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# *Mutual criticism and state/society interaction in Botswana*

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ABSTRACT

State/civil society interaction in Botswana displays patterns characterised by mutual criticism in each other's presence, the willingness of state officials to meet and exchange views with non-state leaders, and the media's role of reminding the contestants to meet and exchange views. The Botswana political culture compels/constrains contestants to meet and exchange views rather than to disengage and resort to the trading of unpleasant remarks in the media and to industrial action on the street. The theoretical implication is that political culture vitally shapes state/civil society interaction and should not be ignored by researchers who seek to define/characterise strong/weak civil societies.

## INTRODUCTION

The central argument of this article is that Botswana's political culture promotes 'mutual criticism in each other's presence' or civility, and that meeting one's opponent is a more accurate measure of the strength of civil society than the strong/weak civil society concept that is often associated with Western societies. The secondary argument is that civil society has contributed more to Botswana's development than is often acknowledged.

The review shows that Botswana has often been characterised as a developmental state, and this has tended to exclude the analysis of the role of civil society in the country's development. The Botswana developmental state is perceived as one in which the state has transformed or begun to transform the material lives of the people, protected human rights far better than the majority of third world societies, and practised political democracy characterised by free and fair elections (Leftwich 1994: 383); in which the state is the primary agent of socio-economic change, through institutionalised patterns of policy intervention, guided by a national development plan that placed emphasis on developmental processes

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(Edge 1998: 333); in which new state elites emerged from an ancient initiator state culture in which state control and wealth generation were entwined (Maundeni 2002: 105); and in which a conscious and disciplined leadership has had as one of its main goals to develop professional institutions with competent bureaucrats (Taylor 2003a: 38). While these approaches emphasise different observable factors, they share the commonality of marginalising civil society in the developmental policy process.

Civic society in Botswana has been dismissed as weak (Holm 1996; Holm & Molutsi 1992; Holm *et al.* 1996), and circumscribed (Taylor 2003b). Taylor (2003b: 221) adds that 'the Botswana government has exhibited highly undemocratic tendencies to portray those organs of civil society it deems beyond its control as foreign stooges, and has not been shy to play the race card against any foreign supporters of civil society in an adversarial relationship with Gaborone'. The main reason why Botswana's civil society is often considered 'weak' is because it has staged very few violent clashes with the government leading to reversal of policies, the hallmark of a strong Western civil society. This Eurocentric way of measuring the strength of civil society seems to be inappropriate for Botswana politics, where lengthy debates are common and confrontations are unusual (Comaroff & Comaroff 1999; Durham 1999).

This article follows Durham's emphasis on 'civility' – that is, the local, cultural concerns with the moral nature of political action and the political aspects of a person's agency. The approach also acknowledges the observations by Comaroff (1975) that criticism of chiefs has long been a feature of public debate in Botswana, and by Schapera (1965: 10) that it has been embedded in the vivid imagery of courtly praise poetry since time immemorial: 'In general, we may say, the poems deal mainly with events in which the chief was personally involved, or failing all else, with what is expected of him … The contents always include eulogies of the chief himself, though sometimes also … direct or implied criticism of his conduct or disposition.' What should be emphasised is that such public criticism of chiefs happened in their presence and in public meetings.

> All matters of public policy are dealt with finally at an assembly open to all men of the tribe, and variously termed pitso, lebatla, or phutego. Such assemblies are held very frequently, at times almost weekly, and they usually meet early in the morning in the tribal council-place, close to the chief's residence. Normally only the men present in the capital attend, the business discussed and decisions reached being communicated, if necessary, to the inhabitants of outlying villages through their headmen. But on important occasions the men from outside are also summoned, and if the matter is at all critical (e.g., in case of internal disputes)

they may even be compelled to attend. A crucial meeting of this kind is sometimes held in the open veld some distance from the capital, and the men all come to it armed and ready for trouble … Since everybody present is entitled to speak, the tribal council provides a ready means of ascertaining public opinion. The decisions reached are generally those already formulated by the chief and his personal advisers, who because of their standing are able to persuade the others to support them, but it is not unknown for their wishes to be overruled. The discussions are characterised by considerable freedom of speech, and, if the occasion seems to call for it, the chief or his advisers may even be severely criticised. (Schapera & Comaroff 1991: 47)

My argument is that the dominant Tswana political culture emphasises open discussions in each other's presence.

In contrast, violent behaviour is peripheral to Tswana political culture and enjoys no moral and media support. The lack of moral support is evidenced by the Tswana language's emphasis on *ntwa kgolo ke a molomo* (conflicts are best solved through discussion). In another instance, 'in 1989, when two Herero men began fighting in a ward *kgotla* (chief's court) in Mahalapye, it was the subject of general ridicule for days: years later in 1996, the incident was still laughingly recalled. When men in the Mahalapye *kgotla* became openly hostile to persons or to the general debate, they would be compelled to leave and their comments dismissed as [dipolitiki] – politics' (Durham 1999: 194). The latest example in the rejection of street encounters was when Survival International staged a campaign outside the Botswana High Commission in London in 2001, leading to 'very sour' relationships with the Botswana government, and with Ditshwanelo: the Botswana Centre for Human Rights and with the general public in the country. Scanlon thinks that this was due to the fact that Survival International's campaign 'has the potential to create serious economic as well as political problems for Botswana internationally, especially since Survival International is attempting to associate Botswana's situation with conflict or blood diamonds' (Scanlon 2002: 21). What is surprising to many observers is the 'irrational' response of both the Botswana government and Ditshwanelo, by further distancing themselves from Survival International and placing diamonds in more danger of international rejection. There is no doubt that the conflict between Survival International and the Botswana Government has the potential to damage the image of the country's diamonds. But the point is that the staging of street encounters by Survival International fundamentally misunderstands the country's political culture, in which criticism in each other's presence is highly regarded and passionately promoted by the civil society, state, and the media, as will be shown in subsequent sections.

A correct understanding of the country's political culture is presented by Scanlon's informant who urged dialogue instead of confrontation with the government:

> This is simply just saying now we are talking about this. We are not fighting. And this is a reality and this is the truth. So in this way this strategy will promote the kind of reconciliation and reconstruction, a reconciliatory and reconstructive environment because you know you are not fighting, you don't go and say bad things about your government and things. You just go into a meeting with the government and you say well this situation looks like this and this and this, perhaps make some recommendations and so forth and also make yourself available to help government because often you are on the ground … (M. Ngakaeaja, Working Group for Indigenous People in Southern Africa – Botswana, quoted in Scanlon 2002: 23–4)

Survival International failed to recognise the importance that Tswana elites in the state, media and community, attach to meeting with your opponent and avoiding street encounters. Thus, street encounters and violent clashes are rejected in preference of mutual public criticism in meetings and conferences such as *kgotla*. This emphasis on mutual criticism in each other's presence does not deny that street encounters and violence sometimes occur in state/civil society interaction in Botswana. There have been numerous cases of street encounters between the government on the one hand, and various opponents on the other, including the Botswana Teachers Union (BTU), the Botswana Federation of Secondary Teachers (BOFESETE), and the Botswana National Youth Council (BNYC) in 2002 and 2003; Ditshwanelo over the death sentence and over the forced relocation of the Bushmen or San from the Central Kalahari Game Reserve in 2001 and 2002; and the Botswana Council of Non-Governmental Organisations (BOCONGO) in 1999 and the Media Institute of Southern Africa – Botswana Chapter (MISA) in 2001 over NGO policy and the Media Bill, respectively. The point is that street encounters whether in urban or rural areas, enjoy little media support. This preference for mutual criticism in each other's presence (and not street encounters), emphasises civility in state/society interaction in Botswana and in media commentaries.

## ASSUMED ROLE OF NGOs IN BOTSWANA POLICY MAKING

Often observers compel local situations to fit their theoretical frameworks which are presented in universalistic language. Those local civil society organisations that do not fit their frameworks are regarded as 'weak', and incapable of contributing to the country's development and democratisation. This article takes seriously Botswana's reputation as an island of

peace, and shows the contribution of civil society to that status. In contrast to objectivist approaches that impose categorical imperatives for measuring the strength of civil society, it reviews the perceptions of the chief executives of civic organisations and their strategies for influencing public policy. Vital information is revealed by focusing on their perception of the role of local NGOs, trade unions and human rights organisations in the Botswana setting dominated by the developmental state. Their common perception is that they help in the definition of the national interest, in the loosening up of the dominance of the developmental state over the policy process, and in compelling policies to be more accessible to those that they would otherwise not reach. Their actions, embedded in a political culture that promotes mutual criticism in each other's presence, enjoys government attention and media support. It is not surprising that the perceived goals and roles of Botswana's civil society groups are achievable through non-combative strategies, because most social actors are embedded in the dominant Tswana political culture, in which violent clashes and public ridicule are rejected, and in which the state leadership is often willing to meet with trade unions and NGOs and share views with them.

Firstly, Botswana civil society organisations perceive themselves as providing an alternative frame of mind, by drafting parallel programmes and implementation methodologies that complement rather than rival those of the state. 'NGOs are important in any democracy. Government experts may make policies without actually having the right scope because of regulations that govern them. There are certain decisions that only civic organisations can make, thus, helping the government to overcome problems or continue policies that would benefit the nation' (BTU int). That is, NGO leaders perceive themselves as providing a moralising voice that broadens governmental definition of the national interest, providing alternative policy frameworks, and providing restricted pressures that encourage government to implement policies that its officials have little or no interest in pursuing.

It is not uncommon in Botswana private newspapers to see colourful pictures of government ministers or officials gathered together with trade unionists, or human rights or environmental activists, after attending workshops. For instance, the annual general conference of the BTU, whose theme was 'empowering grassroots, a must for sustainability', was attended by the minister of presidential affairs, Daniel Kwelagobe, and senior members of the Ministry of Education, all of whom appeared together in a colourful newspaper middle page (*Midweek Sun* 21.1.2004). Nor was it unusual for Ditshwanelo to organise and chair a conference in 2002 on 'HIV/AIDS, the Law and Human Rights', at which the participants

included the minister of health, Joy Phumaphi, the government's chief legal draftsman, Mr G. N. Johnson, and the judge president of the Industrial Court, Justice D. J. de Villiers, as well as those from other NGOs and the University of Botswana, the private sector and countries in the region (Ditshwanelo 2002). This mutual public interaction between civil society, state, academics and the private sector, in conferences and workshops does not mean that the government readily accepts opposing views. 'The transformative ability of education, particularly that promoted by NGOs who deal with human rights, democracy and political education, has led to serious accusations being levelled against them by people in authority … Politicians and leading members of the judiciary have questioned NGO representation of ideas and interests' (Scanlon 2002: 17). Nonetheless, typically of Botswana, NGOs still find it most fitting to invite the same accusing officials to their conferences and workshops to exchange views.

Secondly, civic organisations perceive themselves as providing alternative organisational structures and experiences that could help the Botswana government in efforts aimed at reforming itself and at reaching out to the population. Civic organisations have important experiences that should be shared with government so that the latter can learn how to do things differently (BOFESETE int; BNYC int). Civil society's emphasis on the availability of its experiences and structures is a reference point that government can do things differently and sometimes through non-state institutions. The Department of Youth and Culture (DYC) has taken the lead, partnering with the BNYC and mandating it to spearhead certain reforms which would otherwise take longer to pass through government structures. Such rare government/civil society partnerships serve as reference points for other government institutions to emulate.

Thirdly, civic organisations perceive themselves as providing services to which market forces would otherwise deny access. For instance, Ditshwanelo runs a paralegal programme that provides free legal advice to people who cannot afford to pay for it in the open market. 'Its constituency comprises marginalised and disempowered groups. In other words, it provides legal advice to the poor' (Ditshwanelo int). Catering for the poor in legal matters in a market in which legal fees are exorbitant is hardly something that the government can resist.

Fourthly, civic organisations perceive themselves as umbrella bodies providing services to other NGOs and to the government. For instance, BOCONGO's mandate includes bringing civic organisations together and improving their working relations with the government and the private sector. This is a non-combative role that the government would readily

embrace. BOCONGO also aims to build the capacity of member organisations to help them become effective in their individual operations, or 'to mother other NGOs through capacity building and networking, information dissemination, and policy advocacy' (BOCONGO int). Thus, the primary purpose of umbrella bodies such as BOCONGO is to promote NGO/state mutual understanding, assist in NGO networking, and provide vital training that enhances the intervention capacity of NGOs. These are functions that foster the mutual public criticism strategy between civil society and government.

Fifthly, civic organisations perceive themselves as looking after the interests of the working class and checking on the powers of business. The National Amalgamated Local and Central Government and Parastatal Manual Workers Union (NALCGPMWU) represents manual workers in local and central government and employees in the parastatal sector. It articulates their grievances and complaints, spearheads moves towards reforming their conditions of service, and promotes productivity (NALCGPMWU int). Thus, the NALCGPMWU represent workers whom the government had marginalised in its training, wages, housing, and promotion policies. Without a trade union of this kind, the lives of these government workers would stagnate much more seriously (*ibid.*). Although the NALCGPMWU sometimes resorts to combative action, it knows through experience that doing so would lose it the moral support of the Botswana public and would make the government more hostile and stop listening.

Lastly, civic organisations look after press freedom and the interests of journalists. MISA promotes and defends freedom of expression and the media. It seeks and removes obstacles impeding the free flow of information. After newspapers reported that Vice-President Lt. Gen. Ian Khama hardly ever read local newspapers, MISA-Botswana invited him to one of its fundraising dinners to give the keynote address and exchanged views with him, in his presence.

To sum up, civic organisations fill gaps that the Botswana developmental state has ignored or paid little attention to, and they have also cushioned the society against the actions of the state.

## MEMBERSHIP

NGOs in Botswana are not as secretive about the size of their memberships as political parties, but even objectivist political scientists have hardly researched their memberships. Nor, surprisingly, has civil society itself provided much documented information about its membership. This

researcher relied primarily on interviews with executives of civil society organisations to get some sense of their size. It should be acknowledged that civil society organisations themselves scarcely rely on their membership, as this is only important in so far as it is used to gain recognition from state officials, rather than for combative purposes. In short, there is really not much difference between large membership and non-membership organisations in terms of influencing public policy, as both primarily rely or are compelled to rely on 'mutual criticism in each other's presence'. Size does not really matter in situations, as in Botswana, where mutual criticism is encouraged and combative strategies are discouraged.

Botswana's civil society is characterised by non-membership and membership organisations. Ditshwanelo (int) is a non-membership organisation; that is, it has no paying membership. However, it provides free legal services and a human rights voice to thousands of disadvantaged people in the country, such as the Bushmen or San, and the poor. This is a significant constituency that gives it legitimacy, and the right to be listened to. The San, who are widely regarded as the group most discriminated against in Botswana, constitute 4% of the population (Good 2002: 24), while the poor (those living below the Poverty Datum Line), constituted 39% of the population in 2002, down from 47% in the 1990s (Minister of Finance & Development Planning 2003). This is a significant population from which Ditshwanelo draws its legitimacy.

Secondly, there are membership organisations that represent specific interests. For instance, the trade unions represent a huge membership and constituency. The largest union in the country, the NALCGPMWU (int) has a membership of 40,000. The BTU (int) has 13,000 members, of whom 11,000 are active and 2,000 non-active. Consisting of primary, secondary and tertiary teachers in the whole country, BTU represents vital interests. The Botswana Federation of Secondary Teachers (BOFESETE int) has a membership of 3,000 secondary teachers.

The Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA int) is also a membership organisation, representing individual journalists, corporate media houses and persons interested in media matters. Its membership has fluctuated between 260 and 280 individuals and 16 corporate media bodies. This substantial section of the media fraternity provides MISA-Botswana with the legitimacy that makes government willing to negotiate with it. But influence is not proportional to numbers, as the size of the membership does not place one organisation above the other in terms of influencing public policy.

Umbrella bodies represent large groups of civic organisations. For instance, the Botswana National Youth Council (BNYC int) represents 16

youth NGOs and consists of 51 district youth councils. Young people, defined as those between the ages of 12 and 40 years, constitute 70% of Botswana's population and are represented by the council. Thus, the BNYC represents a significant number of youth organisations and a huge population of individual young people. BOCONGO represents 84 civic organisations, covering sectors such as the environment, youth, media, women and development, human rights and culture. BOCONGO, constituting the parliamentary body for civic organisations, has the legitimacy to confer with politicians and officials.

So, civic organisations, with or without members, exist in Botswana, and their potential to influence public policy lies in mutual criticism with state officials. The next section analyses empirical data and shows that civic organisations that managed to secure the attendance of top state officials at their conferences and meetings, have been able to influence public policy more than those that failed to do so.

## MUTUAL CRITICISM IN MODERN BOTSWANA

Successful civic organisations in Botswana politics have learnt to identify a leader who undermines/threatens their position, invite him/her for a meeting where s/he presents his/her side of the story and hears theirs.

> A Bank of Botswana unionist whispered at the May Day celebrations at Tsholofelo Community Hall in Gaborone this year that it is surprising that it is supposed to be our day but the key speakers and invitees are the Chairman of the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP), and two other cabinet members. Last year they brought (President) Mogae and Kwelagobe again. We are beginning to suspect that there is something happening between the leadership of the trade unions and the BDP. (Molefhe 2002: 4)

This quotation comes from a newspaper article in which the secretary general of the Botswana Federation of Trade Unions, Ronald Baipidi, reportedly attacked 'the government for its deliberate effort to stall legislation in recognition of the ILO conventions that were acceded to on the eve of former President Masire's exit from office in 1998' (*ibid.*). However, it is the willingness of Botswana's state leaders to meet with civil society leaders that should be emphasised, as it distinguishes the country from many third world societies where state/civil society leaders hardly meet to exchange views in a peaceful atmosphere.

It should be noted that the mutual criticism strategy relies both on the capacity of the civil society organisation to secure the attendance of top government officials or state leaders, and on the latter's willingness to attend. What is noticeable from the quotation above is the president's and

his officials' willingness to attend trade union conferences and exchange views with them. In this regard, a 'weak' or unsuccessful civil society organisation in Botswana is one that fails to secure the attendance of state leaders at its conferences. For instance, the Kamanakao Association failed to secure the attendance of President Mogae at its meeting in 2002, denying it mutual criticism in each other's presence – the cornerstone of state/civil society interaction in Botswana.

> Attempts by the Wayeyi pressure group the Kamanakao Association to meet President Mogae has been snubbed by the Office of the President … Meanwhile, a leading member of the Kamanakao Association, Motsamai Mpho, emerged from the Batawana kgotla addressed by Mogae a disappointed man. Firstly, the Batawana Paramount Chief Moremi Tawana openly told Mpho that he would not permit him to speak unless the president says otherwise. Secondly, the Master of Ceremony Claude Gabanakemo told the meeting that during question and comments time, people should confine themselves to the president's speech. In his address the president did not touch on the topic of the Bayeyi chieftainship dispute which is at the centre of the Kamanakao Association's fight for Bayeyi [freedom] from the Batawana. (Modibati 2002: 3)

Failure to secure a meeting with the president prevented the occurrence of mutual criticism in each other's presence, annoying the Kamanakao Association, resulting in a street encounter with Mpho verbally attacking the president and the paramount chief of the Batawana in a newspaper interview. On a previous occasion the year before, President Mogae had reminded paramount Chief Tawana that 'the elderly (referring to Motsamai Mpho, a member of the Kamanakao Association and former member of parliament) should always be respected' (*ibid.*). Mpho's and Mogae's contrasting behaviour suggests that street encounters are resorted to as a second strategy in response to a strategy of avoidance. That is, after mutual criticism in each other's presence has failed to materialise. For instance, BOFESETE, BTU, and other teachers' unions published a joint press release in October 2002, calling for the president to sack his education minister over his alleged misrepresentation of the effects of a strike they had organised. Minister of Education George Kgoroba's press statement that 'the examinations were running smoothly in spite of the teachers' industrial action' (BOFESETE *et al.* 2002: 11) prompted the unions' counter press release entitled 'Kgoroba must go', in which the unions called on the president to dismiss him. The point is that such street encounters often occur if state officials show reluctance to meet union leaders.

The attendance of civil society conferences by state leaders, primarily the president, and their exchange of views, is here posited as a measure of strength in Botswana state/civil society relations. This article argues that

the primary measurement of the strength of civic organisations in Botswana is the demonstration of the occurrence of meetings with state officials and the subsequent exchanging of views. The BTU and BOFESETE met state officials to discuss numerous policies such as the mandatory transfer policy (Ntseane 1997; BTU int), parallel progression (Ditsheko 2002) and the subsequent launching of a presidential commission on the 'separate pay structure'. President Mogae also met leaders of the BTU and BOFESETE in early November 2002 to discuss the parallel progression policy that government had controversially abolished in 2000 (*ibid.*).

Sometimes civil society organisations are compelled to ignore the mutual criticism strategy when they perceive policy matters as calling for urgent and drastic action. For instance, NALCGPMWU's strike action dominated the local news in the early 1990s, over the minimum wage for manual workers. It had commissioned a labour economist from the University of Botswana to assist in establishing what the minimum wage should be, demanded a 154% wage increase to reach that figure, and engaged in industrial action when it felt that the government was not taking the issue seriously. The industrial action for the minimum wage became so politicised that all government manual workers were dismissed from their employment and re-hired on different terms, losing substantial benefits in the process. Industrial action, which is an element of street encounters and violent clashes, is regarded by the proponents of the strong civil society thesis as a measure of civil society strength. But actors in the Botswana political setup know that it hardly produces better results.

Typically of Botswana, even the media reject street encounters such as strike actions. It is common for Botswana newspaper commentaries to urge trade unions and the government 'to swallow their pride and negotiate' (*Mmegi Monitor* 26.11.2002: 2). The newspaper went on to argue that 'nobody in his sane mind would want to live in an environment where strikes and other forms of industrial action are the norm. Strikes by their very nature indicate a situation of dislocation and they bring about unnecessary stoppages … We call upon all the concerned parties to come to a negotiating table and iron out their differences in an amicable way' (*ibid.*). The point is that in a society where industrial action is perceived as unnecessary rather than as part of the negotiating process, any organisation that engages in or forces it on others has to contend with a hostile media that seeks to promote mutual criticism in each other's presence.

In some instances, street encounters and mutual criticism are deployed interchangeably, depending on the circumstances thrust upon unions by the government. Perceived government unilateralism, aimed at

implementing policies that unions had not agreed upon, often leads to street encounters. 'In the early 1990s, the Minister of Health, Chapson Butale, announced in parliament that the government had decided to privatise refectories of hospitals such as Scottish Livingstone, Athlone and Sekgoma Memorial. His statement also appeared on the government owned Daily News and on the National Development Plan of that time' (NALCGPMWU int). The government had not consulted the manual workers who would be directly affected by the privatisation of these hospital refectories. Nor had it cared to educate the workers and the general society about privatisation. Fortunately for the union, its national organiser had attended a Public Service International (PSI) conference in Switzerland in 1989, where privatisation had been one of the issues under discussion. As a result, the NALCGPMWU was better informed about privatisation than many sectors in Botswana society. The PSI conference had notified its leaders that international corporations were targeting Southern Africa countries, particularly South Africa, Namibia and Botswana, for privatisation.

The NALCGPMWU immediately engaged in a number of activities to influence the privatisation policy: it embarked on nationwide industrial action; asked the PSI headquarters in France for help; and met South African and Namibian unions and informed them about privatisation developments in Botswana. The union membership supported the nationwide industrial action that brought government services to a halt. Offices were not cleaned; tea was not served at board meetings, government vehicles did not move during that time, and so on. The primary effect was that privatisation of hospital refectories was shelved and a more serious engagement initiated.

A few weeks after the devastating industrial action, then Vice President Festus Mogae, who was spearheading the policy, called the national organiser of the NALCGPMWU, proposing the setting up of a privatisation task force in which it would be involved. He agreed to take part in such a task force, but withdrew from it after the permanent secretary of the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, who was briefing the members of the task force, gave an analogy of an overloaded sinking ship. To save the ship, he suggested, some of its cargo had to be thrown into the sea. These were the office cleaners and kitchen ladies who had to be retrenched. Such annoying governmental analysis of privatisation prompted the NALCGPMWU to withdraw from the task force with immediate effect and to work from outside it. The manual workers union conducted its own study on privatisation and made submissions to the task force. It submitted that workers should be beneficiaries and not victims of

privatisation; that all sourcing out should first be advertised to the workers before it reached the open market; and that the government should set up a fund to help workers participate fully in the privatisation process. But these could not be won through industrial action, but negotiated through discussions and mutual criticisms.

But what weakens industrial action and all street encounters as weapons in civil society/government struggles in Botswana is that even though the manual workers union had the resources and capacity to engage in it for extended periods of time, it had no media support. The NALC-GPMWU faced a hostile media (public and private) that disapproved of street encounters, particularly industrial action. Typical of newspaper commentaries in Botswana, opposing industrial action is seen as the right thing to do. 'Even before the dust could settle on the teachers' strike, we are faced with yet another threat of industrial action from civic authority workers. Our information is that members of the Botswana Unified Local Government Association are gearing to go on strike. This is utterly unacceptable' (*Mmegi Monitor* 29.10.2002). The media play the role of referee, reminding both civil society and the state of the importance of negotiating.

What is interesting in the above commentary is that the target of media attack was not the unions that had embarked on industrial action, but the government that had forced it upon them. Apparently, the unions had secured a court order and had gone on strike after the government had failed to implement it. It was in that regard that the media accused the state of incompetence, dishonesty and arrogance in dealing with court orders in favour of trade unions.

Mutual criticism in each other's presence and soft street encounters were utilised by the BNYC to counter the unilateralism of health officials and the Ministry of Lands and Housing. In the first instance, with the outbreak of HIV/AIDS in the country, the embarrassment and discrimination that young people used to suffer at the hands of public health staff became a serious policy issue. HIV/AIDS was devastating the nation, particularly the youth. Yet health officials were against the idea of giving contraceptives to them. The unfriendly and unhelpful public health system discriminated against and embarrassed young people who suffered from venereal diseases and those who asked for condoms. It rebuked them for engaging in sexual activities while still young. 'Health staff used to ask embarrassing questions to our youths, such as how could you have contacted venereal diseases when you were so young' (BNYC int). The public health system also limited the number of condoms it distributed to young people. It was in such an atmosphere that the youths tasked the BNYC

with the mandate to help re-orient the health system to prioritise adolescent sexual reproductive health.

The BNYC met health officials on numerous occasions. It also lobbied parliament over the issue of adolescent reproductive health until 'the government asked organisations such as the Botswana Welfare Family Association, to set up youth health clinics. Presently there is one such clinic at the youth centre in Gaborone. The BNYC also convinced the Ministry of Health, through the Family Health Division, that nurses should be re-trained in order to make them youth friendly. They are re-training and this is a major achievement for us' (BNYC int). Thus, the BNYC's meeting with health officials and lobbying parliament played the crucial role of making the Botswana public health system youth-user friendly.

In the second instance, the BNYC was opposing governmental attempts to unilaterally reform the Land Board Act, raising the age entry point from 26 to 30 years for those eligible for election. The BNYC called for the lowering of the age entry point for land board members to 18 years instead, which resonated with the reduction of the voting age in 1999, from 21 to 18 years. It carried out a number of activities to influence the reforms. It issued a press release, mobilised young people to attend and speak at *dikgotla* (village assemblies at the chiefs' places), invited cabinet ministers to address annual general youth congresses and to answer questions from young people, addressed district council meetings and finally met the minister of lands, Dr Margaret Nasha (BNYC int). The end result was that the age entry point for the membership of land boards was retained at 26 years.

Failure to initiate meetings with opposition political parties over youth involvement in primary elections substantially reduced the achievements of the BNYC. For instance in April, May and June 2003, the BNYC held workshops designed to empower young politicians who wished to stand in the primary elections of the political parties and in the 2004 general election. Only five workshops were held, one in the city of Gaborone, another in the town of Jwaneng, and three in the villages of Palapye, Maun and Kang. These workshops were too few to make a significant impact in a country the size of France or the state of Texas. 'The BNYC cannot claim that all young people will have the necessary information to prepare them for participation in the 2004 general election' (BNYC int).

More importantly, the BNYC failed to meet with and win over the support of the political parties, fatally limiting the empowerment of its workshops. In this regard three factors were pertinent: the sour relationship between the BNYC and the Department of Youth and Culture (DYC); the hostility of the political parties; and the lack of funding. In the

first instance, when the BNYC sought to set up more youth administrative structures in the rest of the country, the DYC refused to approve the budget, 70% of which came from the government of Botswana (BNYC int). But with over P5 million (up from P500,000) funding from the government, the BNYC went ahead, spending government money on the unauthorised creation of more administrative structures. Such defiant actions worsened its sour relationship with the DYC, which called in auditors to review the financial records of the BNYC. As expected, the auditors' report was embarrassing as it exposed the BNYC's failure to follow financial regulations. But it was not damaging, as no heads rolled, and no reversals occurred. In fact, the BNYC seems to be growing too big for the DYC, and is even calling for a ministry of youth.

The primary factor lessening the number of empowerment workshops for young politicians to only five was the fact that government funding excluded projects that had a 'political tone'. Thus, more state funding did not immediately translate into more latitude for the BNYC. State officials perceived the BNYC workshops aimed at empowering young politicians as having a political tone, and therefore excluded them from government funding. The result was that the BNYC had to solicit funding from donors, and only the Friedrich Ebert Foundation responded positively. Thus, government funding could not be used for empowering youthful politicians and donor funding was not adequate for hosting more workshops (BNYC int).

On the other hand, the primary factor limiting the impact of those workshops that did take place was the absence of mutual criticism in each other's presence and the visible hostility of the main political parties. The ruling Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) responded to the workshops by tightening the rules of entry for its November 2003 primary elections. It imposed financial requirements of P500 for candidates whose victory would enable them to stand for council seats in the general election in 2004, and P1000 for candidates whose win in the primaries would enable them to stand for parliamentary seats. Such requirements favoured the incumbent councillors and parliamentarians as well as other rich BDP members. While the age entry point was not raised, the effect was the same: to prevent young people from standing for elected office.

On the other hand, the main opposition, the Botswana National Front (BNF), responded by attacking the BNYC in its rallies, accusing it of stirring young people to destabilise the opposition parties. Speakers at BNF rallies accused the BNYC of stirring trouble and the party leadership did nothing to correct them. Instead, some BNF leaders argued that the party should give more priority to veteran politicians, the only people who could

ably represent it in parliament. Thus, the main political parties did not positively welcome the BNYC's political empowerment workshops, and this reduced their impact.

In contrast and as part of the activities to influence the media bill, MISA-Botswana invited legislators to its gatherings and expressed its views. For instance, it invited Vice-President Ian Khama to open its gala dinner, at which it gave him the theme of 'Mass Media Bill' and sought his views on it. It also got him to listen to its own views (MISA int). MISA-Botswana had also institutionalised its participation by taking part in the media advisory council, where it met with other stakeholders such as government officials and the private sector. It also took part in the high-level Consultative Council meetings that were chaired by the vice-president, and commissioned position papers. Through these activities, it has been able to influence public policies without the use of street encounters. Subsequently, the government shelved the Mass Media Bill. Instead, a Broadcasting Act was passed, creating a National Broadcasting Board, a parastatal organisation dealing with issues such as spectre news, licensing, policies and regulations. A 'Press Council of Botswana' has also been set up in which journalists themselves sit (in the absence of state officials), establishing a code of conduct for their profession, thus guarding its integrity.

State officials often show their unwillingness to meet leaders of newly formed NGOs. 'Initially government officials preferred to rebuff the media, labelling it unpatriotic. The politicians asserted that they were elected by the people and ridiculed MISA-Botswana for the fact that nobody elected it. These were unhelpful statements which the state officials had used to convince enough people that MISA-Botswana was unpatriotic' (MISA int). MISA-Botswana undertook a number of activities to clear its name. It joined BOCONGO and coordinated its media sector, as well as participating in the NGO week that BOCONGO organised annually, bringing itself closer to the public. It also invited senior politicians to its annual general meetings and took part in institutionalised forums where it met government officials and the private sector.

MISA-Botswana's greatest achievement has been the fact that the media is now regarded as a stakeholder and listened to, rather than being considered as unpatriotic and a target of government legal and verbal attacks.

in recent years, government has become visibly less reluctant and generally better equipped and experienced to provide media briefings, grant interviews, confirm information, provide access to policy makers, and debates, dispel rumours, and generally deal with the press more in line with patterns of media-government

relations in western democracies than in typical post-independence African political fashion … To their credit, top officials of the Office of the President where authority over press and broadcasting rests, have regularly met with the media at crucial moments, or when words flowing back and forth in both directions seem to be taking on a bit too much of the point. (Zaffiro 1993: 12–13)

Thus, the end result was that MISA-Botswana and the media in general acquired legitimacy and acceptance by state officials and by the wider society and this was central in a political culture in which mutual criticism in each other's presence is primary.

This article has two goals: to show that mutual criticism in each other's presence that was at the centre of Tswana political culture primarily defined civil society/state interaction in Botswana; and to show that civil society has played a crucial role in the country's development. It has demonstrated that civil society/state interaction is primarily characterised by mutual criticism in each other's presence through meetings and workshops. The centrality of mutual criticism is enhanced by the state's willingness to meet civil society leaders, and this has promoted the country's image as a peace loving nation and stable democracy. In contrast, street encounters occurred only when one of the warring parties foreclosed mutual criticism in each other's presence and had to be compelled to meet its opponents.

The article has also demonstrated that civil society has engaged in mutual criticism in each other's presence, through which it has significantly contributed to shaping public policy, protecting unskilled workers, cushioning the poor, and shielding ethnic minorities. The Botswana media has played the role of referee, reminding the warring parties of the importance of meeting and exchanging views with each other, rather than fighting it out in the newspapers and on the streets. The theoretical implication is that to ignore political culture in measuring and analysing state/society interaction could give a misleading picture.

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## *Acronyms and abbreviations*

| | |
|---|---|
| BDP | Botswana Democratic Party |
| BNF | Botswana National Front |
| BNYC | Botswana National Youth Council |
| BOCONGO | Botswana Council of Non-Governmental Organisations |
| BOFESETE | Botswana Federation of Secondary Teachers |
| BTU | Botswana Teachers Union |
| Ditshwanelo | Ditshwanelo: the Botswana Centre for Human Rights |
| DYC | Department of Youth and Culture, Government of Botswana |
| MISA | Media Institute of Southern Africa – Botswana Chapter |
| NALCGPMWU | The National Amalgamated Local and Central Government and Parastatal Manual Workers Union |