Decolonization Deferred: Seretse Khama Ian Khama's Presidency and the Historical Deradicalization of 'Culture' as a Tool for Resistance in Botswana

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Abstract

This paper takes a historical approach to explore why, since from the first President of Botswana, Sir Seretse Khama in 1965, and especially during the Presidency of his son, Seretse Khama Ian Khama in 2008, the discourse of decolonisation never found strong traction in Botswana. I suggest that the older Khama drew from the notion of culture – to invent a neo-liberalism friendly cultural hegemony that would help maintain British support for the newly independent and economically fragile state. It would also maintain the dominance of the ruling Botswana Democratic Party, and much later lay a fertile ground for the younger Khama to be 'culturally' accepted to take up the Presidency. Culture, defined in varying ways by the two Khamas, has been useful for entrenching and normalising inequalities, where Botswana is one of the most unequal societies in the world, with high income inequalities, high levels of gender-based violence and some of the lowest numbers of women in political leadership in Africa. It has also been useful to entrench and normalise low levels of civic participation and resistance without any strong demands for decolonisation, a fertile environment for neo-liberalism and its economic growth without transformation of livelihoods.

Keywords: culture, decolonization, morality, neo-liberalism, deradicalization.

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1 Introduction: Botswana's Historical Silence on Decolonisation

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
Like a raisin in the sun?

Or fester like a sore--
And then run?

Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over--
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

Dream Deferred by Langston Hughes (1951)

This 1951 Harlem Renaissance poem by Langston Hughes, is very poignant at this point in African history, including Botswana. What happens to a dream of decolonization deferred? Does it dry up, or does it explode? Although very crucial and not possible to suppress indefinitely, the rhetoric of decolonization has been historically silenced in Botswana. I this paper, I explore how this has been partly possible through a mobilization of the rhetoric of culture, to supress cultures of resistance. This started from the first President of Botswana, Sir Seretse Khama in 1965, and was much later intensified by this son Seretse Khama Ian Khama when he became the fourth president of Botswana in 2008. Considering that the older Khama and his family suffered deeply from colonialism and it's attendant racism for his marriage to his white partner in the late 1940s, it may be baffling that he would never strongly identify with nationalist and anti-colonial movements sweeping across Africa in the 1960s

and 70s. Fifty years later, particularly since the #FeesMustFall movement of 2015 in neighbouring South Africa, the notion of decolonisation has seen a serious resurgence to the academy and political spaces across the world and particularly in formerly colonised countries. However, this has not been the case in Botswana.

With a population of around 2.5 million people, Botswana is the oldest democracy in southern Africa, having had consistent, free and fair elections since independence in 1966. Seretse Khama Ian Khama became Vice President of Botswana in 1998, a position he held until he was then elected as President of Botswana from 2008 to 2019. He came into power at a time when the the Organization of African Unity (OAU) was being transformed into the African Union (AU), and the ambitious African Renaissance project led by the former South African President, Thabo Mbeki was well underway. A new neo-liberal take on culture had emerged, where African cultures were to become the backbone of Africa's grand entry as a powerful player in in the global economy and to achieve democratic development (Zeleza 2009). This was a major shift from the previous use of culture as a vehicle for a Pan-Africanism, inspired by attempts at African Socialism, that some criticised for blaming the West for all Africa's failures (Owusu 2003).

Botswana, under Seretse Khama Ian Khama did not participate much in the African Renaissance project. Khama was consciously absent from most of the AU meetings, an act that led the former President of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe, to blame him for local former Foreign Affairs Minister Pelonomi Venson-Moitoi's 2017 defeat in the contest for the position of Chairperson of the AU Commission (Charles 2017). Quite outside the African Renaissance discourse on culture, and its African Socialist Pan-Africanism before that, Botswana has always maintained a decidedly neo-liberal take on culture. When Khama launched his own projects of cultural revivalism – which he based on his belief that he would be taking up the leadership of the country – there was an acute lack of discipline and morality in Botswana. The colonial roots of Botswana's postcolonial realities have hardly received much attention.

Historically, Botswana's stance towards the anti-colonial and decolonisation rhetoric has been to use the rhetoric of culture as a tool to manufacture consent towards Western liberalism and away from a Pan-Africanism, inspired by African Socialism. When many of the first crop of postcolonial African heads of state such as Leopold Sedar Senghor, Kwame Nkrumah, and Julius Nyerere drew from the rhetoric of culture to indigenise

the concept of African Socialism (Rejai 1970), Botswana's first president, Sir Seretse Khama castigated it as foreign. Since then, there has been silence about the impact of colonialism on the Botswana modern state. This has resulted in a conspicuous silence around decolonisation, which his son Seretse Khama Ian Khama maintained. This is despite Sir Seretse Khama's own internationally known story of persecution by the racist apartheid regime in South Africa with the help of the United Kingdom (UK), and therefore the persecution of his son and the rest of his family (Williams 2006).

Born in 1953 from a biracial marriage that has been termed, '*A Marriage of inconvenience'*, by Michael Dutfield (1990), Seretse Khama Ian Khama was both a victim and survivor of the worst of colonial conditions; an unusual confluence of apartheid, racism, Christian hypocrisy and African 'custom'. From early childhood, Khama had to confront the brutality of racism and 'othering' that was central to the colonial project (Dutfield 1990). Considering the racially tense circumstances under which Seretse Khama Ian Khama was born, it is important to understand why he and his father before him continued the legacy of preventing the discourse of decolonisation from finding strong traction in Botswana.

I suggest a number of analytical standpoints that can explain why the decolonisation rhetoric was less attractive to the very leader that personally experienced racial prejudices. The notion of a postcolonial condition is used to explore cultural revivalism as a frame for thinking about constructions of legitimacy in postcolonial Africa. I propose that both the Khamas needed to draw from their cultural roles as royals and heirs apparent in one of the biggest pre-colonial polities in present day Botswana, the England-sized Bangwato Reserve. This traditional authority appears to have come in handy in their consolidation of modern state power.

Also, in 2008, when the younger Khama came into power, he was confronted by the onset of the global economic crisis. I propose that, to understand why he found the rhetoric of culture useful requires an appreciation of the impact of neo-liberalism in Botswana, of a precarious diamond-dependent economy with some of the highest income and social inequalities in the world. Culture becomes important for manufacturing consent among citizens so that they do not strongly stand against the injustices. When they do, as labour unions tried to, cultural capital is used to discredit their efforts.

Seretse Khama Ian Seretse Khama's cultural revivalism may be quite separate from Mbeki's African Renaissance project, but even he could not

escape Africa's postcolonial condition, where the rhetoric of culture is unstable, often contradictory, and sometimes dangerous – yet may be liberating and empowering (Tamale 2006).

2 Seretse Khama Making a Choice Between African Socialism and Neo-liberalism: When a Victim Silences Resistance

When Seretse Khama announced his intention to marry his white British partner, Ruth Williams, a series of events followed that led him to live in exile for some years, with his son Seretse Khama Ian Seretse Khama also being born in exile. From the point of view of the coloniser, Seretse as a native could not legally marry a white woman. On the other hand, Tshekedi Khama, uncle to Seretse who also raised him and served as his regent, strongly disapproved of the marriage, arguing it was against tribal custom. As Paramount Chief in-waiting, Seretse was expected to marry a suitably chosen wife following established marriage customary processes, and of royal lineage. The marriage also created a diplomatic strain between South Africa, Britain and the Bechuanaland Protectorate administration. Neighbouring South Africa, was and remains Botswana's most important economic and political partner had instituted apartheid laws in 1948, outlawing interracial marriage (Dutfield 1990; Williams 2006). In the ensuing saga involving governments and the church, an attempt to prevent Seretse from marrying Ruth failed (Williams, 2006). Seretse returned home to Botswana to appeal for popular support for his marriage, making it perhaps the first democratically decided marriage at a 1949 *kgotla* meeting held in Serowe, the capital of his tribe,

> Excluding royal headmen, he [Seretse Khama] asked those who still opposed the coming of his wife to stand. Not more than 40 did so. He then called on those who now accept his wife to stand. This brought the whole assembly to its feet – 4,000 men shouting 'Pula, Pula, Pula!' It was a stirring spectacle, a magnificent expression of public sentiment (Parsons 2017).

Leaders in postcolonial Africa, from the first group of presidents in the newly independent Africa such as Leopold Sedar Senghor, Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere in the 1960s often mobilised the rhetoric of *culture* as the basis of both

national development, their application of socialism to their African contexts and their vision of Pan-Africanism (Rejai 1970). Yet, upon assuming state power, without openly stating so, Seretse Khama chose the right over the left economic bloc. Although he never admitted it, it appears the Cold War limited Khama's options for a convivial adoption of both socialist and liberal approaches, which seemed to be his wish. Although Botswana attempted to be non-aligned, neo-liberalism was clearly the only choice Seretse Khama could make for his newly independent and economically precarious country.

Seretse Khama distanced himself from socialism, even in its Africanised form, opting rather for a kind of 'return to our roots', that was both facilitative of neo-liberalism and lacking in the rhetoric of anti-colonialism and its associated process of decolonisation. At a seminar arranged by the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation and the Scandinavian Institute of African Studies in Uppsala, November 11, 1970, Seretse Khama (Khama S. 1970b) said,

> Many African countries have formally stated that their guiding ideology is socialism. This label, even if qualified by the adjective 'African' can have little meaning for the majority of our people... We in Botswana have chosen to develop our own guiding principles and describe them in terms readily comprehensible to our people. And these principles, rooted in our culture and traditions, are now being tested in practice.

Seretse Khama carefully found Setswana equivalents of a decidedly neo-liberal development and economic agenda. He further said at the same seminar in Uppsala that,

> Our principles then are democracy which in our main language Setswana is rendered by *'puso ya batho ka batho'*, or rule of the people by the people, and development which we translate in Setswana as *'ditiro tsa ditlhabololo'* which means literally 'work for development', a significant rendering as I am sure you will agree. Our third principle is self-reliance which is variously expressed in Setswana and illustrated by numerous Setswana idioms of long-standing and our fourth principle [of] unity, which is also expressed in Setswana by a number of words and idioms, each with its particular shade of

> meaning. I mention these Setswana expressions to demonstrate that these principles are not mere imported slogans but are rooted in our social and political culture (Khama S. 1970b).

Although the older Seretse Khama dismissed attempts by the likes of Nyerere to coin an African Socialism, he proceeded to do exactly what Nyerere did. Nyerere made an attempt to indigenise African Socialism by using an existing local cultural construct of *Ujamaa* - familyhood. Similarly, as shown above, Khama drew from local Tswana concepts in an attempt to indigenise neo-liberalism and make it a local cultural product.

Seretse Khama chose a liberal democratic rather than the anti-colonial and nationalist approaches of the Pan-Africanists when he took over as President. He firmly set Botswana on a modernist path at independence when his ruling party chose a system that subordinated tribal leaders to the three other functions of the state, being the executive, the judiciary and the legislature. It is crucial to recall that Seretse himself, along with other royals such as his uncle Tshekedi, Sekgoma Letsholathebe of *Batawana*, Sebele II of *Bakwena* and Molefi of *Bakgatla ba Kgafela* were at some point deposed by colonial leadership for not cooperating with it (Ramsay 1998). Seretse did not dismantle the colonial 1954 African Leadership Proclamation where chiefs had some legislative and executive authority with the consent of *Kgotla* and the community elders, but the state retained veto power over all chiefly decisions. The *Native Advisory Council*, later the *African Advisory Council* and at independence the *House of DiKgosi* (chiefs) was a powerful structure, although it was excluded from the passing or abolishing any laws (Gabasiane & Molokomme 1987). From independence, Seretse's leadership proceeded to strip the *DiKgosi* of more responsibilities such as land allocation and reduced their judicial powers.

Seretse Khama is most remembered for an often-misquoted statement he made in his famous speech as Chancellor at the University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland graduation ceremony on 15th May 1970. He is misquoted as having said, 'a nation without a culture is a lost nation' although he actually said 'a nation without a *past* is a lost nation, and a people without a *past* is a people without a soul' (Khama 1970a). This, he apparently said to counter White supremacist insistence that Africa did not have any history before colonialism. The replacement of 'a nation without a *past* is a lost nation' with 'a nation without a *culture* is a lost nation' indicates the power of the

rhetoric of culture. That Seretse's statement is cited or remembered differently from what he actually said, itself makes an interesting statement about a mutual constitutiveness between actors in constructions of cultural revivalism and the wider context within which the rhetoric emerges. It seems that Seretse is conveniently [mis]interpreted to further rhetoric not completely of his making. And while he is remembered in this way, there is at the same time selective amnesia that Seretse was opposed to cultural institutions such as chieftainship having legislative powers within the modern state.

Seretse, however, did not completely dismantle tribal authority as Sections 77, 78 and 79 of the Constitution distinguished between major tribes whose *DiKgosi* automatically became members of the House of *DiKgosi* and other tribes who could have a representative elected to the House. *DiKgosi*, like Bathoen of *Bangwaketse* and Linchwe of *Bakgatla ba a Kgafela* were aware that the House of *DiKgosi* did not afford them any real power (Gabasiane & Molokomme 1987). When Ketumile Quett Masire took over as President in 1980 he continued on the modernist path, specifically of agriculture. His tenure was not an easy one, and often set him and his leadership on a collision path with tribal *DiKgosi* such as Kgosi Seepapitso IV of *Bangwaketse* and Kgosi Linchwe of *Bakgatla ba a Kgafela*, who detested the fact that the modern state vested in them less powers than District Commissioners in their tribal territories. *DiKgosi* had since the 1920s distrusted the idea of setting up tribal councils to assist them in managing tribal affairs (Gabasiane & Molokomme 1987).

Seretse Khama Ian Khama's ascension into the Botswana Presidency was a highly orchestrated affair. In 1997, the eldest son of the first President of Botswana, Seretse Khama, Seretse Khama Ian Khama, resigned from his position as Lieutenant General and Commander of the Botswana Defence Force (BDF), amid speculation that he was bound for the second highest office in the land. This was following a 1997 report by consultant Lawrence Schlemmer, who recommended that someone be found who was external to the then-warring ruling Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) factions between party stalwarts Mompati Merafhe and Daniel Kwelagobe. The same year in 1997, President Masire amended the Constitution to allow for the automatic succession to President by a sitting vice-President, upon the President's retirement, incapacitation or death. President Masire defended this as necessary to ensure national stability (Good & Taylor 2008). At the retirement of President Masire following a Constitutional reform to fix the term of office

for the Presidency, former Vice President Festus Mogae became President and Khama became his Vice President, as had been speculated. Through automatic succession, Khama ultimately became President of Botswana in 2008, a process that was seen as less of a democratic process than a result of an elite coalition (Dusing 2002; Sebudubudu & Molutsi 2011).

3 Khama's 'Four Ds' and a Renegade Neo-traditional Modernity and Deferment of Civic Rights

> I hear voices lamenting that the timeless values that have long held our nation together are under threat. That *Botho*, our shared sense of mutual respect and responsibility, is being replaced with more self-centred, all too often self-destructive, social and political behaviour…
> (Khama S.K. 2009).

At his inauguration in April 2008, Khama announced that his roadmap for the nation would be underpinned and characterised by what he came to be famously known for, the 'Four Ds' of 'Democracy', 'Development', 'Dignity' and 'Discipline'. To this end, he had made a call for the citizens of Botswana to 'return to culture'. Discipline, or the lack thereof, according to Khama, was the impediment to his vision of a prosperous Botswana. He defined discipline as, 'to sacrifice short term [self] interests for sustained development'. The lack of discipline, he argued, was evident in 'alcohol abuse, reckless driving on our roads, disrespect for elders, vandalising of school property, wastage of scarce resources such as water, the use of abusive language in public discourse and defamation, slander and false statements in the media (Khama S.K. 2008)'. Khama introduced a 70% alcohol levy in 2008 without much consultation. He then threatened further increases over the years.

Being culturally a Paramount Chief of his own ethnic group, came in very useful for Khama, by providing him with birth right legitimacy and helping him to mobilise the support of other traditional leaders. From his very first State of the Nation Address in 2008, Khama emphasised the role of traditional leaders in upholding discipline and moral values. Not surprisingly, *DiKgosi* – the traditional chiefs – took full advantage of the moment of cultural revivalism to attempt to address their own *postcolonial condition* of eroded

influence against state power. To get their buy in, Khama called for the return of powers to *DiKgosi* and other local moral entrepreneurs like churches, to enforce discipline. Soon after taking office, Khama set up a Morals Committee, also known as the Joint Advisory Committee of *Ntlo ya Dikgosi* – the House of *DiKgosi,* and Botswana Council of Churches on Social Issues. This was to return disciplinary powers to local moral entrepreneurs.

Consequently, a number of *Dikgosi* enthroned around that time, like Kgafela of the *Bakgatla baa Kgafela,* Letlamoreng of *Barolong,* Puso of *Batlokwa* and Malope of *Bangwaketse* have made similar calls to make the 'return to culture' and made tighter moral discipline a priority. The benefits of *go tsosolosa ngwao* for *DiKgosi* have been varied. *DiKgosi* of *Bakgatla ba a Kgafela* found themselves dragged before courts after giving permission to re-introduce age-regiments to act as vigilantes and use corporal punishment without trial on 'misbehaving' members of the community in the village of Mochudi. Many members of the community supported the beatings as culturally appropriate, but as citizens of a modern Botswana state, the aggrieved community members were able to claim protection embedded in the Constitution against oppressive reinventions of 'culture' (Mmegi Online 2010).

A National Strategy for the Promotion of Good Social Values was approved through a Presidential directive in 2008 (Government of the Republic of Botswana 2008). This was on the basis of recommendations from a report by a joint advisory committee of *Ntlo ya DiKgosi* and the Botswana Council of Churches on social values (Mmegi Online 2008). Among the recommendations made by the Morals Committee that were accepted by government included the reintroduction of traditional age regiments, *mephato,* to help as vigilantes in the discipline of communities. A proposal for the Liquor Act to be amended to increase the legal age for alcohol consumption from 18 to 21 years, was also accepted. Flogging of people at ward level for disciplinary purposes was re-introduced with *diKgosana* (minor *DiKgosi*) being empowered to administer corporal punishment. Teachers were also given back the power to administer corporal punishment on pupils or students showing deviant behaviour (Gaotlhobogwe 2010).

At an opening of a school hall at Rainbow International School in Gaborone in November 2010, Khama said to the students that, 'Our culture traditionally accords the elderly people the respect they deserve. Education is not meant to destroy the cultural fabric' (Tautona Times, 2010c), Khama urged

them to hold onto what he referred to as 'our culture and respect our values'. At the 2009 World AIDS Day commemorations in Kasane, Khama called upon citizens to uphold their 'core' value of *'botho'* in the fight against HIV/AIDS (Tautona Times, 2009). Thereafter in 2012, his leadership proceeded to table a Public Health Bill that threatened the right to privacy for people living with HIV/AIDS, negating the same *botho* to which he had referred to (*Sunday Standard* 2013). 'National interest', always vaguely defined, has become an excuse, not only in Botswana but elsewhere in the postcolonial context, for an assault on freedom of expression and the denial of individual human rights. For Khama, the answer lies here: 'For this nation to grow and prosper in unity, we must at all times be driven by the desire to serve national interests before individual interests. Let us adopt a culture of 'we' against that of 'I'' (Khama 2010).

When close to 100 000 public servants, including about 1 500 considered essential workers went on a national strike in April 2011, demanding a 16% salary increase, Khama ignored their Bargaining Council, thus rendering it defunct. Rather than directly addressing the workers, Khama chose to speak out against the strike at *kgotla* meetings in rural villages such as Leporung, Mmakgori and Dikhukhung of Barolong Farms, telling them, 'I will not abuse public funds to buy elections', implying that workers' demands were unreasonable and tantamount to political blackmail (Mmegi Online 2011). Government was to later terminate the employment contracts of more than 1 400 health workers, including 50 medical doctors for refusing, to end the strike because of their status as essential workers (*Sunday Times* 2011). At the *kgotla* meetings, Khama's leadership creatively utilised the cultural notion of *botho* as a countervailing force against civic demands for greater rights and freedoms, within a neo-liberal discourse of budget deficits and the country's still fragile economy (Mmegi Online 2011). In this way, his leadership was able to capture a constituency among the petty *bourgeoisie*, moral entrepreneurs, and especially the rural and urban poor.

This deployment of 'culture' allowed Khama's leadership to maximise the benefits of the modernist project without being trapped by its insistence on individual human rights. Using this double move, he was able to take every opportunity to consolidate his position by refusing to be captured by the 'rights' claims made by workers, opposition parties and gender activists. He was thus able to tap into 'cultural' sensibilities and to castigate dissenting citizens as unpatriotic and selfish, reducing their demands to a lack of values.

The poor and unemployed are not exempt from the cultural guilt. Making some opening remarks at a joint meeting between Cabinet and the Gaborone City Council, in June 2010, Khama lamented the waning spirit of self-help, participation and mobilisation in development among communities, which he said had been replaced by a 'culture of entitlement and dependence on government handouts'. He said this again in his September 2010 Independence message to the nation (*Tautona Times*, 2010b). Another occasion on which he reiterated the same was at the Cabinet's meeting with the Central District Council in August 2010 (*Tautona Times*, 2010a). Khama made every attempt to ensure his leadership, though it did not conform to democratic principles of popular endorsement, remained constitutional. By so doing, Khama was successful in achieving popular legitimacy despite economic and political backsliding.

Khama did what postcolonial critic Mahmood Mamdani (1996) calls 'sublating both [modernist and communitarian approaches] through a double move that simultaneously critics and affirms' (Mamdani 1996: 3). Khama was able to garner support for essentially suppressing rights in areas such as the right to strike, freedom of information and the freedom of association. Yet as he did this, Khama made every attempt to ensure his leadership conformed to democratic principles and remained constitutional. He also did so without overtly flouting neo-liberal sensibilities as antithetical to Botswana culture. Before we prematurely celebrate cultural revivalism as some sort of agents of a 'return to our roots', and thus a pre-cursor to decolonisation, we are being warned to read the sub-text, often of an attempt to legitimise oppressive agendas within an already accepted discourse, in this instance culture. The *postcolonial condition* of leadership in Africa requires negotiation of legitimacy at political or state level, but most importantly legitimacy at the cultural or subjective level. As a result, a postcolonial leader, even in a democratic state has to at once practise conviviality and a stylistic connivance with *culture*. I conclude that Khama's signature on *culture* is of a moralistic renegade neo-traditional modernity. In the final analysis, rather than seeing Botswana's successive Presidents as pro- or anti-culture, I have demonstrated that they fall within the same continuum; with moments of heightened appeal to overtly modernist agendas, strong antipathy towards culture, and moments of reactionary and fundamentalist appeals to culture. This is the *postcolonial condition* of leadership in Africa.

For Botswana, the current moment is of a renegade neo-traditional fundamentalism. The older Khama, Sir Seretse Khama was able to invent and sustain the dominance of the ruling BDP, by underplaying the colonial legacy that underpinned its West-looking neo-liberal economic agenda and couching it as something that was not foreign but already rooted in local cultures. At the same time, he was able to successfully vilify socialist alternatives attempted elsewhere in Africa as foreign, since African cultures were more communitarian than individualistic – much unlike neo-liberalism. The younger Khama, Seretse Khama Ian Khama when he was later brought into the Presidency to resuscitate a weakening BDP dominance, figuratively took a leaf from his father's book on the success of the use of culture to continue to entrench a 'culturally' accepted neo-liberalism.

4 Deradicalisation of Culture Towards Acceptance of Neo-liberalism and its Attendant Inequalities: Seretse Khama Ian Khama's '*go tsosolosa ngwao*'

Khama said at the 2010 State of the Nation address, 'What is more tangible is the significant role various forms of cultural expression can play as a driver of economic growth in such areas as tourism, entertainment and adaption of indigenous technologies (Khama S.K. 2010)'. To this end, Khama promised to encourage arts and entertainment practitioners to set up cultural industries around the country. The government was to establish Regional Arts and Crafts Purchasing Centres around the country, with a pilot project in Kgalagadi South, one of the poorest areas in Botswana. Assistant Minister for Presidential Affairs and Public Administration, Dr Gloria Somolekae said in 2013, at the annual Maitisong Cultural Festival, that the 2008 government directive on the procurement of local art and crafts for decoration of government offices had created a market for local artworks that amounted to P950 000 (USD117 000) by 2011, bought by different governmental and parastatal organisations (Botswana Press Agency 2013). The thinking at that time was that the cultural industry would become the new frontier for economic diversification.

The Khama leadership associated culture with heritage, to be defended and promoted. At the 2010 State of the Nation Address, Khama announced that in that year, Botswana had acceded to the 2003 Convention on the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. The convention defined

intangible cultural heritage as 'practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage' (Khama S.K. 2010). By drawing on it as heritage, to be preserved and promoted, Khama also mobilised a ready-made cultural legitimacy for neo-conservatism. Coined as heritage, 'culture' takes a nostalgic, idealistic and romanticised twist, bringing in a fear that it can somehow be lost if not promoted and defended.

In his first year as President, Khama immediately introduced the President's Day Culture Competitions – *Letsatsi la Ngwao* – every July. The competition has become the highlight of the Department of Arts and Culture's social calendar. By the President's own account, the number of participants in competition had more than doubled over the years from 5 993 at its inception in 2008 to a staggering 12 562 in 2012. In July 2010, under his stewardship, the first ever *Pitso ya Ngwao* (a culture summit) was held, bringing together arts and culture activists to draw a frame for advocacy, capacity-building and funding for the sector. Khama's idea was for the establishment of a Culture Hub. This is what largely earned Khama the title of a cultural revivalist. Gasebalwe Seretse, staff writer of the local *Mmegi* newspaper, celebrating the trend since Khama became President stated that, 'While in the past, Batswana were generally regarded as 'cultural renegades' of sorts by other African nations, there are indications that there is a spirit of arts and culture revival going on countrywide' (Seretse 2008).

Go tsosolosa ngwao – to revive culture, had become a new mantra across the country, with almost every ethnic group doing some activity towards the goal, most taking advantage of the grants. In 2012 alone, *go tsosolosa ngwao* was chanted across many different communities across Botswana, in urban and rural areas of Francistown, Letlhakeng, Molepolole and Kanye, among others. The notion of *ngwao* – culture – was applied beyond discreet group identities, to encompass even multi-cultural spaces such as schools. In 2012, Maruapula School celebrated their Setswana week under the theme, *'Go tsosolosa ngwao go simolola ka nna'* – reviving culture begins with me (Maruapula School 2012). The Bakwena people started the Dithubaruba Festival, also with the intention of '*go tsosolosa ngwao'*. They also returned to *go bolotsa letsema* – declaring the start of the planting season. Khama's own ethnic group, the Bamangwato, revived initiation ceremonies and age-regiments in 2011. The village of Letlhakeng took advantage of the 2012

Independence Day celebrations to revive *ngwao ya Sekgalagadi*, their ethnic identity. By creatively weaving together his infamous *'Four D's'*, especially the fourth 'D' – *discipline*, with notions of *go tsosolosa ngwao* (cultural revival) –, Khama was able to successfully 'sell' his project of a moralistic neo-liberal approach to culture.

5 Analysis: The Postcolonial Condition of the Use of Culture for Deradicalization of Cultures of Resistance

Although Khama's presidency was politically orchestrated, his stay in power was difficult. In 2008, when Khama took over from Festus Mogae, it was at a moment of reckoning with the declining promises of the course of modernity on which his father had set the country. Diversification of the economy away from diamond-dependency had failed, and the global markets upon which Botswana was dependent were in a financial crisis of their own. The country began dropping on the Global Competitive Index (Tradingeconomics.com 2020). With this decline in economic growth came another interesting twist to the rhetoric of culture. Where culture was previously thought to be an impediment to economic growth, it was to become the new point of cooperation between two failed but unlikely friends, neo-liberalism and culture:

> Madam Speaker, Government is committed to the preservation and promotion of Botswana's diverse cultural heritage ... culture can be defined as the sum of who we are and where we have been as a society, its ultimate value to our collective wellbeing is immeasurable (Seretse Khama Ian Khama 2010).

The use of the term culture by Khama is what Achille Mbembe (1992, cited in Werbner 1996) called 'promiscuous'; by which he means the manner in which coloniality has resulted in structures and institutions that are inevitably resistant and collaborative, refusing capture and loving captivity, and involving 'a convivial tension between the commandment and its targets'. van Dijk (2008) explains that 'the influence of context is often subtle, indirect, complex, confused and contradictory, with results far from the main effects of independent social variables', and also that, 'contexts are like other human experiences – at each moment and in each situation such experiences define

how we see the current situation and how we act in it'. By examining the use of the word 'culture' by Seretse Khama Ian Khama, it becomes apparent that a postcolonial leader, even in a democratic state such as Botswana, practices conviviality and a stylistic connivance with *culture.* Khama's signature on *culture* is of a moralistic crusade in the face of developmental challenges resulting from neo-liberalism.

The notion of a *postcolonial condition* is used to explore cultural revivalism as a frame for thinking about constructions of legitimacy in postcolonial Africa. A 'postcolonial condition' is where the discourse of colonialism is absent, but its legacy of the domination of the weak by the strong, or the local by the global continues and has become a 'localised' form of identity. The notion of a postcolonial condition is extrapolated from the work of Jean-François Lyotard, (Lyotard 1979; 1984), '*La condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir',* by which he referred to what he saw as a revolutionary shift from modernist attempts to unearth universal grand or objective truths to a condition where there existed a plurality of small narratives that compete with each other. While I accept that '*La condition postmoderne'* can allow for alternative narratives, these are not always transformative. Culture, with its potential to be a resource for resistance, can and does become a site for legitimating power and control. It is a postcolonial condition also in the sense of an epidemic – highly contagious and difficult to prevent. It is a condition because it is not desirable. It is also a condition because it requires multiple responses or a thick description as it has no single cause or instigator. It leaves no postcolonial identity untouched.

The use of postcolonial conditions as a frame poses a challenge as to whether postcolonial discourse applies to Botswana. There is a view that Botswana was so mildly colonised that the title of a *postcolonial* state is unwarranted. Botswana is a former British protectorate rather than a colony. Mamdani (1996) distinguishes between colonies and protectorates, with colonies being the European territories of settlement, and protectorates being of European domination, though not settlement. There is an argument that Botswana's protectorate status and resource scarcity by independence left the country and especially traditional institutions fairly intact compared to other African countries where settler colonialism occurred. It is argued that as a result, Botswana escaped the worst of the extractive propensities generally characteristic of non-settler colonialism (Acemoglu *et al.* 2001). However, there is enough evidence that the line between formal occupation and

protectorate status did not necessarily cushion the nation against domination. Mamdani (1996: 46f) does reveal how in Botswana, the colonial state retained veto power over all chiefly decisions, although the 1954 African Leadership Proclamation was supposed to give chiefs some legislative and executive authority with the consent of *kgotla* and the community elders (Mamdani 1996). Because of this, Botswana does in fact have one of the most peculiar postcolonial conditions characterised by economic growth but not necessarily economic development (Narayana 2012), democracy without strong civil society institutions (Somolekae 1998) and a much-liked leader (Afrobarometer 2012) with a very unhappy citizenry (Happy Planet Index 2012).

6 Conclusion

Current calls for decolonisation need to critically reflect on historical contexts within which the attempts to confront and dismantle the dominant narrative are taking place within a convivial interplay among neo-liberalism, contestation of power, and the political economy of constructions of legitimacy through hegemonic mobilisation of the rhetoric of culture. A lesson from Khama's cultural revivalism is also that the current postcolonial condition of leadership in Africa is of invocation of culture as a tool for mobilising legitimacy in an increasingly tense postcolonial context of identity politics.

Opposition leader, Gobotswang, correctly points out that Khama's popularity needed to be contextualised. His view was that Khama's popularity within an otherwise unequal society was a sign of a poorly functioning democracy (Gobotswang 2013). Some opposition politicians suggested that he made himself a kind of god by rendering the poor dependent on government handouts and blanket donations (Keorapetse 2013). The position I take is that the strong grassroots support that Khama continued to enjoy negated some of the arguments that Khama had militarised the state, therefore suggesting his leadership was a dictatorship.

I argue that, not only the postcolonial state is bifurcated, but so are postcolonial identities. They are bifurcated by the state condition that produced them to be at once *citizens* and *subjects*. This becomes more pronounced for postcolonial subjects who become leaders, for while they remain marginalised in the global political economy, at home their claims to power are contested, even in spite of elections. For Khama, born biracial at the height of racial

segregation, an added dynamic was always to negotiate legitimacy, as the coloniser treated him as neither *citizen* nor *subject.*

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