁴ On the day of the disturbances, Setiloane had been asked by the campus nurse to help transport the injured students to the hospital, some of whom were subsequently hospitalised.²⁵ It is this role that the police misunderstood as meddling and showing sympathy with the disobedient students. Setiloane requested an audience with the President to explain his role in the disturbances, but this was denied.

The influence of expatriate academics, especially those from South Africa and Zimbabwe, as well as political scientists, was a constant source of worry for the Botswana government. The government viewed the role played by students from these countries in student politics with great discomfort. Some of the foreign students became presidents of the SRC,²⁶ and it is not surprising that they were singled out for excessive beating during the disturbance. On the other hand, several academics had long been identified as trouble makers and the University management was required to report on them. They included Marcus Balintulu (Sociology, presently Vice Chancellor of the Walter Sisulu University in South Africa); John Melamu (Professor of English, who subsequently became the Deputy Vice Chancellor); Ntombi Setshwaelo (Assistant Lecturer in English); Mbulelo Mzamane (English, and later Vice Chancellor of Fort Hare University in South Africa) and Jack Parson (Political Science). In a confidential report to the Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Education in October 1976, the Rector, Professor Setidisho complained that:

The problems which we face stem from a very small group of men and women; they refer to themselves as the Soweto group that is determined to disrupt the smooth operations of the University, and they act in the name of the Academic Staff Association, and any small excuse they can find for destructive criticism, they will make use of it ... and the University cannot continue in this way any longer.²⁷

The foreign academics were under constant surveillance by the authorities. In a secret and undated report, 'Activities of Mbulelo Mzamane', it was said that Mzamane as Dean of students 'always took an active role in siding with the students whenever there was some misunderstanding between them and the Ministry of Education'.²⁸ It was later shown that the report was based on a misunderstanding of the role of a Dean of Students, though the Botswana government finally declared him a prohibited immigrant in 1981, while he was on study leave at Sheffield in the United Kingdom. Like Leshoi and Setiloane before him, no reasons were given for his expulsion and an appeal by him was denied.²⁹

The demonstration by the students appears to have embarrassed the government of Botswana. In a democracy like Botswana there was a clear separation of powers between the executive and judiciary, and the state could not withdraw a murder case already in the courts. It became clear that what angered the Khama government was the conviction that the demonstration was the work of an opposition hoping to make political capital out of the incident. The ruling party appeared to have no interest in establishing the facts with certainty. A government that had

only three years previously strongly supported the commission of enquiry that followed a comparatively small demonstration at Roma was now vehemently opposed to any idea of a commission when the opposition called for it. The Minister of Education at the time, Hon. Kebatlamang Morake, contended that it would serve no purpose to investigate what was already known (*BDN*, 12 December 1978). To him, it was well known that the opposition parties and some expatriate lecturers had played a part in the disturbances. Morake lamented that the lack of adequate funds by the Botswana Government had made it difficult to hire staff of their own choice.³⁰

President Khama's anger and views on the demonstration were expressed at his inauguration as Chancellor of the University on 24 September 1978, which the students boycotted. Khama's statements provide a rare opportunity to understand the extent to which his government would tolerate opposition, his commitment to the rule of law and its observance and its official position on foreign workers, especially those from neighbouring countries who had fled oppression. During the address, President Khama cautioned the students that their stay at the University should not be of 'devotion to the study of nihilistic philosophies and destructive revolutionary dogmas which have no relevance whatsoever to prevailing circumstances in your countries'.³¹ In an obvious reference to members of staff who had been deported from Botswana on suspicion of aiding students, Khama strongly warned that:

We will not allow you to turn us into what you think we should be. Some of you come from oppressive societies and we are very happy indeed to share our freedom with you in the spirit of African brotherhood, but on condition that you do not abuse your stay here and the freedom you enjoy from it. We will be prepared to ask anyone of you who tries to incite our students to disobey established authority in this country to leave us in peace.³²

With regard to the issue of the separation of judicial and executive powers, he lamented that, 'I hope I do not live to see much as confused state of affairs prevail in this country – a state of affairs where our Attorney General would charge a person only to be overruled for political reasons by the executive [or] rioting students'.³³

Given the political situation in the region and the role that the students had carved for themselves in it, it is not surprising that they resolved to embark on a demonstration for which permission had not been granted by the Gaborone District Commissioner. It was also not a surprise that the governance structures of the institution were simply ignored and major decisions affecting the institution were taken by the Office of the President and Ministry of Education under the pretext of maintaining law and order.³⁴ The Act that established the University gave the government the power to take over the administration of the institution and to close it under such circumstances. The College Council was not consulted on the expulsion of the students or on the deportation of the two academics. The Rector was simply informed about the deportations and instructed to expel the students.³⁵ All that the Council could do was to plead for clemency for the students as they viewed expulsion as an over-reaction.³⁶ Minister Morake's response was uncompromising. He accused the Council of being 'reluctant to face the students, but quite willing to face His Excellency the President'.³⁷ When the expulsions were finally withdrawn, it was not a result of a change of heart by the Khama government, but because legal opinion had been sought, which made it clear that the expulsions were invalid in law because the students had not been given a hearing as provided for in the Act.³⁸

Conclusion

These three case studies show that the University community in Botswana was clearly part of the regional liberation movement and this was consistent with developments elsewhere in the

continent and beyond. The case studies also demonstrate the rigid consistency in the application of foreign policy by the Botswana government in housing only genuine refugees and operating within the framework of the Front Line States, and discouraging actions that could be considered as promoting direct actions against powerful white minority regimes in Southern Africa. The Tswaipe case shows the government's commitment to the rule of law, because the state did not interfere with cases already before the courts. On the other hand, the cases raise questions on the extent to which the Khama government could tolerate opponents, particularly those whose actions were viewed as being in conflict with official policy or whose activities could be interpreted as unfriendly by the South African and Rhodesian governments. The deportations of those considered trouble makers without granting them a fair hearing was in conflict with the democratic values the Botswana government claimed to adhere to. These events may help to shed light on ways to deepen Botswana's future democratic practice. The cases relate to the important matter of the institutional instruments within the university that gave the government the power to settle matters internal to its governance, and reveal a tendency of students to not follow established communication channels. Their reluctance to engage institutional governance and management structures requires further enquiry, which may help to inform the governance of Higher Education institutions in Africa and beyond.

Notes

1. Shaneka Oliver documents fascinating stories of how students in historically black institutions in this part of the USA attempted to use their participation in the war to gain recognition at home.
2. Botswana National Archives (henceforward BNA): OP27/3: Guerrillas – August 1967–January 1969: Khama to Kaunda (top secret) Gaborone, 5 September 1967.
3. BNA: CE6/1/13; N.O.H. Setidisho (Pro-Vice Chancellor (PVC), Botswana), 'Student Strike at Roma', Gaborone, 4 February 1975.
4. *Ibid.* Education Cabinet Information Note on Disturbances at UBLS, Roma.
5. Mashologu had only been PVC at the Roma campus for two weeks when the Act establishing the National University of Lesotho was passed. BNA: CE6/1/13; Education Cabinet Information Note on Disturbances at UBLS Roma, Gaborone, 4 February 1975.
6. UBLS Council – C.75/41: Report of the Commission of enquiry into Student Unrest at the University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland Roma Campus, March 1975.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*, 9.
9. *Ibid.*, 21.
10. *Ibid.*, 25.
11. *Ibid.* Education Cabinet Information Note on Disturbances at UBLS, Roma, 4 February 1975.
12. BNA: OP/13/21 – Political Report, 1977–78: Record of Meeting between His Excellency and Bishop Muzorewa (Top Secret), Gaborone, 21 April 1978.
13. *Ibid.*
14. In this demonstration, there was cooperation between the students and members of staff, most of them were from Zimbabwe.
15. BNA: OP/13/21 – Political report, 1977–78: Record of Meeting between His Excellency and Bishop Muzorewa (Top Secret), Gaborone, 21 April 1978.
16. UCB Council Special Meetings on Students Unrest, Gaborone, 15 September 1978; 26 September 1978 and 3 October 1978.
17. BNA: PO/2/8: Prohibited Immigrants, 15 December 1981–October 1983.
18. UCB Special Council Meeting, Gaborone, 22 September 1978: anonymous letter on 'Student Protests at the University College of Botswana'.
19. BNA: OP/13/21: Political Reports, 1977–78: A.W. Kgarebe to Secretary for External Affairs, London, 7 April 1978.
20. The author was one of the students who were beaten up and locked up at the Central Police Station in the mall.
21. UCB Council Special Meetings on Students Unrest, Gaborone, 15 September 1978. A letter by an anonymous writer in the documents of the meetings.

22. The author was one of those detained at the Central Police Station. The students were subjected to many other forms of humiliation. The author was handcuffed to a certain Chilume throughout the first day, and had to endure the humiliation of using the toilet together.
23. The eight students were: Dennis Alexander (now a prominent business man); Monageng Mogalake (now a senior lecturer in Sociology at the University of Botswana); Samuel Mkhombe (student from Swaziland); Motsi Madisa (now Deputy Director, Academic Services at the University of Botswana); Mothusi Lekalake (now a senior executive in the private sector); Raffik Khan (now a prominent businessman); G. Chilume; Rampholo Molefhe (freelance journalist).
24. BNA: CE6/7/1/6I: University College of Botswana, 1977–78: Reverend G.M. Setiloane to His Excellency the President: Mafeking, 20 September 1978.
25. Ibid.
26. Examples include: Ngubeni ka Ngope (South African) who was President in 1977; Kenneth Manungo (Zimbabwean) who was Vice President in 1975 and President in 1976 and Carlos Caminho (Mozambican) who was Secretary General in 1977 and President in 1978.
27. BNA: OP8/2: Permanent Secretary, Education, to Permanent Secretary to the President, Gaborone, 26 October 1976. The fact that this was written in 1976 is a clear indication that the discomfort with the foreign academics started long before the demonstrations of 1978.
28. BNA: OP/2/6: Prohibited Immigrants, 18 July 1975–25 June 1976.
29. BNA: OP/13/21 – Political Reports, 1977–78: A.W. Kgarebe to Secretary for External Affairs, London, 7 April 1978.
30. Ibid.
31. Some members of Parliament expressed the view that the students should have been caned for disobeying lawful orders: *BDN*, 12 December 1978.
32. *BDN*, 25 September 1978. There was concern that those invited to speak at the University tended to be those in the left such as Kenneth Koma (leader of the main opposition Botswana National Front); representatives from embassies of East European countries, etc. See *BDN*, 15 February 1978 and 16 March 1978.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
35. UCB Special Council, Gaborone, 15 September 1978. It is difficult to understand what the Botswana government meant by the maintenance of law and order when the students had not moved out of campus or caused any destruction.
36. BNA: SH15/11: UBS, 1977–83: Norman Kingsbury (Registrar) to PS, Education, Gaborone: 26 September 1978.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid., Minister Morake to Norman Kingsbury, Gaborone, 26 September 1978.

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