

REVIEW

Democratisation and demilitarisation in Lesotho: The general election of 1993 and its aftermath.

R Southall & T Petlane (eds)

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A book devoted to the twin processes of democratisation and demilitarisation after the historic transitional election of 1993 in Lesotho was undoubtedly timely and, indeed, appropriate when it was written, and it remains so even after three further elections.

The book, the first comprehensive text on democratisation and the related processes of elections and demilitarisation, is divided into nine chapters written by academics and analysts both within and outside the country, each with an extensive knowledge of Lesotho's politics.

In the first chapter Rok Ajulu sets the scene and puts both the book and the election into a general context by providing an historical background to the election, situating it within the broader context of the third wave of global democratisation which affected the African continent in the early 1990s. Focusing on the 'changing character' of Lesotho's 'ruling class' and its public policy and on the role played by exogenous forces, of which South Africa is and always has been the most notable, Ajulu argues that if the 'ruling class' had not pursued collaborationist policies in relation to Lesotho's powerful neighbour the country's survival would have been at risk. He concludes that the return of democracy brought about by the 1993 election did not change the country's dependence on South Africa and placed the 'embryonic ruling class', represented by the Basotho Congress Party (BCP), in the same dilemma as its predecessors.

In chapter 2 Roger Southall analyses the country's transition and the 1993 election, paying a special attention to the circumstances surrounding the withdrawal of the military from power and the factors that led to it. These were, among others, the power struggle between the 'radical' and 'conservative' elements within the then ruling Basotho National Party (BNP); the central role of South Africa in Lesotho's politics, which led to the 1986 coup d'état; the resultant tensions between the military junta and the country's monarchy and within the regime itself; the processes that led to democratisation, including the establishment of the National Constituent Assembly (NCA), which paved the way for the election; and the attempts by the military to entrench itself in the future democratic dispensation by establishing the 'Defence Commission', which was designed to protect it from investigations into its corrupt activities. He also details the electoral

processes and the conduct, behaviour, and responses of the key players – the political parties – comparing this election with the annulled 1970 poll.

Fox's chapter assesses voting patterns and the geographic distribution of votes from 1965 to the 1993 poll. Acknowledging the difficulty of using variables such as ethnicity and region in Lesotho's homogeneous society he finds that, compared to both 1965 and 1970, there was 'a major swing away from the BNP towards the BCP', both in terms of votes and geographically. The BCP swept both the mountain and lowlands constituencies, leaving the BNP with 'one or two pockets ... in the southern stronghold [of Mount Moorosi]'. Echoing Southall's sentiments Fox attributes the vote swing to 'a strong protest vote' against the BNP and surmises, in the conclusion, that voters' mobility from rural areas to urban centres, or what he dubs the 'modernisation variable', was operating in vote distribution in the 1993 election.

In chapter 4 Southall 'investigate[s] the demographics and the educational experience of candidates; their social experiences and activities; and their political activities and attitudes to key issues'. He submits that in a parliamentary democracy demographic data are useful in explaining the success or failure of candidates in any election. The specific variables under investigation are: religious affiliation, occupation, economic status, age and gender, and education.

With regard to social experience the author focuses on external work experience and voluntary association membership. He concludes that most BCP MPs were drawn from the Protestant religious denomination, despite the fact that religion may no longer be an important variable in Lesotho's politics. He states that MPs are not 'cut off from their constituents by possessions and wealth', yet when they assume public office, he predicts, there is a danger of them 'seeking to ensure their financial survival by non-democratic methods'. Lastly, he points out that the 1993 parliamentarians fought their previous political battles without comprehending adequately the political and economic challenges confronting them and Lesotho itself, namely, the 'nature of Lesotho's links with changing South Africa', with its attendant 'declining export migrant labour ... and the largely undebated social consequences of the Highlands Water Project, which many analysts consider a time-bomb'. He cautions that there is a need for the BCP to select new and younger leaders and more female candidates to boost its popularity.

In chapter 5 Tim Quinlan analyses the 1993 election in the Khubelu constituency of the Mokhotlong district of Lesotho, focusing on the electoral process, including the selection of candidates by the two main parties – the BCP, which won, and its rival, the BNP; the key issues of the election campaigns; the election itself, its outcome, and the factors that produced the outcome. He avers that the BCP won the poll because its candidate focused on issues affecting and appealing

to the local inhabitants of the area, while his BNP counterpart addressed broad national issues with little appeal to the locals.

Like his co-authors he argues that the BCP's triumph over its rival was essentially 'a vote of resistance against the BNP as opposed to belief in the BCP's capabilities and national agenda', and this was occasioned by the BNP's record in government, which had marginalised the rural communities, Mokhotlong and its electoral constituencies included. The author offers as an example of this marginalisation a policy, which was later abandoned, of levying grassing fees for livestock in an attempt to reduce overgrazing. He concludes that the election gave Basotho a chance to 'express disdain for the previous governments and their repressive policies' but casts doubt on whether the results reflect support for the BCP's ideology of pan-Africanism and its 'socialist tradition'.

John Daniel provides an account of the election monitoring exercise during the 1993 election. He defends the role of foreign observers in African elections, arguing that those who criticise them conflate the process of election observation, which is limited both in scope and time, and a more comprehensive and extensive monitoring process. The former process is, according to Daniel, what took place in Lesotho, and it involved an array of activities and processes, including election management and administration, and financial and technical assistance provided by the international community.

He details the objectives of election monitoring exercises, applying them to Lesotho, and rejects the BNP's claim that its defeat was due to irregularities in the election process, arguing that any such irregularities would have had to be 'of massive scale and ... be shown to have been deliberately concocted to favour one party over another'. This, he maintains, the BNP failed to prove in court and therefore no fraud could be ascertained. He concludes that the election was free and fair because of the role of the international observers, who, he writes, helped to 'rid a people of tyrants', an opinion expressed by one voter in Matsieng, who said 'You United Nations Have Delivered Us'.

In chapter 7 Pontso Sekatle analyses the BNP's claims of electoral fraud by reviewing the related processes of vote counting, voter education, and election monitoring against the background of the polls of 1965 and 1970 and concludes that the BNP mounted a less effective voter education campaign than the BCP and that this, along with other factors (its past record of authoritarianism and human rights violations, corruption, its close ties with the army, and factionalism), accounted for its defeat. The key issue for the BNP, according to the author, was that the election had 'a robotic outcome', manifested in the consistent pattern of figures in total disregard of the relative strengths and weaknesses of the parties in different constituencies. Sekatle rejects this claim as having no substance because, compared to the 1965 and 1970 elections, the party

had demonstrated 'relative strength in its traditional strongholds', although it lost the contest.

In chapter 8 Khabele Matlosa shows that the victorious BCP was expected to inherit a hostile bureaucratic apparatus, notably the security forces, created by previous regimes, but that the speed with which relations between government and security forces deteriorated, leading to the military-backed coup of 17 August 1994, came as a surprise. The chapter analyses this development, highlighting the challenges concomitant with the process of demilitarisation which the new BCP government had to confront but failed to overcome, principal among which are how, effectively, to place a military that has tasted political power under civilian control while simultaneously not jeopardising its interests – individual and corporate.

The author elaborates on the tensions between the three central elements of Lesotho's politics: the government, the military, and the monarchy, and how these threatened political stability and the very process of transition. The initial tensions between the military and the new government spilled over into the military itself, circumstances of which the BNP took advantage for political gain. These culminated in instances of faction fighting sparked by the refusal (initially) by the government to grant a pay rise to the military. The problems abated but were not fully resolved.

Matlosa shows how the unresolved question of restoration of the dethroned King Moshoeshoe II surfaced – setting the government and the monarchy on a collision course, spearheaded, this time, by Moshoeshoe's son, the reigning monarch, King Letsie III, and led by the BNP leadership. The failure of the government to resolve this issue led to the 'palace coup', which was tacitly supported by the security forces.

Matlosa also highlights the important role played by the international community in resolving these crises when internal efforts proved to be ineffective, and in reversing the coup by restoring the BCP government. He concludes by reiterating that Lesotho's case illustrates 'classic problems of demilitarisation' in that 'having become accustomed to power, the military proved extremely reluctant to make way for a democratic government, to render itself subject to democratic control mechanisms, and to concede its corporate interests to civilian supervision'. He notes, too, that the military had been 'highly politicised and had become imbued with partisan politics', and finally that Lesotho's post-election problems and the external interventions have limited the country's political independence.

Tsoeu Petlane, in chapter 9, deals with a number of issues related to the prospects of consolidating a democratic culture in post-1993 elections and, in particular, tackling the issue raised by Matlosa – how to place the military under effective civilian control in the transition period. He observes that Lesotho's army

has been central in the country's post-independence politics and argues that in order to achieve democratic consolidation all the players – government, opposition and, importantly, the armed forces – must be committed to the process.

Given the history of politicisation of the armed forces, their exploitation by politicians both in government and in opposition, and their entrenchment in national politics as an autonomous agent to protect their own interests, they pose a major challenge to the democratisation process. Petlane argues that politicisation of the armed forces continues to be a threat to democratisation, which requires, among other conditions, civilian control over the army. For him 'democracy cannot take root in an atmosphere which continues to place national politics at the mercy of armed groups, both constitutional and extra-legal'.

In sum, therefore, the book provides comprehensive coverage of the 1993 election and detailed treatment of related issues and, in that regard, achieves its objective, despite the limited financial resources at the authors' disposal when the project commenced, a factor that is reflected in the preface.

It is a valuable resource for those interested in Lesotho's politics, and elections in particular. The few factual and editorial errors in the text are not significant enough to affect the value of the book and its objectives.

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