

Seekings, Jeremy

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Building a conservative welfare state in Botswana

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WIDER Working Paper 2017/83

**Building a conservative welfare state in
Botswana**

Jeremy Seekings*

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Abstract: Botswana's welfare state is both a parsimonious laggard in comparison with some other middle-income countries in Africa (such as Mauritius and South Africa) and extensive (in comparison with its low-income neighbours to the north and east). Coverage is broad but cash transfers are modest. This reflects distinctively conservative features—including, especially, preferences for workfare and for minimal benefits paid in kind (food) rather than cash—combined with parsimonious cash transfers for select categories of deserving poor (the elderly and orphans), administered through the Department of Local Government, not a dedicated welfare department. This is a very different model of welfare state-building—and, more generally, social contract—to those of its neighbours in Southern Africa. It is the result of the specific character of poverty in Botswana and the enduring, but not unchallenged, political dominance of the conservatively paternalist Botswana Democratic Party.

Keywords: social protection, drought relief, Botswana, conservatism, dependency, welfare state, poverty reduction

JEL classification: P16, I38, O55, H53, J14, Q25

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*Centre for Social Science Research, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa; jeremy.seekings@uct.ac.za.

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Katajanokanlaituri 6 B, 00160 Helsinki, Finland

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1 The paradox of welfare policy in Botswana

Welfare states in Africa are distinguished by their emphasis on social assistance—with benefits in cash or kind—rather than social insurance (Seekings forthcoming), but even within Africa there is variation. Botswana is a case that has been previously assessed in very different ways, as both extensive and parsimonious. In this paper I argue that both of these characterizations are correct. Botswana is an example of a conservative African welfare state, characterized by a distinctively conservative approach to precisely who is decommodified, how, to what extent, and with what legitimating ideology.

Botswana is a sparsely-populated, arid country with a small population that grew from about half a million at independence to 2 million people in 2010, in an area a little larger than France but smaller than Texas. At independence in 1966, it was one of the poorest countries in the world, with gross domestic product (GDP) per capita about one-half of its northern neighbour Zambia and one-tenth of its southern neighbour South Africa. The new country had little infrastructure and few public services. Three decades later, in 1997, the government's *Vision 2016* document set the objective of eliminating absolute poverty by 2016, i.e. the fiftieth anniversary of independence (Botswana 1997b). This objective was not implausible given the country's rapid, mineral-driven economic growth from the early 1970s. Real GDP per capita had grown nine-fold since 1966, was about to surpass South Africa's, and was almost ten times higher than Zambia's (World Bank 1997). Poverty had already declined significantly, although most of the benefits of growth had accrued to the rich, resulting in widening inequality in the distribution of income. *Vision 2016* therefore proposed that more should be done for the poor. Botswana should become 'a compassionate and caring society, offering support and opportunity to those who are poor, and including *all* people in the benefits of growth' (Botswana 1997b: 8, emphasis in original).

For some scholars, Botswana failed to achieve this goal. In this view, its welfare policies have been distinguished by an enduring failure to include all of its citizens in the benefits of growth. Bar-On (2001) emphasized the parsimony of the country's welfare policies, and concluded that 'Botswana's social assistance scheme fails many of the very poor completely, and those who do benefit from it are receiving steadily less of the nation's increasing prosperity' (Bar-On 2001: 264). Ulriksen (2011, 2012, 2016) contrasted Botswana with Mauritius. Both were multi-party democracies with open, middle-income economies and competent state institutions. Both invested heavily in public education, as well as public health and housing. But Botswana spent much less on social protection and had no national social security legislation. Hickey (2011) similarly contrasts Botswana unfavourably with South Africa.

In contrast, World Bank studies describe Botswana's social protection system as 'one of the most extensive ... in the region' in terms of both the range and coverage of programmes (Garcia and Moore 2012: 227), and as 'mature and complex' (BIDPA and World Bank 2013: x). Devereux (2007) also assesses that 'By African standards, Botswana implements an unusually comprehensive set of social welfare programmes for its poor and vulnerable citizens' (Devereux 2007: 554). A long series of scholars have emphasized the effective and programmatic response of the Botswana government to drought-induced poverty (Holm and Morgan 1985; Hay 1988; Teklu 1995; De Waal 1997; Munemo 2012). Seleka et al. (2007: 33) calculate that government transfers reduced the poverty headcount rate in 2002/03 by 10 percentage points, from about 40 per cent to about 30 per cent.

There is merit in both sets of assessments, which mirror contrasting interpretations of the overall 'developmental' experience of Botswana. Viewed in terms of public expenditure on social

protection, Botswana lags behind many other middle-income countries in Africa (and elsewhere), although less dramatically than Ulriksen (2012: 1503) and others have suggested.¹ Viewed in terms of the overall coverage of institutionalized programmes, however, Botswana seems more of a frontrunner, with provision far exceeding that in most other African countries. Coverage is extensive but expenditure modest primarily because most benefits are set at parsimonious levels. Poverty is reduced, but it is not eliminated. This suggests that welfare states in Africa cannot simply be located on a one-dimensional continuum from minimal to extensive. Welfare states in Africa vary along multiple dimensions, including coverage, generosity, total expenditure and design.

This should be no surprise to comparative scholars of welfare state-building. In the 1990s Esping-Andersen (1990, 1999) overturned the orthodox view that welfare states varied along only one dimension ('effort', measured in terms of expenditure), demonstrating that they varied in terms of their (re)distributional effects and implications for citizenship. The conservative welfare regimes of continental Europe, for example, were heavy spenders, but they perpetuated rather than eroded stratification both by class or status. They also perpetuated gendered differentiation within households by entrenching the model of male breadwinners and dependent female carers (see also Van Kersbergen 2003).

Viewed comparatively, welfare states in much of Africa have tended to develop along a distinctive trajectory, spending heavily on education and (non-contributory) social assistance (including drought relief) rather than (contributory) social insurance. These welfare states are generally responses to the risks inherent in agrarian societies, with safety net programmes introduced in response to deagrarianization whether temporary (most often due to drought) or permanent (typically due to insufficient land or insufficient labour to farm), rather than to the risks inherent in industrialization. They are concerned more with the risks affecting peasants (and ex- or non-peasants in agrarian societies) rather than the risks affecting workers in formal employment (and ex- or non-workers in proletarianized societies) (Seekings forthcoming). Within the set of African countries, however, there is some variation in terms of precisely *how* they spend their budgets, i.e. the design of their social assistance programmes. Botswana's welfare state has been shaped by almost fifty years of rule by the conservative—but also modestly benign—Botswana Democratic Party (BDP). Under the BDP, and buoyed by rapid economic growth, the social contract in Botswana was fashioned (or refashioned) along broadly conservative lines, ensuring widespread but parsimonious inclusion in an otherwise (and increasingly) unequal society. Viewed in comparison with welfare regimes in Europe in the twentieth century, Botswana has more in common with Christian democratic regimes than with social democratic ones.²

¹ Total public expenditure on contributory pensions and safety nets amounted to 3 per cent of GDP in Botswana in 2012/13 (BIDPA and World Bank 2013: xi). In the mid-2000s, total public expenditure on social benefits in Mauritius amounted to between 3 and 4 per cent of GDP, with other (unidentified) expenditures on 'welfare' pushing this share up to between 5 and 6 per cent of GDP (Mauritius 2008).

² This comparison was suggested by Tlou et al. (1995).

2 The characteristics of Botswana's welfare state

Welfare policies in Botswana have long revolved around three major components: cash-for-work; 'supplementary' feeding programmes for designated 'vulnerable groups' (children, together with pregnant and lactating mothers); and additional support for selected categories of people (initially support along the lines of poor relief for 'destitutes', and more recently universal old-age pensions and support for orphans, i.e. for categories of people who have ceased to be supported adequately by kin and cannot support themselves). In contrast to neighbouring South Africa, there is no general Child Support Grant (CSG) paying benefits to poor mothers or caregivers.

Overall, the welfare state in Botswana has the following characteristics:

- Extensive coverage: as the BDP government emphasizes, as much as one-half of the population receives food and about 10 per cent of the population receives other social assistance benefits even in non-drought years, with the proportions rising in drought years. The proportion of the population receiving cash benefits is much lower than in neighbouring South Africa, but it is high by comparison with most African countries, and the coverage of feeding programmes is also relatively high.
- Some of the benefits are parsimonious: 'minimum assistance' to 'genuine destitute persons' (Botswana 2002: 2). The old-age pension was introduced in 1996 at Pula100/month (US\$30/month) and barely changed in real value thereafter; pensions in South Africa were four times larger in real terms. Similarly, workfare 'wages' are low relative to South Africa. On the other hand, whilst the value of the cash component of the destitute grant is tiny, the value of the food basket (or coupons) paid under this programme and under the Orphan Care Programme is much higher.
- There is an enduring (although no longer complete) preference for benefits in kind rather than cash: programmes originally provided benefits in kind only (including food-for-work and food baskets for 'destitutes' and orphans, as well as the feeding schemes themselves), and only later changed to pay cash (workfare from 1982) or to include a cash component (destitute relief). The old-age pensions were paid entirely in cash from the outset, in 1996; more recently, food baskets have been replaced with food coupons (similar to food stamps). The cash benefit for 'destitutes' remains tiny compared to the value of the food basket/coupons.
- Workfare plays a central role in the welfare state: if households include able-bodied working-age adults, then they are expected to work for relief (although this has sometimes been relaxed during bad droughts).
- Some programmes are universal (the old-age pension, Orphan Care Programme and most of the feeding schemes), whilst others are means-tested, either directly (destitutes grants) or because the low benefits ensure self-targeting by the very poor (workfare).
- Programmes assume and respect the centrality of the family: workfare is designed to enable a working-age adult breadwinner to support his or her familial dependents; the destitutes programme is intended to support households where there is no able-bodied, working-age adult; pensions and orphan support became necessary because they fell outside families, in the case of the elderly because of shrinkage in the 'extended' family; and whilst familial,

programmes are not inherently patriarchal, i.e. there is no assumption that the breadwinner is male—indeed, women predominated in workfare programmes.

- None of the social assistance programmes are statutory, i.e. none are based in legislation; this may be due to the concern not to generate any sense of entitlement.³
- There is no separate ministry for social welfare; most safety nets have been administered by the Department of Local Government.

Most (but not all) of these characteristics are distinctively ‘conservative’: Coverage might be extensive, but there is a paternalistic preference for benefits in kind and a clear emphasis on workfare and the family, and most benefits are parsimonious. Much of the welfare state, and the ‘destitutes’ policy in particular, were reminiscent of the poor laws of nineteenth-century Britain. In addition, the BDP government developed a distinctively conservative welfare doctrine to justify its interventions. The state sought to strengthen the social order built around the family and the community, and to limit interventions in markets. This was not a welfare state built on universalist, egalitarian, or highly redistributive principles.

This paper examines how and why Botswana has developed this conservative welfare state. Section 3 examines the origins of welfare programmes in drought relief in the 1960s and 1970s, the institutionalization of a ‘safety net’ in the 1990s and early 2000s, and more recent debates over welfare provision. Section 4 focuses on how the particular form of the welfare state in Botswana was shaped by the character and ideology of the BDP. Section 5 examines the importance of partisan competition through regular elections.

3 Welfare state-building in Botswana

The three major components of public welfare provision in Botswana—i.e. workfare for able-bodied, working-age adults, ‘supplementary’ feeding programmes for designated ‘vulnerable groups’, and additional support for selected categories of people (especially the elderly)—date back to the mid-1960s, when independence from colonial rule coincided with terrible drought and famine. The government negotiated with the newly-established World Food Programme (WFP) over food aid for, at one point, more than half of the population, as well as stock feed for cattle. Massive support from the WFP and elsewhere—with an estimated value of at least 2 per cent of GDP—averted starvation, although one-third of the country’s cattle did die. As it became clear in early 1966 that famine would continue beyond the scope of a WFP ‘emergency operation’, the BDP government and the WFP together designed a suite of ‘developmental’ programmes. First, feeding programmes provided directly for pre-school and primary school children, and pregnant and lactating mothers (and, later, tuberculosis patients also). Secondly, food-for-work programmes provided rations to working-age adults working on ‘self-help’ projects, building school facilities, roads, etc.; the rations were intended to support entire households. In addition, assistance was expanded for other ‘destitutes’ who were unable to work on grounds of age or infirmity (Seekings 2016a).

The drought of the mid and late 1960s also shaped the development, within the government and BDP, of a conservative welfare doctrine (Seekings 2016b, and below). The drought added to the pressure on the BDP government to articulate the relationships between, and respective

³ I am grateful to Isaac Chinyoka for this point.

responsibilities of, citizens and state. Crucially, the state assumed responsibilities supposedly undertaken hitherto by the chiefs. It also adapted existing understandings of chiefly authority and responsibility to accommodate the new state institutions. The result was a doctrine that represented the state as benign, with clear responsibilities to the poor, but at the same time emphasized the responsibilities of the poor themselves to contribute to their own welfare.

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Compared to the mid and late 1960s, the 1970s were years of relatively good rains and harvests. The country's cattle herds grew rapidly. Drought did not disappear, however, and the government began to institutionalize its relief programmes. The regular feeding programmes expanded steadily through the late 1960s and 1970s. Food-for-work programmes stopped and started until 1978 when a decision was made to establish a regular food-for-work programme to operate in non-drought as well as drought years. The government also sought to formalize its support for 'destitutes' who were unable to work, and who needed support in good years as well as bad. In 1974 the responsible minister asked his cabinet colleagues to decide 'whether the nation has reached that stage of economic and social advancement at which it can afford to begin succouring at the end of their lives the very poorest people of all'. Although he believed 'that the time has come to take a major step towards implementing a genuine long-term programme of relief for the chronically destitute', there was some opposition from the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (whose minister was the Vice-President, Quett Masire), and most of the proposed reforms to the destitutes programme were shelved.⁴

The government's priority in the 1970s was economic growth, and it constructed a developmental state to promote this goal (as did most governments across Africa). At first the government focused on the cattle industry, which the colonial state had begun to nurture prior to independence. The BDP government had already nationalized the country's only abattoir, and now proceeded to invest heavily in boreholes (Peters 1994). Many of the BDP leaders and bureaucrats acquired large cattle ranches. In the 1970s, the government's focus slowly shifted to mining. The result was growing inequality, as the incomes of the rich and even the formally employed working class grew sharply, with only modest benefits trickling down to the poor. Poverty was addressed primarily through public education and subsidies for small farmers (Selolwane 2012).

When drought recurred in 1978–79, the government and WFP together provided drought relief for as many as 530,000 people, i.e. about 80 per cent of the population (Gooch and Macdonald 1981: 5). The government formalized its public works programme (as the Labour-Intensive Public Works Programme) and introduced a new National Policy on Destitute Persons. The latter provided for minimal benefits in kind for any individual 'who is rendered helpless due to natural

⁴ Botswana National Archives (BNA), OP 28/6: 'Social Welfare: "Chronic" Destitutes', Draft Cabinet Memorandum drafted by Ministry of Local Government and Lands, 7 February 1974, and signed by the Minister, K.P. Morake, and subsequent correspondence.

disaster or temporary hardship', and had neither assets (with a limit of four cows) nor close kin to support them.⁵

When Seretse Khama died, in mid-1980, the state was massively involved in the decommodification of its citizens through providing a safety net that was wide—and very wide during times of extreme drought—but also parsimonious and paternalistic, providing benefits in kind, through workfare wherever feasible. This was a welfare state that insured its citizens against the risk (of drought) that was most pressing in a still largely rural society. This was *not* a welfare state that insured its citizens primarily against the risks associated with urbanization and industrialization. Drought intermittently pushed into poverty households that were headed by working-age, able-bodied adults. Food-for-work programmes providing rations for a single adult per household were intended to strengthen families, not compensate for family breakdown. At the same time, the state accepted responsibility for children and mothers and for 'destitute' people who were unable to work, but at minimal levels.

Khama was succeeded as president by his Vice-President (and Minister of Finance and Development Planning), Quett Masire. Masire himself seems to have been more concerned with growth and less with redistribution than Khama, but his first years in office were also ones of sustained drought, from 1981 to 1986. Arable production fell by two-thirds. Three hundred thousand cattle had died by 1984. The government responded by expanding its drought relief and recovery programmes: feeding programmes were extended to provide meals for school children over weekends and during school holidays; the public employment programme was expanded, and also introduced cash payments alongside food rations; and more generous food parcels were distributed to much larger numbers of 'destitutes'. Once again, more than half of the population benefitted from feeding programmes, including through the Labour-Intensive Public Works Programme (Botswana 1991: 452). As in the late 1980s, drought relief was followed by drought recovery efforts. These programmes were run through existing, largely bureaucratic structures, not by politicians. The 1985/86 Household Income and Expenditure Survey—conducted several years into the drought—found that the real incomes of the poorest households in rural areas had probably declined since the mid-1970s, but the fact that the observed decline was modest seemed to be 'an achievement to the credit of the government's drought relief policies' (Harvey and Lewis 1990: 282). Botswana's drought relief programme was widely acclaimed as a great success and a good example of the general dictum that democracies do not permit drought to lead to deaths on a large scale (e.g. Drèze and Sen 1989; Teklu 1995; De Waal 1997).

Under Masire (president until 1998) and his successor, Festus Mogae (president from 1998 to 2008), the BDP government continued to emphasize economic growth, but at the same time moved to 'institutionalize' further welfare provision in two respects: financial responsibility was transferred within the WFP to the government, and new policies were introduced to fill the holes in the existing safety net based on drought relief. In 1985, concluding their study of the drought relief programmes, Holm and Morgan (1985) had assessed that:

Drought relief is coming to assume a role in Botswana politics comparable to education and welfare in the industrialised countries. Indeed, it is already so popular that the leaders of the BDP have resisted pressures for cuts from bureaucrats. It will be difficult for the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, which quite naturally concerns itself with balancing the budget, to find

⁵ I have been unable to locate a copy of the actual policy. This summary is based on the description in the later, 2002, Revised National Policy (Botswana 2002) and in Gooch and Macdonald (1981).

a politically acceptable way of reducing the various relief programmes, once the drought is over. (Holm and Morgan 1985: 476)

Holm and Morgan were soon proved correct as the government not only prepared for further droughts but also moved to address more fully the challenge of chronic poverty. Old-age pensions were introduced in 1996, assistance for orphans soon after, and provision for 'destitutes' was reformed in 2002. By the early 2000s drought relief programmes had extended into a permanent welfare state, funded from domestic revenues, not from external aid or agencies.

The 1985/86 survey data revealed that poverty remained widespread and deep. Poverty persisted even in years of good rain, indicating 'a structural poverty problem' (Botswana 1991: 17). Government documents acknowledged that social justice required government action:

Government food aid, its drought relief and recovery programmes, and other aid measures targeted for the destitute are intended to supplement the incomes of the very poor in order to ensure that their disposable incomes, both cash and in kind, provide them with a minimum standard of living. (Botswana 1991: 33).

The government envisaged that 'existing assistance measures' would 'be consolidated into a simple, single-channel "safety net", based on strict eligibility criteria, for disadvantaged households', which could easily 'be expanded during drought to protect basic needs and the productive assets of vulnerable households' (Botswana 1991: 89).

Policy reform was driven in large part by the threatened (and finally effected) withdrawal of the WFP and ensuing transfer to the Government of Botswana of financial responsibility for drought relief and related welfare programmes. This required that the additional budgetary demands of drought relief and related programmes be anticipated, through advance financial and organizational planning. The WFP had raised with the Government of Botswana the issue of the transfer of financial responsibility as early as 1983, but the deepening and enduring drought meant that this was postponed. It was only in the early 1990s that agreement was reached over the phased withdrawal of the WFP (to be completed by 1997). A drought in 1992/93 was the last for which Botswana received WFP food aid.⁶

As the transfer of responsibility of feeding programmes from the WFP to the government's own budget became more imminent, the government was compelled to think more carefully about the design of its programmes. On the one hand, it was concerned not to perpetuate 'dependency', which might entail more precise targeting of some programmes. On the other, it was forced to consider which citizens were 'deserving', and especially which chronically poor citizens were deserving of support in non-drought as well as drought years. The result was not so much the institutionalization of welfare programmes as their reform through respecification.

The dilemma was set out explicitly in the 7th National Development Plan (NDP) (1991–1997). The plan recorded a strong commitment to social justice and concern over the decline of extended family support, envisaging a 'social safety net' and making specific budgetary provision for childcare (Botswana 1991: 386). Here the government faced the dilemma: 'The major challenges Government faces is to ensure that the temporary reliance of vulnerable groups on drought relief does not become a permanent dependency' (Botswana 1991: 389). Across most of Africa, post-colonial governments were wary of encouraging laziness and 'dependency' by providing overly generous assistance ('handouts') to households with able-bodied, working-age adults. Khama,

⁶ Emergency Operation 5060 on top of the ongoing feeding programmes 324 EXP IV and V.

Masire, and the BDP emphasized the importance of ‘self-help’ and ‘self-reliance’, and the need to balance individuals’ responsibility to work with the government’s responsibility to provide for those who were unable to support themselves (Seekings 2016b). Feeding programmes for children and other ‘vulnerable’ groups were less controversial, although there was some discussion over the scope of the programmes and especially whether they needed to be better targeted on the poor. The government took over full financial responsibility for these from the WFP in 1997. Provision for ‘destitutes’, on the other hand, had always been more controversial. The government did nudge up the value of the benefit, from a paltry Pula30/month to an only slightly less paltry Pula45/month in 1990 (Botswana 1991: 389). The big question, however, was whether there were specific groups of people for whom the destitutes policy was no longer adequate.

The most pressing group of chronically destitute were the elderly. Hitherto, Botswana’s safety nets were based on the assumptions that most elderly people either supported themselves or were supported by their kin and the small number of exceptions was covered adequately by provision for ‘destitutes’. Social and economic change made both assumptions doubtful. In April 1988, after years of drought, one of the appointed BDP Members of Parliament, proposed the motion ‘that this Hon[ourable] House requests Government to introduce old age pensions’. The motion was supported by MPs from both the BDP and opposition parties.⁷ The only response from the government, however, was a research programme launched by the Ministry of Health, resulting in a workshop in Gaborone in 1993 (see Bruun et al. 1994). The research confirmed that many elderly people—especially widows—were impoverished, without sufficient support from children or destitute relief. Elderly people told researchers that ‘our children do not seem to care much about us; we are forced to sit back and wait for any form of relief, hoping that the Government has also not forgotten us’. But the government apparently also ‘does not know that old people exist’ (Ngome 1994: 105–6). Following the 1993 workshop, an inter-ministerial working group was reportedly set up to continue discussions over ministerial responsibilities to address the challenge of poverty among the elderly. The prospect of competitive elections in October 1994 seems to have provided additional impetus. The BDP manifesto for the 1994 elections included the promise at least to ‘study the feasibility and the affordability of an old age pension scheme’ (BDP 1994: 19, para 13.3). Following the elections, in April 1995, Masire declared the country to be drought-stricken again—and without the prospect of WFP support.

It came as a surprise, however, when the Minister of Finance and Development Planning (and Vice-President), Festus Mogae, announced in his budget speech in February 1996 that non-contributory old-age pensions would be introduced.⁸ In his memoirs, published a decade later, Masire wrote that the BDP was aware that ‘traditional’ support systems were withering, especially in the towns, and poverty was growing among the elderly. ‘We discussed the idea of an old age pension scheme for many years’, he wrote; ‘By 1996, we felt that we had enough revenue coming from diamonds, and those funds belonged to all Batswana. So we discussed it and decided to go ahead’ (Masire 2006: 234).

The old-age pension programme and the assumption of responsibility for feeding programmes cost close to 1 per cent of GDP. This level of expenditure would have been a massive outlay for many African countries, but for Botswana it was less than the government was spending on drought relief and recovery much of the time. Moreover, at the time, public finances seemed buoyant. Former Deputy-Minister of Finance and long-time cabinet member David Magang later accused Masire of profligacy as a minister, throwing money away (Magang 2008: 475). The 8th

⁷ *Hansard*, Parliament of the Republic of Botswana, 8 April 1988, pp.971–8.

⁸ Masire had not mentioned pensions in his presidential address the previous November: *Hansard*, 6 Nov 1995, pp.4–15.

NDP (1997/98–2002/03) forecast budget surpluses, with rising revenues outpacing the rising expenditure. But if the economy grew more slowly than forecast but public expenditure grew rapidly, then budget deficits would ensue (Botswana 1997a: 69–71). It turned out that the economy grew faster than expected. Nonetheless, the rapid increase in public expenditure did lead to budget deficits in 1998/99 (of Pula 1.4 billion, i.e. more than 6 per cent of GDP), 2001/02 and 2002/03 (Botswana 2003: 35–39). Increased domestic expenditure on welfare programmes contributed to these budget deficits, although the growth of total expenditure was driven primarily by the public sector wage bill (Seekings 2017).

Orphans comprised a second category inadequately covered by destitute relief. The Ministry of Local Government was tasked with keeping a register of orphans and providing them—and their foster families—with necessary food and other benefits in kind (such as school uniforms). As the number of orphans grew, due primarily to AIDS, the ministry was unable to cope. By 1998 it was thought that less than one-half of all orphans were registered (Botswana 1999: 26). In 1999, the government approved a short-term Plan of Action for Orphans, which provided for the appointment of dedicated child welfare officers and committees, and initiated a new Orphan Care Programme (OCP) to take orphans off general destitute relief. Through the 2000s there were about 50,000 orphans being supported under this programme. Although there were fewer beneficiaries than there were old-age pensioners, the cost of the food basket for orphans (and their foster families) was much higher than the value of an old-age pension, which meant that the total cost of the OCP was about the same as the total cost of the old-age pension scheme.

The initiation of new, dedicated programmes for the elderly and orphans and perhaps also the onset of yet another drought in 2001 (lasting until 2004) prompted reform of the destitutes policy in 2002—despite the state’s continuing budget deficits. The new policy defined more clearly ‘permanent’ ‘destitutes’ (comprising primarily the disabled) and ‘temporary’ ‘destitutes’ (resulting from drought or the death of or desertion by a breadwinner). Special provision was made for ‘needy children’ (other than orphans, who were covered by the OCP). The Revised Policy raised the value of the food basket and introduced for the first time a modest cash benefit on the grounds that ‘destitutes’ needed cash (for items such as toothpaste and paraffin) as well as food rations. The 2002 Revised Policy was more generous, but it remained highly moralistic, based on an understanding of destitution that encompassed a failure to take advantage of opportunities to improve one’s life. The policy identified the ‘responsibilities’ of the destitute, and specified appropriate actions to be taken if ‘destitutes’ ‘flouted’ these responsibilities (Botswana 2002: 11–12).

There are no good data on precisely what proportion of the population benefitted from the various government programmes. Seleka et al. (2007) report that, one in three households was receiving support from one or other programme as of 2002/03, but this figure seems to have excluded school feeding programmes. By 2009/10, the proportion had risen further. Although only about 10 per cent of the population benefitted directly from cash (or ‘near-cash’) programmes, many of these supported large households, so the proportion of *indirect* beneficiaries was much larger. An even larger number of individuals benefitted from feeding programmes: Given some overlap between programmes, it is likely that approximately one-quarter of the total population benefitted from school meals, and a similar proportion directly from other programmes. It is probably true that a large majority of households benefitted from one or other government welfare programme. Cash benefits remained parsimonious, however, especially in comparison with neighbouring South Africa.

The government remained torn between its formal commitment to providing a thorough safety net and anxiety about expanding it too far and too fast. The tension was especially evident with respect to provision for children. In neighbouring South Africa, the government introduced in

1998 a CSG that paid modest cash benefits, subject to a means test, and initially only for children to the age of seven. The means test was set at quite a high-income level, however, and the age threshold was raised repeatedly, eventually to the age of eighteen. Even though the South African government resisted proposals for a more rapid expansion, the cost of the programme rose from less than 0.2 per cent of GDP at the outset to 1.2 per cent of GDP by 2009 (Seekings 2016c). In Botswana, provision for orphans was expanded in the mid-2000s, and the cost of the OCP did rise to 0.2 per cent of GDP by 2012/13 (BIDPA and World Bank 2013). But this was a fraction of the cost of the South African CSG. If the costs of the school and vulnerable group feeding programmes are added, the total cost of support for children and mothers in Botswana came to only 0.7 per cent of GDP in 2012/13 (BIDPA and World Bank 2013)—i.e. approximately one-half of the total share of GDP spent on child-oriented social assistance in South Africa.⁹

When, in 2010, a team of consultants (from the UK and Botswana) proposed a broader child grant along South African lines, costing approximately the same as the South African CSG, the government of Botswana demurred. The plan was reportedly supported by bureaucrats in the Ministry of Local Government but was shot down by politicians on the grounds that it would encourage dependency and laziness.¹⁰ In 2013, the World Bank (together with BIDPA) proposed replacing the existing Destitute and Orphan Care Programmes with a new means-tested Family Support Grant (FSG). The FSG would pay a cash benefit of P85 per capita per month (equivalent to P340 for an average family of four) to all families living in absolute poverty who were not reached by other programmes (BIDPA and World Bank 2013: 73–6). The government of Botswana was apparently not persuaded.

One programme that did see significant reform—or at least repackaging—was workfare. Another review of Destitute Policy, in August 2008 recommended (again) that able-bodied ‘destitutes’ should be enrolled in workfare.¹¹ This required that the workfare programme be extended to all parts of the country where there were (able-bodied) ‘destitutes’ and at all times (not only during drought). The former Labour-Intensive Public Works programme was renamed the *Ipelegeng* programme, became permanent rather than intermittent, and poverty- rather than drought-focused, from 2008/09 (see Hamer 2016).

The government seems to have contemplated but had neither the courage nor conviction (nor incentives, as we shall see) to reel in the welfare state. A review of Botswana’s social welfare programmes in 2007 warned that further increases in expenditure were not sustainable and recommended more targeting (Seleka et al. 2007), but the government rejected the introduction of means tests for old-age pensions and orphan benefits.¹² In his 2010 budget speech, the Minister of Finance warned that the number of people receiving assistance was ‘economically unsustainable’.¹³ As of 2009/10, Botswana’s various social assistance programmes were costing a total of about 1.9 per cent of GDP (BIDPA and World Bank 2013: 42), which was less than in

⁹ In addition to the CSG, South Africa paid grants to foster parents who had adopted children and to the caregivers for disabled children.

¹⁰ I am grateful to Isaac Chinyoka for this information.

¹¹ ‘Budget speech 2010’ (presented by O.K. Matambo), *Hansard*, Monday 8th Feb 2010.

¹² ‘Budget Speech 2007’ (presented by B. Gaolathe), 5th February 2007; accessed from <http://www.gov.bw/globalassets/po/budget-speech2007.pdf>.

¹³ ‘Budget Speech 2010’ (presented by O.K. Matambo), *Hansard*, Monday 8th Feb 2010.

South Africa but more than in most African countries.¹⁴ The World Bank and their local partner BIDPA seem to have assessed that this was too much, and recommended stricter targeting and less generous benefits.

The expansion and institutionalization of the welfare state in Botswana was possible because rapid economic growth generated rising public revenues. The welfare state was ‘necessary’ to ensure that the benefits of growth were shared across the whole population. Economic growth may have been exceptional: GDP per capita was fourteen times higher in real terms in 2008 than it had been at independence. But this economic growth did not eliminate poverty. Even with an expanding welfare state, 19 per cent of the population fell below the national poverty line in 2009/10, and the poverty gap remained large in relation to the resources spent on safety net programmes.

4 Social change, Tswana culture, and the ideology of the BDP

Economic growth fuelled social and economic changes that contributed to the perception that welfare programmes were necessary. Urbanization was the most obvious trend. The urban population grew from less than 10 per cent of the national population in 1971 to 57 per cent in 2006 (Botswana 1997a: 13; 2009: 20). Poverty, however, remained highest in rural areas, and was concentrated among households and individuals who lacked skills, had insufficient access to land and cattle to farm, and were without kin to support them. A rising proportion of rural households had no cattle, little or no land, and weak or no kin or other networks through which they could claim support. Poverty was thus the result of deagrarianization rather than urbanization.

As early as 1977/78, a year of reasonable rain and production, one survey found that only 7 per cent of households were able to meet their food needs through their own production. Almost all households were dependent on other sources of food, especially income from waged work, whether as migrants in neighbouring South Africa (in the mid-twentieth century) or within Botswana itself (in the later part of the century) (Vierich and Sheppard 1980: 50). The simplest measure of deagrarianization in Botswana is the declining proportion of households, including of households in rural areas only, who had access to cattle, whether through ownership or some kind of lease arrangement (including *mafisa*, i.e. the traditional system of loaned cattle). In the ‘traditional’ agricultural sector, i.e. excluding about five hundred large commercial farms, 32 per cent of farming households had no cattle in 1981. By 1995, this proportion had risen to 49 per cent (Botswana 1997a: 227–8).

A social aspect of deagrarianization was the shrinkage of kinship obligations. The official narrative of Tswana culture emphasizes the extended family. In 1970, for example, then Vice-President Masire praised the ‘African extended family ... with its built-in system of social security’ as ‘an invaluable institution’. He warned that, ‘if the extended family system were to disintegrate we would all be the losers’. He continued to laud ‘the traditional system of sharing natural resources of water and grazing, and land generally’ for providing ‘a sound basis on which to build a just and egalitarian society’.¹⁵

¹⁴ BIDPA’s reported total for ‘safety net’ expenditure also included expenditure on scholarships, and then compared this inflated total with totals from other countries that excluded comparable public expenditure on education (BIDPA and World Bank 2013: 32). This is misleading.

¹⁵ In *Development in Botswana*, quoted in Kooijman (1978), p.212.

Contemporary ethnographic studies reported, however, that the extended family system was threatened by the rise in individualism and decline in perceived obligations towards kin, including even parents. Kooijman (1978), who conducted research in the early 1970s, reported a decline in the former practice of young men ploughing for their parents. She illustrates this with a discussion of one poor family, whose kin were not prepared to support them except in return for work. A wealthy kinsman told Kooijman that ‘I cannot give him food without him or his family working for us. My wife could never agree to a free gift of corn. She would ask me what I am doing by giving food to “lazy” people’. Perhaps, in part in consequence, poor people were often ashamed to ask for help (Kooijman 1978: 234–5). Colclough and McCarthy (1980) summarized that ‘it is generally believed that [the] traditional methods of security [against drought] are now breaking down’; chiefs no longer organized tribal stores of food, the expansion of cattle grazing had pushed away the wildlife herds that had previously been hunted in times of drought, rising numbers of households had no cattle, which meant they had nothing to sell during drought, and the *mafisa* system was in decline (Colclough and McCarthy 1980: 111–14).

Increasingly, government officials recognized that the extended family system was disintegrating. The 7th NDP acknowledged that the traditional extended family system was breaking down (Botswana 1991: 18). This recognition facilitated the expansion of public provision. Evidence on social change was presented at the 1993 workshop on the poor elderly. In the parliamentary debate on the old-age pension in 1996, an opposition MP recalled that:

before independence, the sense of communal obligation was very strong as the care of the aged, orphans and the disabled was voluntarily undertaken by relatives under the system of extended family. Now, today, as you are all aware, that sense has now died. What remains is the sense of everybody for himself and God for us all.¹⁶ Kooijman (1978: 212)

The BDP government’s response to the persistence of poverty amidst social change was shaped by its understanding of Tswana culture and its paternalistic but conservative ideology. From the mid-1960s, the BDP sought to appropriate traditions of responsibility. The official narrative of Tswana culture places a very heavy emphasis on tradition, more explicitly than most other national cultures in East and Southern Africa. According to this narrative, chiefs had clear responsibilities for the poor. In the case of the Batawana, when the chief (*kgosi*) was installed, he was told:

Morafe wa gago ke oo
O babalele
Ke wena ramasiela, ke wena rabahumanegi
Kgosi ke kgosi ka batho.

Translated: ‘There is our nation, care for it, you are the father of the orphans and the poor, the king is the king by the grace of the people’ (Tlou 1998). The BDP was led by a traditional leader (Seretse Khama, who had effectively been deposed as chief of the BaNgwato after marrying a British woman), but was nonetheless a ‘grand coalition’ of the modernizing, educated ‘new men’ who became commercial cattle farmers, embraced liberal democracy and removed many of the powers of chiefs (Gillett 1973; Parson 1984; Parsons 1988; Tlou et al. 1995; Samatar 1999; Sebudubudu with Molutsi 2009). The BDP was not a broad-based nationalist movement, nor was it led by a natural ideologue (such as Nyerere, in Tanzania, or some of the leaders of rival political parties in Botswana).

¹⁶ BNF MP for Kanye, Mr S. Gabathswane. *Hansard*, Thursday 15 Feb 1996, p 95.

Formed to negotiate independence, and having won an overwhelming majority in the pre-independence elections, the BDP had to define an ideology setting out the relationships between the new (BDP-run) state and its citizens. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Khama, Masire and the BDP, with the assistance of their mostly expatriate scriptwriters, crafted conservative doctrines of government, growth, and welfare. These doctrines were shaped profoundly by the drought and ensuing destitution and poverty that accompanied independence and the government's determination to transfer powers from the chiefs to the new state. With respect to welfare specifically, the result was a doctrine with four key elements:

- An idealization of rural society, wariness of social change and distaste for urban life.¹⁷
- An emphasis on 'self-help' and hostility to 'dependency' on the charity of the state.
- The goal of social harmony despite inequality.
- The sharing of responsibility between individuals and the state.

Khama and the BDP identified four 'fundamental principles' that would guide our National Development', each of which was said to be rooted in Tswana tradition: democracy (*puso ya batho ka batho*), development (*ditiro tsa ditlabalolo*), unity (*popagano ya sechaba*), and self-reliance (*ipelegeng* or *boipelego*). These were united in the Tswana concept of *kagisano*, which was usually translated as 'unity, peace, harmony and a sense of community' (Gulbrandsen 2012; Seekings 2016b). Whilst the BDP sought to appropriate tradition, its leaders were not traditionalists. They did not, for example, promote traditional clothing or rituals (Gulbrandsen 2012: 192).

BDP leaders were liberal in their preference for markets over the state and were conservative on many social issues (including both the family and sex), but saw the state and society as having responsibilities for the poor. These responsibilities were shared with the poor themselves: The poor had a responsibility to work hard and take advantage of whatever opportunities were open to them; they should not rely on government 'handouts'. Improved productivity was always to be preferred to welfare. Khama and Masire were insistent that theirs was not a socialist ideology (Khama 1970; Masire 1989, 1994, 2006). At the end of Masire's presidency, the BDP's ideology was rearticulated in *Vision 2016* which invoked the four 'national principles' underpinning the country's development plans, i.e. democracy, development, self-reliance, and unity. It then added a fifth principle: the Tswana concept of '*botho*':

This refers to one of the tenets of African culture—the concept of a person who has a well-rounded character, who is well-mannered, courteous and disciplined, and realises his or her potential both as an individual and as a part of the community to which he or she belongs. '*Botho*' defines a process for earning respect by first giving it, and to gain empowerment by empowering others. It encourages people to applaud rather than resent those who succeed. It disapproves of antisocial, disgraceful, inhuman and criminal behaviour, and encourages social justice for all. '*Botho*' as a concept must stretch to its utmost limits the largeness of

¹⁷ 'We in the BDP were also concerned about the drift to towns for social reasons. In the rural areas, people had a traditional way of making a living and carrying on with their lives. In the cities, they either got a job or they just become lost souls. The traditional safety nets—going to live at your uncle's place, or borrowing oxen from someone else to plough your lands if you had no oxen—had no parallel in the towns. We talked about it in cabinet; we talked about it in party meetings; and we talked about it in parliamentary caucuses. It was very much a part of our thinking as we developed our economic policies.' (Masire 2006: 217)

the spirit of all Batswana. It must permeate every aspect of our lives, like the air we breathe, so that no Motswana will rest easy knowing that another is in need. (Botswana 1997b: 2)

Together, these five principles should promote ‘social harmony’ (*kagisano*). There was a clear, implicit commitment to social justice. Botswana would become ‘a compassionate and caring society, offering support and opportunity to those who are poor, and including *all* people in the benefits of growth’ (Botswana 1997b: 8, emphasis in original). Poverty would be halved by 2007, and absolute poverty would be eliminated by 2016. This would be achieved primarily through economic growth and the provision of opportunities, but ‘there will be a social safety net for those who find themselves in poverty for any reason (Botswana 1997b: 9). At the same time, Botswana should worry about the ‘deterioration of national values’. In a section on the “‘give me” attitude’, *Vision 2016* insisted on the importance of avoiding ‘a culture of dependency’ (Botswana 1997b: 25).

Under Festus Mogae, a professional economist who became Vice-President and Minister of Finance and Development Planning before succeeding Masire as president in 1998, even heavier emphasis was placed on the importance of a balance between public and individual responsibilities. He affirmed repeatedly his commitment to tackling the challenges of poverty and unemployment, but saw this in terms of ‘mutual social responsibility’. ‘National development’, he explained in his budget speech in 1993, was ‘a cooperative endeavour, and we must all play our part’. Mutual self-responsibility meant ‘that self-reliance takes precedence over appeals to Government for assistance’.¹⁸ In the first BDP election manifesto under his leadership, Mogae called for ‘self-reliance as opposed to a dependency syndrome’ (Mogae 1999). Mogae emphasized also the importance of fiscal responsibility. ‘We are all aware that resources are scarce and have alternative or competing uses’, he lectured parliament in 1996; ‘devoting more resources in one area will usually involve withdrawing some resources from another area. The essence of the economic policy-making is therefore trying to make the “right” choices or strike the right balance’. In the face of trade-offs, he said, the government sometimes has to make unpopular decisions, and resist populism.¹⁹ Mogae assumed the presidency just when the government began to experience fiscal difficulties, and his speeches reflected the imperative of austerity. But they were rooted in doctrines articulated under his predecessors Khama and Masire.

The BDP leadership was resolute in its hostility to dependency (on ‘handouts’). Gulbrandsen (2012), who conducted his original research in the late 1970s, reports that ‘in private conversations politicians and bureaucrats consistently emphasized the danger of providing too many direct subsidies for the poor people, these being, in their view, likely to encourage laziness’ (Gulbrandsen 1996: 367). The term ‘dependency’ seems to have appeared in documents in about 1980, and was prominent in BDP and government documents from the mid-1980s (see, for example, the 6th NDP—Botswana 1985: 20–21). Magang writes that the culture of dependency and entitlement emerged after Khama’s death (in 1980) (Magang 2008: 402, 470). The spectre of dependency haunted BDP and government documents through the 1990s (see, for example, the 7th NDP—Botswana 1991: 33, 385, 389) and 2000s.

Gulbrandsen (2012) wonders what effect the (generally) paternalistic, modernizing state has had on the subjectivities of its citizens. He concludes that ‘it seems reasonable to maintain that the

¹⁸ *Hansard*, vol.110, part 1, Monday 8 Feb 1993, p4. See also the BDP’s 1994 election manifesto.

¹⁹ Mogae, budget speech, *Hansard*, Monday 12 Feb 1996, pp.4–23. See also Mogae’s final presidential State of the Nation address to parliament in 2007, reproduced in Grant (2012: 84).

state's massive, widespread and persistent intervention in the population has contributed to the fact that the population, in various ways, has been caught up in the process of state formation', most obviously through the schooling system (Gulbrandsen 2012: 279; also 313). Drawing on ethnographic research in the 1990s, Helle-Valle (2002) seems to support this view. Having discussed how villagers were incorporated into the 'traditional' structures of headmen and chiefs and were alienated from the 'modern', bureaucratic state, Helle-Valle comments on the nascent welfare state:

The Botswana state has gained a certain amount of legitimacy in the eyes of its people as a generous patron. Many villagers see 'the government', often personified by the President, the local member of parliament or other local representatives of the state, as *motswadintle*—as 'he from whom good things come'. ... The general attitude is that 'the government' or the 'BDP' will deliver the goods, so that villagers can live their village lives. It is therefore not surprising that the villagers' attitude to the state apparatus is closely tied to the latter's role as a generous patron. For instance, in 1990, when a number of programmes relating to an eight-year-long drought had just been brought to an end, the general attitude among villagers was that the state's behaviour was *maswe* (bad). Two years later the government (no doubt thanks to the impending election) reintroduced many of these programmes and the general attitude shifted in a more positive direction. (Helle-Valle 2002: 195–6)

At the same time, as Helle-Valle notes, the government bureaucrats on the front line of the new state treated villagers with disdain.

5 Political competition

The shape and size of the welfare state in Botswana reflect the BDP's ideological preferences in the context of a competitive political system in which the BDP has been compelled to consolidate its support. The BDP won more than half of the vote in every election from the pre-independence election of 1965 through to 2009. The BDP had a comfortable parliamentary majority throughout this period, even when its share of the vote was only just over 50 per cent, because of the Westminster-style first-past-the-post constituency system. In 2014, for the first time, it failed to win a majority of the vote but nonetheless retained a majority of seats in parliament. The BDP is arguably the most successful party in Africa in terms of its success in remaining in office for fifty years (and counting). Nonetheless, the BDP has faced electoral challenges, and these have pushed it into more extensive reform than it might have undertaken in the absence of electoral competition.

The limits to democracy in Botswana have been well-documented. Nthomang (2007), for example, characterized Botswana as an 'enfeebled democracy'. Good (1996) (who was later deported for his efforts) labelled it as an 'authoritarian liberal democratic state', and later with Taylor called it a 'minimalist democracy' (Good and Taylor 2008; see also Good 2016). These and other scholars drew attention to abuses of power by successive BDP presidents, the BDP's exploitation of the benefits of incumbency, and the chronic marginalization of San (and perhaps other non-Tswana minorities). Makgala (2006, 2009) analysed the personalized and often regional factionalism that pervaded the political elite within both the BDP and the opposition parties.

Neither the BDP's long tenure, nor its abuse of its powers, means that it has been immune to electoral pressure. The BDP has always faced vocal criticism from opposition parties. In the mid-

1960s it worked hard to construct party structures across the country. Then and later it worked hard to maintain its bedrock of electoral support in rural areas. In the run-up to elections policy-making was clearly shaped by the BDP's concern to maintain its electoral popularity. The election of 1994, when the BDP's share of the vote fell dramatically to 53 per cent, was a massive shock. The BDP succeeded in stabilizing its support at about that level in 1999, 2004, and 2009, but in 2014 it experienced another shock when its share of the vote dropped below 50 per cent. The re-election of the BDP has often seemed less than certain.

The initial opposition to the BDP was the Botswana People's Party (BPP), which was hostile to chiefs and put forward a 'socialist' programme. Its support was concentrated in the major towns (Lobatse and Francistown). The BPP, however, split prior to the first election (in 1965), and its support declined steadily. It won three seats in both the 1965 and 1969 elections, but in 1969 a rival opposition party—the Botswana National Front (BNF)—also won three seats (out of a total of 34). By 1984 the BNF had clearly ousted the BPP as the primary opposition party. The BNF brought together in an unlikely coalition the strident socialist Kenneth Koma and the Bangwaketse chief Bathoen II. In 1994 the BNF made a major breakthrough, winning 13 seats (to the BDP's 27), in an enlarged parliament. Soon thereafter (in 1998) the BNF split, with most of its MPs forming a breakaway Botswana Congress Party (BCP). Although the BCP won a significant share of the vote in subsequent elections, it failed to win many seats. In 2014, the BNF combined with other minor opposition parties into the Umbrella for Democratic Change, but the BCP declined to join (for which it paid a high price when it won only three seats despite winning 20 per cent of the vote). The support of both the BNF and BCP was concentrated in urban areas, and opposition parties controlled municipal governments in Gaborone and several other major towns. Opposition support was also based heavily among more economically marginalized urban voters. Whilst both the governing BDP and opposition parties (and trade unions) were rhetorically pro-poor, their rhetoric differed. The BDP espoused a paternalist, conservative doctrine, whilst the opposition presented a more orthodox social democratic discourse.

The BDP has used public expenditure to bolster its electoral support, especially in rural areas. Faced with competition from the new BNF in the 1969 elections, Khama's government secured continued support from the WFP for drought recovery programmes (and other rural development programmes). In 1979, MPs from the BDP reportedly pressed the government to declare a drought so that drought relief programmes could pour money into their constituencies in the run-up to that year's elections (Munemo 2012: 132–3). Press reports from the 1979 election campaign indicate that the distribution of food aid was an important campaign issue (Munemo 2012: 147). 'Young Turks' in the BDP criticized the party's leaders for neglecting inequality whilst pursuing economic growth (Picard 1987: 170). The 1984 elections have been described as being 'critical in bringing BDP to see the political value of drought relief' (Holm and Cohen 1988: 36). The cabinet reportedly over-ruled the Ministry of Finance and expanded massively the drought relief budget in order to maintain the BDP's support in rural areas (Holm and Cohen 1988). In 1994 the opposition BNF criticized the BDP for 'dividing the nation into the haves and the have-nots', and promised that a BNF government would 'create more jobs' and 'provide social welfare for the most needy', including free education, contributory and non-contributory old-age pensions, dependents' and orphans' benefits, unemployment benefits and pre-school facilities for working parents' (BNF 1994: 3–8). Following its narrow victory in the 1994 elections, and looking forward to the next elections in 1999 (Nthomang 2007: 212), the BDP government moved to introduce old-age pensions and orphans' benefits, and to assume financial responsibility for feeding programmes, despite the considerable cost of these at a time when the budget was beginning to take strain. Most recently, in the 2009 and 2014 elections, BDP leader and president Ian Khama (the son of Seretse Khama) has sought to brand himself as pro-poor through, inter alia, expanding the *Ipelegeng* workfare programme (Hamer 2016). The BDP has been willing to appropriate the

opposition parties' policies just as it earlier sought to appropriate Tswana tradition whilst stripping the chiefs of most of their powers. In 1996, when the Minister of Finance announced the introduction of old-age pensions, opposition MPs reacted claiming that the BDP was 'dancing' to their 'tune'.²⁰

Scholars who have conducted ethnographic research in rural areas suggest that the BDP's expansion of state provision (on top of governing during very rapid economic growth) was crucial to it sustaining its electoral support in its rural strongholds. Until the late 1980s, 'the ruling party and the government it dominated exercised its hegemony so forcefully ... that it was no simple matter for the opposition to establish a convincing political alternative'. When the government provided schools and clinics, roads and water supplies, and feeding programmes, all that the opposition could criticize was that this was not enough (Gulbrandsen 2012: 249). The BDP insisted that its leaders—and government officials—participated in popular meetings (*kgotla*), where they were exposed to (controlled) criticisms of the government's performance with respect to development. Holm and Morgan (1985) noted that the BDP—from the president down to local councillors—had come to view drought relief as 'a very effective means of reinforcing its rural support' (Holm and Morgan 1985: 476). A survey showed that 'the single most important reason given by respondents ... for being a member of the BDP was the Drought Relief Programme' (Molutsi 1989: 128). In the face of alleged corruption, welfare programmes were crucial to sustaining the BDP's electoral support.

The opposition parties continued to present themselves as more pro-poor than the BDP. In its 2009 election manifesto, for example, the BCP/BAM proposed that the age of entitlement for old-age pensions be reduced from 65 to 60 years, and that the value of the old-age pension be increased. For much of the time, however, the pressure exerted by the opposition parties was limited by divisions and a lack of clear direction (Osei-Hwedie 2001; Selolwane 2002; Makgala 2006).

Electoral competition helps to explain both the expansion of public provision and its pronounced rural bias. Munemo (2012) argues, perversely, that the BDP implemented cash-for-work programmes rather than food aid in the 1980s because of its strength, as the incumbent party, *not* because of its electoral vulnerability. His overarching hypothesis, applied to several countries, is that electorally vulnerable governments prefer food aid which politicians can manipulate to consolidate their support, whilst more secure parties are happy to shift from discretionary expenditures to programmes administered by bureaucrats. Contra Munemo's (2012) hypothesis, Botswana was a case of a governing party introducing more and more programmatic reforms as its share of the vote declined.

6 Conclusion

Esping-Andersen (1990) attributed the conservative welfare regimes of continental Europe to the absence of a 'red-green' political coalition between the industrial and urban working class with small, capital-intensive, family farmers. In Germany, most obviously, labour-intensive agriculture predominated in the early twentieth century, and farmers were recruited into a conservative coalition that sought to repress trade unions and left-wing parties whilst co-opting some workers (especially civil servants) into corporatist institutions. After the Second World War, the German

²⁰ MPs Dabutha (BNF, Gaborone North) and J.M. Pilane (BNF, Kgatleng West), *Hansard*, 14 and 20 February 1996, pp 53–4 and 72–3.

middle classes supported conservative reforms because they wished to preserve occupationally segregated social insurance programmes (and ensuing status differentials) and remained loyal to the Christian democrats. Underlying this politics was a history of absolutism (rather than liberal democracy) and Catholicism (with its commitment to preserving the traditional family) (Esping-Andersen 1990: 26–33, 133–5). The Christian democratic understanding of social citizenship emphasized ‘duties rather than rights, the family and the social group rather than the individual, society rather than the state, and distributional justice rather than social justice’ (Van Kersbergen 1995: 178), with distributional justice understood in terms of classes or status groups receiving their fair but unequal shares.

The conservative welfare regime in Botswana had some features in common with the conservative regimes of continental Europe: The state sought to co-opt public sector workers, in part through social security (spending 1.2 per cent of GDP on this, compared to 1.7 per cent on all safety nets); and the BDP and state were strongly committed to both the status hierarchy and the family. But the welfare regime was far less statist than in countries such as Germany, leaving protection against risks to the market as well as kin. Botswana’s welfare state was more residual than the conservative one in Europe, providing means-tested benefits for the poor (including through workfare), whilst universal programmes (such as the old-age pensions and school feeding programmes) provided modest benefits. Social insurance remained very limited.²¹ Moreover, Botswana’s welfare state was hardly corporatist. In these respects, the welfare regime in Botswana was more akin to a conservative, familialist version of the liberal variant of welfare regimes that Esping-Andersen (1990) identified in Europe. The BDP adhered to a conservative ideology, but not one with roots in Catholicism. It was an ideology of modernization, but one concerned more with the challenges of deagrarianization rather than those of urbanization and industrialization.

Comparing Botswana with Mauritius, Ulriksen (2011, 2012) concluded that Botswana was a laggard with respect to welfare state-building generally and in terms of its specific (‘neo-liberal’) responses to the global crisis in 2008–09. Ulriksen attributes this to the weakness of lower middle classes in Botswana relative to Mauritius, which in turn reflected underlying economic differences, with Botswana’s cattle- and later diamond-based economy empowering elites relative to lower classes. Ulriksen is surely correct to contrast the welfare state constructed under *conservative* BDP governments in Botswana with that built under the *social democratic* (or more radical) governments in Mauritius. But she misrepresents both the differences between these two cases and the reasons for these differences.

Both Mauritius and Botswana built welfare states based on social assistance programmes, but they did so via very different routes. Mauritius was a heavily proletarianized economy and society from the nineteenth century. The economy remained predominantly agricultural through the mid-twentieth century, but it was dominated by sugar plantations, not smallholder or peasant production. Poverty was widespread, and could not be addressed through the expansion of peasant production because there was no surplus land. Contributory social assistance was ruled out because sugar was sold in very competitive international markets. Social democratic governments therefore countered poverty—especially in old age—through generous social assistance programmes (Seekings 2011). In Botswana, in contrast, the population was, for most of the twentieth century, incompletely proletarianized. It comprised a ‘peasantariat’ or semi-proletarianized peasantry

²¹ Botswana provided pensions for white-collar public sector employees. These were privatized in 2001, requiring massive capital transfers during 2002–03. There is no mandatory social insurance (although this was debated in parliament in 2008), and manual workers in the public sector are not covered by the public sector scheme. Most workers rely on gratuities or severance payments (including through provident funds)—see Selolwane (2012): 112–5, 120–2.

(Parson 1984). Conservative policy makers sought to mitigate poverty through sustaining an agrarian society based on peasant production and the extended family spanning both small, family farms and the wage labour market. Social assistance programmes were introduced, in the first instance, to tide peasants through periods of drought, and later to protect those specific groups (the elderly, orphans, 'destitutes') who fell through the cracks of agrarian society.

Ulriksen (2011, 2012) underestimates the extent of the welfare state in Botswana, by neglecting drought relief and peasant-support programmes. Under the BDP, a welfare state was built, but it was a conservative one. Ulriksen (2011, 2012) also exaggerates the reach of 'neo-liberalism' in Botswana in the 2000s. The government did reintroduce school fees, but then exempted the poor. Proposals to introduce new means tests (for old-age pensions, for example) were not adopted or implemented. Welfare programmes did not expand, but nor were they rolled back. The welfare state in Botswana remained conservative, not neo-liberal.

Costing close to 2 per cent of GDP, Botswana's social assistance programmes may be less expensive than those in Mauritius, but they are more extensive than their counterparts in most countries in East and Southern Africa. The Botswanan welfare state was far more substantial than its counterparts in neighbouring Zambia or Zimbabwe. In the 1990s, this reflected in part rapid economic growth, which generated resources far beyond those available to the Zambian or Zimbabwean states. Even in the 1980s, however, Botswana has an impressive set of public policies to relieve poverty. The brutality of the environment was an important factor, in that the government of Botswana was compelled earlier to develop policies for the relief of and recovery from drought. Political factors were important also. The political elite was conservative, but its distaste for the poor (widespread across Southern Africa) was tempered by a rhetoric of responsibility that was rooted in the circumstances of drought and the seizure of chiefly powers in the late 1960s. The governing party faced real electoral competition from opposition parties, and implemented policies that mitigated poverty in its electoral strongholds in rural areas. The governing party also enjoyed a broadly Weberian bureaucracy, facilitating a programmatic response to poverty rather than the deployment of discretionary patronage.

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