

Diamonds and democracy in Botswana

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Dear Peter:

Five years ago, as a newly-arrived Peace Corps volunteer in a West African village, the braying of donkeys used to keep me awake all night. Their hoarse, wrenching cries sounded like a group of slowly-asphyxiating asthma sufferers trying to scream for help. That disturbance seemed to sum up the culture shock I first felt in a far-away foreign land.

Now that I've come back to Africa, landing in the Botswana capital of Gaborone, I'm experiencing a different kind of cultural shock. It's a less-than-exotic din: The alarms on the local people's fancy cars go off in the early morning hours. After a few hours in this country following an exhausting flight here, my wife and I fell asleep in a run-down hotel on the outskirts of Gaborone only to hear the piercing wails of one car alarm after another. Where were the familiar donkeys?

That was my first clue this country is unlike any other I've visited in my travels on the African continent. Botswana appears to be prosperous and booming, with new Mercedes and Toyotas whizzing along congested two-lane roads beneath rapidly-rising skyscrapers under construction. Many outsiders, both Europeans and Africans from other Southern African countries, repeated to me the same characterization that appeared recently in Newsweek: "It's the Kuwait of Black Africa." Averaging 8 to 10 percent GNP growth each year, Botswana has amassed a 4 billion pula (about US\$2 billion) reserve fund that qualifies this country as an economic miracle of Africa.

With an economy grown rich on the mining of diamonds, Botswana society has had the "breathing space" absent in most other African countries to allow a democratic society to flourish. The city supports a vigorous free press, with five

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Since 1925 the Institute of Current World Affairs (the Crane-Rogers Foundation) has provided long-term fellowships to enable outstanding young adults to live outside the United States and write about international areas and issues. Endowed by the late Charles R. Crane, the Institute is also supported by contributions from like-minded individuals and foundations.

private weekly newspapers vying for readership, along with a government-owned daily newspaper and radio station. In addition, there's a history of traditional consensus-taking by the Botswana chiefs called kgotla, a gathering where everyone has a chance to speak their mind before a decision is taken. That tradition is still strong: Most proposed governmental programs must be presented to the "grassroots" in kgotlas around the country or run the risk of not being perceived as legitimate. The invention of "freedom square" public debates during the anti-colonial struggle of the 1950s has continued to give Botswana people a forum where tribal constraints on topics don't apply and where spirited discussions air differences between the ruling and opposition parties. Passionate speeches and indignant hecklers seemed to be normal at the two rallies I attended. Most Batswana I've come to know also strongly believe in law and honesty, so corruption is less than in other African countries.

But as the economic horizon darkens with bad news blowing this way, there are signs that civil liberties may be more fragile than they look. Botswana, I've decided, resembles the young "yuppies" of my generation in the United States. This country is booming economically and, in celebration of its success, the government has been on a spending spree with its credit cards. The elite urban citizens feel good about their prosperity and like to show off a bit with some conspicuous consumption that American businessmen can only dream about nowadays. And like many of the upwardly mobile friends of mine, Botswana is a neo-liberal: trumpeting the wonders of a free market economy and very vocal about democracy, but liable to become quite conservative in a financial pinch. The right of a labor union to strike, the freedom of the press to seriously report on government policy, and the ability of citizens to be politically active were all called into question in the wake of a week-long national strike.

I wouldn't have been as pessimistic had I arrived a month earlier, before the general strike of 60,000 government-employed manual laborers across the country left the nation and Gaborone paralyzed. In the week before the walkout, I admired all the construction going on around the city. Buildings were going up on every street corner, it appeared. Dump trucks, earth movers, backhoes rolled in and out of the noon time traffic jam near the "government enclave," where the state ministries are housed alongside the foreign embassies. Detour signs on the major arteries diverted the steady stream of cars around numerous road-widening projects. The chaotic capital looked like the heaven where civil engineers will go if they are good.

Then, on a Monday morning, the now-familiar swarm of workers clad in blue overalls was missing. It was the first nationwide strike in the history of Botswana. In the next few days, sewers backed up with the start of the seasonal rains, leaving huge

lakes of foul-smelling water covering the lanes of some busy downtown streets. This meant my wife and I, on foot, had to give wide berth to the busy traffic or risk getting drenched by the spray of speeding cars charging headlong through the muck. Was it sabotage by the public works employees before going out on strike? Other pedestrians like ourselves wondered aloud, but it was just a rumor. Garbage collected outside most buildings in the downtown like snowdrifts, occasionally tumbling down and scattering across the sidewalks. Like the refuse collectors, the road construction crews were missing, leaving deep trenches and the skeletons of metal bars sticking out of half-poured concrete.

Labor union officials said the government reneged on an agreement to increase wages after months of negotiations, so an oft-threatened strike became inevitable when talks collapsed. The union demanded a 154 percent increase in wages, from 326 pula a month (about US\$163) to almost 608 pula (US\$300) and justified such a massive jump with their own market-basket research on what the average government laborer spends on food and rent for a family of four. The union workers claimed their wages were below the "minimum living wage." No public response had been made by the government at that point.

The men I talked to in a bar at the end of the first day of the job action felt optimistic the strike would be successful and they spoke of exercising their democratic right to down their tools. They said the government brought on the strike when the ministers gave each of themselves almost 2,000 pula more in salaries shortly before last year's general 23 percent raise.

The government's response to the strike? Fire them all. Every last worker who had been absent from his place of work for two days was out of a job. The government justified such drastic action by stating the strike was illegal because in its contract the union promised to maintain essential services like garbage collection during a strike, give ample notice of any impending walkout, and "provide labor for the orderly shut down of non-essential plant." The strike was also judged illegal by the state because the union should have submitted the wage dispute to arbitration by the commissioner of labor (who is appointed by the government and so has questionable neutrality). A new trade union act allows the commissioner to replace union leaders with his own appointees, cancel the registration of a trade union for violating the law or its own constitution and send his representatives to monitor almost all union meetings. Trade unions are effectively barred by this 1990 law from representing an employee who challenges his dismissal. Under the act, all 60,000 dismissed employees ceased to be union members!

There appeared to be both fear and exhilaration on the faces of the crowd of several thousand men and women who gathered outside the Botswana Federation of Trade Unions building on the fourth day of the strike. Some of the strikers, mostly the

younger men, began to toyi-toyi outside the union gate. The toyi-toyi is Zulu war dance that Americans have seen in television footage of protests in South Africa: a menacing rhythmic prancing into the air that has the same hypnotic effect on observers as it appeared to have on the dancers. The crowd had a militant air.

As Bobbie Jo and I had walked through the city to eat lunch in a restaurant near the union office, we passed young men dressed in red warm-up outfits walking around in pairs. We must have seen a hundred milling around aimlessly, looking in the stores, carrying small plastic sacks. I asked one if he was here with a soccer team for a big match. He just smiled, gave me the indulgently amused look one would give to the village idiot, and walked on. The union hall sits in the African Mall, a large commercial complex strewn with trash, now that those who had been paid to pick up the garbage appeared to litter with a vengeance as an act of civil disobedience. Rounding the corner near the union headquarters, we saw a thicker concentration of the red sweat pants and jackets: about a hundred of the "athletes," sitting in orderly rows, next to green military trucks. More redcoats circled the strikers, but never clashed with them.

After having lunch with a university professor and his wife across from the union hall, I broached the subject. Just who were those athletic-looking guys lounging around nearby? "They're the BDF -- the Botswana Defense Force soldiers," replied the professor. "They're wearing their football warmups to avoid stirring up the crowd, but they want to make sure everybody knows they're around." Our party paused awkwardly outside the professor's car. On one side of us were the protestors; on the other, a soldier and a red-clad sports fan talked quietly before an apparent message was relayed into a portable radio.

"I think we're going to go talk to the union leaders right now," I told the professor, feigning a jaunty hardened-American-journalist attitude I didn't feel. We both looked at the agitated masses, then back at the soldiers, then solemnly at each other. "That wouldn't be smart right now," he replied, with a sideways look at the red-clad crew ready for exercise of one sort or another. "You're white and you'd be noticed by many people walking into that building. Why don't we give you a lift? Now."

At least 29 workers were detained and later released by police. Most were taken into custody in connection with acts of sabotage. One worker reportedly switched off the electrical generator to a hospital, while others cut off water to people in the towns of rural towns of Machudi, Maun and Kanye. The Special Support Group, the rougher group of riot police deployed with batons, was mobilized. Their dark green Land Rovers could be seen again and again circling around Gaborone.

"We have waited long enough for the government to attend to our grievances, but in vain," said Johnson Motshwarakgole,

secretary of the National Amalgamated Local and Central Government and Parastatal Workers Union. "We have exhausted all possible communication channels. In fact, I must emphasize here that it is not us or our members who are on strike. But rather it's government which is on strike in that they are even refusing to hold any discussion with us on the matter."

Now I wanted to make sure I quoted Motshwarakgole exactly, to note that the Botswana people do have an ingrained tendency to open discussion and democracy. Notice that his rebuttal against the government officials is that they weren't talking, which is a serious charge in this society. The kgotla tradition in Botswana society demands that all points of view must be heard.

Patrick Molutsi, a sociology professor at the university of Botswana, shifted uncomfortably in his chair in his office when I began lauding the traditional democratic culture of Botswana. Like others, Molutsi views the kgotla not as the basis of democracy, but as a pattern that only gives the citizens an illusion of input. For the most part, he said, the kgotla was and still is a means to drum up public support for decisions already made by the political elite. The chief would consult with advisors before the kgotla, come to a consensus, then present the community with his decision. Ordinary citizens have never seen the struggles behind the scenes that determine politics, so they never organize to influence the politicians.

"Most of us expect and want our leaders to speak with one voice," he said with a shake of his head. As a result, lobbying the government on an issue of policy is rarely done. Nor does the government want groups of politicized people knocking on their office doors.

"Students, nurses, unions are not supposed to be political," Molutsi said. "They're supposed to be neutral. People are so aware, so wary of this, that they become self-policing not to have political ties to avoid having the government come down hard on them." Molutsi speculated that the government cracked down hard on the union because of the perception the opposition party--the Botswana National Front--had a hand in the strike.

Molutsi should know about democracy. He's the director of the Democracy Research Project, a group begun in 1987 and largely funded by foreign donors to hold seminars and workshops on democracy. Rather than simply monitoring the level of free debate and issuing warnings about the lack of such, the democracy project has jumped into the fray by consulting with politicians about making the bureaucracy more responsive to the wishes of those elected to office. Molutsi says just like the chiefs gave people the illusion of participation in a decision already agreed upon, the entrenched civil service dominates the policy-making in Botswana and presents the elected officials with already-made decisions to ratify. Many civil servants, he says, look upon

elected ministers of parliament as 'interfering' in decision-making. While election to parliament requires a candidate to read and write English, most of the politicians have been intimidated by the superior education of top civil servants. Influential permanent secretaries drafted many of the laws because the members of parliament lacked technical expertise, although change has come with younger, better-educated politicians.

When Bobbie Jo and I obtained a preliminary copy of the proposed six-year national development plan from an economist in the ministry of finance, the man warned us there would be some changes. "Umm, how do we find out what the changes are?" asked Bobbie Jo, who prides herself on being an extremely accurate journalist. "Will the debates in parliament reflect those changes?" The economist frowned and shrugged his shoulders, unsure how to explain a complexity clearly beyond these newcomers. "No, the parliament has already approved it. But now the committees (of civil servants) are working on the budget."

That's an example of how civil servants have the final say on the nation's direction for the next six years, in a form of bureaucratic dominance dating back to the colonial administration. Democracy begins to look thin if the elected officials simply rubberstamp the civil service's version of the future. The "National Development Plan VII" was drafted by the civil servants, then haggled over when the ministries squared off in a struggle for a bigger slice of the financial pie, then sent to the parliament for a nominal approval before inter-ministerial committees re-chew the whole budget over again and make final decisions on housing, drought relief, conservation, rural development and land use. The whole debate is secret, outside the view of the public (unless some of the proposals are run through the gauntlet of nationwide kgotla meetings) until officially published in January.

The problem is how to educate the people about what their rights are and motivate them to fight for those rights, which is what democracy is all about. I spent an evening filled with cheap beer and high emotion out in the rural home of a British-born writer who has lived in Southern Africa for almost 25 years. As a strongly-opinionated man living in Botswana with his African wife for more than a decade, he failed to see a single glimmer of light in the future of the country. "It's rude to be critical and this is one of the impediments to a proper democracy here," he said, as we sipped our beers in the quickly gathering gloom following a brilliant red sunset. "There are two strands here: They are as outspoken as they can be in the kgotla but, on the other hand, it's rude to speak out elsewhere. That's how people can run away with greed. Who's going to stop them?"

Even when the strikers were fired, having gambled and lost, they didn't appear ready to be violent. No one held a protest sign. Only once did the workers march through the downtown,

jamming noontime traffic under the watchful eye of the police, but without much fire. Eventually, they dispersed. Confusion, not anger, seemed to be the dominant feeling of the crowd. Sitting under a tree after they had been sacked, a group of women who worked cleaning government buildings began to sing about the strike. Roughly translating the words from Setswana (the Botswana language spoken by the majority of the population) to English afterwards, one of the women in the group told me they sang:

"When the government put us in jail,
you must continue to find your rights,
we are the people of this country,
we are the Batswana
and we are supposed to have rights..."

All the women confessed they were very hungry, but had no money. They all laughed, however, as they sang another protest song a bit more pointed than the last one:

"Who put you on that mission like you have?
We need our rights.
Who will refuse to give us our rights?
It's Lieutenant General Merafhe.
General Merafhe is a witch of these industrial classes.
Merafhe is our witch."

Mompati Merafhe, the minister of Presidential Affairs and Public Administration, is arguably the most powerful man in Botswana. He's in control of the day-to-day running of the country, as well as the police force and the military. The title of lieutenant general is honorary, since Merafhe resigned his position after being appointed to the cabinet two years ago by the president. As luck would have it, on our way to meet the lieutenant general one afternoon, Bobbie Jo and I got a lift from a British military engineer who worked for Merafhe during the last 12 years. "There wouldn't be a Botswana Defense Force without him," said the man. "But make no mistake: Put any obstacle in his path and he'll remove it. He's a power-hungry man. That's different from the typical Botswana man around here."

Merafhe had come directly from the parliament session in his blue pin-stripe suit to find out what the American couple wanted to talk about and he kept glancing at his watch every few minutes while he answered our questions. When asked about the strike, his eyes narrowed slightly, but his face never showed any emotion.

"I think it would have been an act of gross irresponsibility if we had conceded to something like that," he said, shifting his large frame restlessly. "They wanted 154 percent after a 23 percent raise last year? The finance ministry was saying you are going to have to pay an extra 150 million pula for all the industrial class workers. If we agreed, then there is no way as a government we could turn around and say that private business

could pay a lesser minimum wage. All the small companies would go out of business. The pula would have to be devalued. And we'd become a low productivity, high labor cost country. Those are the hard facts of life."

On the Monday following the week of labor action, the union gave in and told workers to go back to work in hope of reclaiming their jobs. Many of the workers felt bitter and wanted to continue the strike, but most of them got their old jobs back after reapplying for their positions. Merafhe, however, decided employees had to forfeit their previous benefits when re-hired. The workers lost the 23 percent wage increase they had received and now were worse off than before, making entry-level starting salaries. For example, a cleaning woman named Emily who swept a block of government guest flats where we stayed lost her last two pay increases. She's now making less than she was last month, although she has worked at the same job for the last 13 years. With three children to support on a smaller paycheck, Emily seemed dazed when she came back to sweep the floor on Monday.

The heavy-handed way the government handled the strike drew the fire of the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, which spoke out for the first time on a domestic bread-and-butter issue of economic justice. Heretofore, the Catholics have only made noise about legislation concerning the ability of Botswana doctors to perform abortions. "These manual workers are as essential to the running of the nation as the top civil servants," states an open letter to the editors of all private newspapers. "It is a shame that the latter who have been so privileged should act so harshly to those less privileged."

There were few public criticisms like that and no public debate about the merits of the huge wage increase. During all the newspaper coverage of the strike, the government-run Daily News ran only a single story of **three sentences** reprinting the government's dismissal notice verbatim. No further interviews were conducted, not a single person named, nor was there any background to say how long or how many people were on strike. And the week following the strike, police detectives from the Serious Crimes Squad ransacked the offices of a private newspaper that reprinted an internal government memo marked "secret." The document outlined the reasons why the wages of the industrial class employees could not be raised and contained nothing that the Merafhe didn't say later in justifying the refusal to grant the wage increase. The fact that a newspaper had a "secret" document, however, made the government angry.

"If you're a private journalist, don't report anything but 'his excellency'" (President Masire), said Paul Rantao, the mayor of Gaborone. As a member of the opposition party that feels locked out of the political system, Rantao is a bitter man. "His excellency was smiling today, his excellency was having lunch today, his excellency appeared to like his food," Rantao mocked

in a high falsetto voice, imitating the Radio Botswana news announcers. Rantao can speak convincingly about restrictions on the freedom of the press. As a young man, he was a state-paid journalist writing news for the Daily News and Radio Botswana.

"The ruling party here is like any other African state: It does its best to ridicule and block the other parties," he said, returning to his flat, angry tone of voice. "It monopolizes the media, puts only its own information on the radio. It couldn't allow the union leaders to explain themselves.... There was a total news blackout and as far as I'm concerned, it's totalitarian. At the bottom line, democracy is only apparent, not real, here. If you're using a subhuman yardstick -- a third world yardstick -- you might call this a democracy. But a real multi-party democracy here is a myth."

Rantao's party, the Botswana National Front, is in the majority on the capital's city council. During the strike week, the city council voted to rescind the government's action to dismiss the city-managed workers and called on the government to retract the mass firing. He and the other BNF councilors were elected because their party is strong in the urban areas, he said, while campaigning in the rural areas could cost millions of pulas to travel from rally to rally. On the other hand, the very existence of the sharply critical opposition does indicate that multiparty democracy is alive and well, at least in Gaborone.

Rantao sounds like an avid fan of a soccer team when he excitedly cites previous election results that show gathering momentum for the opposition. In 1979, it was Botswana Democratic Party with 75 percent, and the Botswana National Front with 14. In 1984, it was BDP 71 versus BNF's 20. In the last election in 1989, the score was 63 to 27. If the elections aren't rigged, he says, the BNF will have a strong showing in the 1994 balloting. "What's lacking is the attitude that the opposition is the government in waiting," he said loudly, with some hand waving. "The BDP must see ourselves as a potential government, and they must see themselves as a potential opposition. That's democracy."

What worries Rantao, Molutsi and others is the coming economic woes. That's what the strike was about, in part. The union leaders recognized that if they didn't get better wages now, when the economy is at its peak, they never would. The democratic image Botswana presents to the international community has attracted foreign aid and investment, which in turn makes the democracy possible. When income from diamonds dwindles, however, democratic freedom as it's known in Botswana may dissipate as well as the competition gets rougher for a slice of economic pie.

Botswana remains dependent on the selling prices of its diamonds, which could collapse if the western countries continue to slip toward recession. In 1990, diamonds brought in 88 percent of the total revenues at US \$1.3 billion. The total amount of

foreign revenue earned by diamonds last year dropped 1 percent, compared to a 40 percent annual increase enjoyed over each of the last seven years. For the first time since 1982, Botswana predicted a spending deficit of 135 million pulas in its proposed 1991/92 budget. "The most disturbing development and the one which appears to have marked a turning point in the economic fortunes of Botswana was the decline in export earnings from diamonds," acknowledged the 1990 Bank of Botswana report. And diamond production has hit a plateau with nowhere to go but down. All the district councils of the country, where local projects are approved, were told by the government to ensure all construction was completed on old projects before any new projects began. The new funds for infrastructure in rural villages have been cut back under the title of "targeted subsidies," meaning that only a few projects will get funds. Development and democracy could become an urban phenomenon.

Despite the diamond-financed rural development programs, there's a widening gulf between the urban rich and the rural poor. Over the past two decades, the government has provided free primary and secondary education, an efficient health care system and clean water. That progress significantly improved the rural people's standard of living. But on the other hand, figures show rural incomes have continued to drop since the 1970s. One study showed real income of the poorest 40 percent declined by more than a quarter from 1972 to 1986. As incomes drop in the countryside, more people are pushing their way into the cities in search of jobs. "Something is wrong," says Ben Raseroka, a biology professor at the University of Botswana who befriended us in the first week we arrived. "Gaborone is bursting. The roads are too narrow, the water pipes too few. Something is wrong. You can see something is wrong from half past four to half past six, when the roads are jammed at rush hour."

Gaborone is one of the handful of capital cities in the world that was built from scratch. Like Washington, Brasilia, and Bangkok, there never was a village or town on this site before the urban planners began laying out the streets. The capital of Botswana was moved in 1964 from Mafikeng (which is now the capital of the so-called independent South African homeland of Bophuthatswana) to Botswana, with a planned capacity of 30,000 people. But over the last decade, this nation's largest city has seen its population more than double from 59,660 to 134,000. By 2016, more than 1.7 million people are expected to be living in the urban areas and about one million in the rural areas, turning the rural-based society on its head. Most will be in Gaborone or the urbanized villages being gobbled up by the "metropole," to use the old-fashioned dependency theory term neatly applying to this situation. Out in the once-peaceful village of Mogoditshane on the outskirts of Gaborone, where Bobbie Jo and I stayed in a ramshackle hotel, population jumped a whopping 355 percent, from about 3,000 people to more than 14,000 in ten years' time.

And when the hard times hit, the government is going to be overextended on its loans. Remember what I said about the yuppies charging their credit cards to the limit? All those new cars were purchased with low-interest loans made to state employees at six to eight percentage points below the commercial rate and secured by the government. But those loans are only for new cars, not used ones. The government employs about one-third of the formal work force in the country, about 150,000 people as civil servants, workers in parastatals or teachers. If only half those people took advantage of the generous credit scheme, then that accounts for tens of thousands of new cars on the road.

Then there's the housing program. Essentially, the government also gives low-cost loans for government employees to buy homes. Under a liberalization, the car allowance can also be diverted to buy (on credit) the land and materials and labor needed to build a new home. If that's not enough government help for the urban elite, there's the Financial Assistance Program. If a businessman wants to start a company that could launch Botswana into international commerce, the government will pay the salaries of his workers for five years. Those loans should be paid back, but in practice the majority don't.

Sitting outside on the patio of an expensive hotel in Gaborone, I raised this same question of government hand-outs with two older Botswana men. Both had been very high level senior servants--one was the head of his department in the ministry of local government and lands, while the other had been permanent secretary in the home affairs ministry--before they both retired about 13 years ago. Now a bit more gray-haired and quite a bit stouter, the two old friends became fiery when they talked about their dissatisfaction with the new type of civil servant whose existence depends on a non-repayable government loan.

"There's no dedication these days to the job, because these younger guys never had to flog themselves to get a university education or to get a job," said the former home affairs bureaucrat. "It's all been handed to them. So now they decide they will work just as much as they are paid, then knock off early on Friday. And if someone from the village comes in and sits waiting for hours, no one cares."

Both men now raise cattle in the rural areas and dabble in construction to keep making enough money to live like rich men. Both agreed rougher economic times would teach the younger generation to be more serious about working harder. "If it's all come for free, then they expect to get something for nothing," said the other man. "A government loan isn't paid back and they don't have any shame. They could pay back just 20 percent in a year, so eventually the money is returned. But they won't."

Despite all the government-subsidized spending and easy money to start up a business, the commercial sector of Botswana

remains weak. Almost everything bought and sold here -- from toothpaste to furniture and cars to clothing -- is imported from South Africa. Swamped with South African manufactured goods, there are few markets that domestic production can compete in without state subsidies. Botswana produces less than half the domestic demand for maize, milk, and wheat. Without a healthy bank account to buy all these imports, there would be even more serious to the state than a five-day strike if the food runs out.

Curiously enough, of all the people I met and talked with about Botswana's future as a democracy, it was the general who made me feel the most hopeful. True, he has been actively involved in the deportation of several foreign journalists. As a fierce critic of the private press, Merafhe has warned that the government would not allow the stability of society to be disturbed by abusive reporters writing critical essays. Local disgruntled journalists style the general as a "strong man," who could pose a dangerous threat to the media's independence. And other critics raise valid questions about Merafhe's push to build up the Botswana Defense Force, despite the lessening tensions with South Africa. Consuming approximately 4 percent of the current national budget, the military will spend the bulk of its 875 million pulas to build a new air base in the Kalahari desert, an investment officially frowned upon by the Bank of Botswana. I admit the growing importance of the 4,500-person defense force in Botswana makes me uncomfortably aware how easily the army intervenes in the political life of other African nations. And I know that economic malaise is often the motive for a coup.

But Merafhe is adamant the military has no possible role in running Botswana's government. "If they did so, it would be on an illegal basis. I know Africa today has military regimes and I know how the economy has gone down under military regimes. The question is not worth answering." Another fact I found hopeful is his unpopularity with his fellow civil servants. Merafhe has that dedication to his job that those retired senior civil servants mourn in the new generation of political leaders. The general publicly accused his fellow civil servants of leaving work early on Fridays and at the end of the month to drive out to their cattle ranches. One recent Friday afternoon, he said he passed several senior bureaucrats while driving back to Gaborone from an appointment in the north of the country, and calculated that they must have knocked off at noon or earlier to have traveled so far. "I'm the minister of public service and I am responsible for the conduct of public officers," Merafhe explained. "Therefore I occasionally speak out, because I really feel that if we don't all work, then this country is going to be bankrupt. It's not a question of if, but only when."

Merafhe and Botswana are unique in my experiences in Africa.

Sincerely,

Casey