

# Ngwato attitudes towards Zimbabwean immigrants in the Bechuanaland Protectorate in the 1950s

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## INTRODUCTION

This article was inspired by a book entitled *Transnationalism and New African Immigration to South Africa*,<sup>1</sup> edited by Jonathan Crush and David McDonald, which I reviewed for the *European Journal of Population*, 19, 4 (2003), 439–40, and which deals with the disturbing rise of xenophobia in South Africa. My main criticism of the book was that it completely lacked a historical dimension. Later I discovered that similar studies on Botswana, particularly on illegal Zimbabwean immigrants, suffer from the same defect.<sup>2</sup> This article is therefore a modest sketch of the historical background to the phenomenon of xenophobia, with which policy-makers in Botswana are grappling in the early twenty-first century. It is not, however, a historical treatise on xenophobia. Furthermore, it is acknowledged that scholarship on xenophobia is recent, being a post-liberation development in Southern Africa.<sup>3</sup>

Before the end of apartheid in South Africa in 1994, Botswana was surrounded by countries under racist white minority regimes, and the black people in the neighbouring countries of South Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe waged wars of

1 See C.J. Makgala's review of J. Crush and D. McDonald, eds, *Transnationalism and New African Immigration to South Africa* (Toronto, Southern African Migration Project and Canadian Association of African Studies, 2002), in *European Journal of Population*, 19, 4 (2003), 439–40.

2 E.K. Campbell and J.O. Oucho, 'Changing Attitudes to Immigration and Refugee Policy in Botswana' (Southern African Migration Project, Policy Series No. 28, 2003, <http://www.queensu.ca/samp/sampresources/samppublications/policyseries/Acrobat28.pdf>); J. Oucho, E. Campbell and E. Mukamaambo, 'Botswana: Migration Perspectives and Prospects' (Southern African Migration Project Policy Series No. 19, 2000, <http://www.queensu.ca/samp/sampresources/samppublications/policyseries/Acrobat19.pdf>); F. Nyamnjoh, 'Local Attitudes Towards Citizenship and Foreigners in Botswana: An Appraisal of Recent Newspaper Stories', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 28, 4 (2002), 755–75; W.G. Morapedi, 'Post Liberation Xenophobia Tendencies Towards Zimbabweans in Botswana: With Reference to the "Influx" of Undocumented Zimbabwean Immigrants into the Country' (paper delivered at CODESRIA 30th Anniversary Conference, Gaborone, The Grand Palm Hotel, 18 Oct. 2003).

3 D. Macdonald, J. Gay, L. Zinyama, R. Mattes and F. de Vletter, *Challenging Xenophobia: Myths and Realities about Cross Border Migration in Southern Africa* (Cape Town, Southern African Migration Project, 1998) and D.A. McDonald, ed, *On Borders: Perspectives on International Migration in Southern Africa* (Ontario, Southern African Migration Project, 2000).

liberation, sometimes from Botswana. During the liberation struggle large numbers of refugees flocked to Botswana from those neighbouring countries. These people were mostly accepted and treated sympathetically by the ordinary people and authorities. However, following the collapse of the Zimbabwean economy in the late 1990s and early twenty-first century, large numbers of Zimbabweans fled into Botswana, mostly as illegal immigrants escaping economic hardship back home. In Botswana these Zimbabweans obtained low-paying jobs which Botswana citizens shunned. In some instances Botswana employed Zimbabweans in domestic service. However, not all Zimbabwean immigrants found 'odd jobs' attractive. This, coupled with the fact that jobs in Botswana were scarce, seems to have forced some Zimbabwean immigrants to resort to crime for survival. This development created a backlash of xenophobia among the Botswana,<sup>4</sup> who indiscriminately attribute much of the crime committed in the country to Zimbabweans.

This article attempts to demonstrate that resentment towards Zimbabwean immigrants in Botswana has a historical precedent, contrary to conclusions drawn by cross-border migration researchers. The article does not suggest that there has always been unease regarding Zimbabwean immigrants in Botswana. The argument is that the perception that Zimbabweans are at present responsible for the crime being committed in the country mirrors speculations by the colonial and tribal authorities in the 1930s and the late 1950s. The article shows that while suspicion, antagonism and resentment have been shown towards Zimbabwean immigrants in the past, it is only recently that this has crystallised into the phenomenon of xenophobia. The thrust of the article is to show how the tribal leaders of the Ngwato responded to the presence of illegal Vapostori ('Mazezuru') immigrants from Southern Rhodesia in the late 1950s. The primary cause of their resentment was the illegality of the immigrants and the real or putative crimes that they were accused of committing. By illegal immigrants are meant foreigners who arrive clandestinely and do not have official permission to stay in a host territory. Illegal immigrants therefore differ from refugees, who are people fleeing political or religious persecution and economic hardship and who have the official status of asylum seekers in a host state.

Perhaps it is necessary briefly to touch on xenophobia in the Western world, particularly the United States, although this phenomenon is also rife in European countries, in order to provide a historical comparison. On xenophobia or nativism ('intense opposition to an internal minority on the grounds of its foreign (i.e. "un-American") connections . . . The word *nativism* also suggests some part of its meaning: a preference for those deemed natives; simultaneous and intense opposition to those deemed strangers, foreigners'<sup>5</sup>) in the United States, Joe R. Feagan writes:

4 The term 'Botswana' is used to denote citizens of post-independence Botswana, while the term 'Tswana' refers to the Tswana-speaking tribes during the colonial period.

5 J.F. Perea, 'Introduction', in J.F. Perea, ed, *Immigrants Out!: The New Nativism and the Anti-Immigrant Impulse in the United States* (New York and London, New York University Press, 1997), 1, emphasis in original.

Contemporary attacks on immigrants do not represent a new social phenomenon with no connection to past events. Anti-immigrant nativism in North America is at least two centuries old . . . Historically, and on the present scene, nativists have stressed to varying degrees four major themes. One common complaint is that certain 'races' are intellectually inferior and should not be allowed into the country, at least not in substantial numbers. Nativists have often regarded immigrant groups as racial 'others' quite different from the Euro-American majority. A second and related theme views those who have immigrated from racially and culturally inferior groups as problematical in terms of their complete assimilation to the dominant Anglo culture. A third theme, articulated most often in troubled economic times, is that 'inferior' immigrants are taking the jobs and disrupting the economic conditions of native-born Americans. A fourth notion, also heard most often in times of fiscal crisis, is that immigrants are creating serious government crisis, such as corrupting the voting system or overloading school and welfare systems.<sup>6</sup>

Unlike in the United States, in contemporary Botswana and South Africa xenophobic sentiments are more often than not directed at black African immigrants, not whites. In this case xenophobia is a pathological hatred directed at people because of who they are – members of a particular race, tribe or group – and is therefore aimed at more than just preventing illegal immigrants. Annah Triandafyllidou, in explaining the sudden rise in xenophobic tendencies in Spain, Italy and Greece following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, states that 'xenophobia involves a hostile reaction towards foreigners by members of a nation or ethnic group, and is linked to specific preconditions that foster its development'.<sup>7</sup> She continues: 'It is generally related to economic factors and its main objective is the expulsion of the new groups'. This definition closely captures the phenomenon obtaining in Botswana, where crime, as opposed to crude competition for economic opportunities, fosters xenophobia towards Zimbabwean immigrants.

#### THE ZIMBABWEAN IMMIGRANT FACTOR IN EARLY TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY BOTSWANA

The influx of both legal (documented) and illegal (undocumented) Zimbabwean immigrants into Botswana has bred an anti-Zimbabwean attitude or xenophobia.<sup>8</sup> The presence and consequences of illegal Zimbabwean immigrants in Botswana today have been debated in many a public forum in that country. Intolerance as a result of an increasing incidence of serious crime, which is usually blamed on the Zimbabweans, 'reached a climax when infuriated residents of Masunga [in the North East District] convened a series of kgotla [public forum] . . . meetings where, in one of them, they ordered all Zimbabweans whether documented or undocumented to leave the village immediately'.<sup>9</sup> The same was done in Tlokweng near Gaborone in 2003 and Odi in 2004. Zimbabweans in Botswana have been accused of crimes

6 J.R. Feagan, 'Old Poison in New Bottles: The Deep Roots of Modern Nativism', in Perea, *Immigrants Out!*, 13–14.

7 A. Triandafyllidou, *Immigrants and National Identity* (London, Routledge, 2001), 5.

8 See Nyamnjoh, 'Local Attitudes' and Morapedi, 'Post Liberation Xenophobia'.

9 Morapedi, 'Post Liberation Xenophobia', 7.

ranging from house breaking, rape, murder, prostitution, spreading HIV/AIDS and foot-and-mouth disease and assaults to stock theft and armed robbery. These accusations are made by the police, village elders, youth, tribal authorities and business people, amongst others. Commissioner of Police Norman Moleboge stated that illegal immigrants from Zimbabwe threatened the security of Botswana. Briefing the House of Chiefs on crime, he reported that in 2002 alone 26 214 illegal immigrants were dealt with by the police for violating immigration laws, against 1 387 who were victims of crime.<sup>10</sup> So serious has this perception been that in some instances vigilante groups, such as the Zimbabwean Clean-up Campaign (ZCC) of Masunga, were formed to assault and drive the Zimbabweans out of town.

However, President Festus Mogae and his Foreign Affairs Minister, Lieutenant General Mompoti Merafe, while not condoning the entry of illegal immigrants into the country, have on a number of occasions pleaded with the Batswana to understand the plight of Zimbabweans and, for the sake of continued good relations between Zimbabwe and Botswana, not to display xenophobia towards them. Unfortunately, the message seems to have fallen on deaf ears, probably owing to the perceived dangers presented by Zimbabwean immigrants in Botswana.

#### POPULATION STUDIES ON XENOPHOBIA IN BOTSWANA

Botswana and South Africa have in recent years been afflicted by serious xenophobia, as a result of which numerous studies have been conducted on this phenomenon in both countries. In particular the Southern African Migration Project (SAMP) 'which aims to explore the migration phenomenon from a variety of disciplinary and methodological perspectives and at a number of different spatial scales'<sup>11</sup> has done commendable work in this regard. In collaboration with the Canadian Association of African Studies (CAAS), SAMP has produced a corpus of literature on the subject and has a website where newspaper articles on migration-related issues are posted in order to monitor public attitudes to migration in the region.<sup>12</sup> SAMP has also held conferences at which experts on migration have presented their research findings.

As part of SAMP's National Immigration Policy Survey (NIPS) initiative, members of the Internal Training Programmes in Population and Sustainable Development (ITPPSD) of the University of Botswana conducted research in Botswana. The research yielded a publication by Eugene Campbell and John Oucho entitled *Changing Attitudes to Immigration and Refugee Policy in Botswana*, which examines perceptions of the Botswana citizenry towards immigrants, migrants and

10 Mmegi, 'Illegal Immigrants Threaten Botswana Security', 5 Feb. 2004, <http://www.mmegi.bw/2004/February/Thursday5/index.html>

11 Crush and McDonald, *Transnationalism*, 1.

12 <http://www.queensu.ca/samp/migrationnews/index.php>

refugees as well as attitudes towards the country's immigration policy. The authors cite the following as important practical reasons for conducting the study:

- Anecdotal reports of growing xenophobia need to be systematically assessed through rigorous survey methods. In other words, how widespread is the reported intolerance and is it more common among some groups?
- Assuming that no government wishes to condone xenophobia, a survey of this nature can provide important insights into the causes and dimensions of intolerance and assist government in formulating appropriate responses, including public education campaigns.<sup>13</sup>

Campbell and Oucho note that xenophobia in Botswana began in the late 1990s, the Botswana previously having been the most tolerant to foreigners in Southern Africa.<sup>14</sup> They write: 'The history of the formation and development of Botswana tribes does not indicate previous existence of xenophobic attitude or behaviour among Botswana. Has post-independence in-migration led to a new attitude towards foreigners?'<sup>15</sup> The present article demonstrates that while xenophobia proper is a new development in Botswana, as Oucho and Campbell point out, there had been instances in the past in which Zimbabwean immigrants were subjected to attitudes that bordered on xenophobia.

In their study, Campbell and Oucho attribute the rise of xenophobia in Botswana to competition for resources and employment between citizens and aliens. Before the 1960s the Tswana communities were agrarian and there was no industrial development of any consequence in Bechuanaland. A significant number of men and women sought employment on the South African mines, on South African farms and in domestic service in South Africa. Aliens who entered local communities to provide labour, particularly in the subsistence agricultural sector, were mostly welcome.

However, in the 1960s, as the territory was preparing for self-rule, a small number of light industries were set up in a number of regions, including the Ngwato reserve. The establishment of these industries was accompanied by the establishment of trade unions by workers in the industries.<sup>16</sup> These industries provided much-needed employment, although the problem of acute unemployment remained serious. Therefore, 'streetwise' refugees or immigrants from Rhodesia and South Africa were treated with suspicion and a degree of intolerance, as they were seen as competitors for the scarce jobs. For instance, Sheila Bagnall, a teacher at Swaneng Secondary School in Serowe soon after independence, observed that 'in the fifth [Form] are three or so South Africans. They never really become assimilated as the Botswana rather fear them for their sophistication and also because they are a threat when it

13 Oucho and Campbell, 'Changing Attitudes', 1.

14 Oucho and Campbell, 'Changing Attitudes', 1.

15 Oucho and Campbell, 'Changing Attitudes', 29.

16 G.A. Sekgoma, 'History of Trade Unions in Botswana 1940s-1978: A Marxist-Leninist interpretation' (BA research essay, University of Botswana, 1978).

comes to getting scarce jobs. One such is Moses who ran for Head Boy but was roundly defeated by the indigenes'.<sup>17</sup> It should be stated that these were isolated instances, however. At the Botswana campus of the University of Botswana and Swaziland in the 1970s students from the neighbouring countries were influential in student politics. For instance, in 1976/1977 the Student Representative Council president was one Carlos V. Camin, a citizen of Mozambique.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, according to Botswana university students at the time, socially these 'sophisticated' aliens were not tolerated as they competed with the indigenes for girls.

However, Campbell and Oucho omit the major cause of xenophobia towards Zimbabweans in Botswana today, that is, allegations of crime in various forms arising from the fact that a crime wave has hit many settlements in the country. Furthermore, the authors do not rely on important data such as police and court (both customary and magistrates' courts) records. This may be because their study focuses on quantitative rather than qualitative data. While government on the one hand has tended to be diplomatic with regard to the perception that Zimbabweans are committing crime, the police and tribal authorities on the other hand have been quite open in blaming the crime wave on Zimbabweans.

In consequence, this article argues that allegations of crime committed by illegal Zimbabwean immigrants are a major cause of xenophobia in Botswana. There is a precedent for this. As early as 1938 the authorities were concerned about aliens from Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) and Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) who entered Bechuanaland and were alleged to be committing crimes.<sup>19</sup>

From 1949 to the mid 1950s the Ngwato reserve experienced serious tribal strife that brought about anarchy and paralysed tribal administration. It appears to be during this period that the Vapostori immigrants began trickling into the area. In the late 1950s this became a cause for serious concern and was debated at the Ngwato tribal council meeting. The 1950s also saw the emergence of politically motivated independent African churches in some parts of the Bechuanaland Protectorate. This movement was met with intolerance and banishment of its members by the tribal authorities with the support of the British colonial government.<sup>20</sup> The Vapostori were part of this development, but their position was rather problematic in that they could not be banished or repatriated, since some of them paid the much needed tax to the local authorities.

17 S. Grant, ed, *Sheila Bagnall's Letters from Botswana, 1966-1974* (Gaborone, Leitlho Publications, 2001), entry for 17 Mar. 1967, 68.

18 A.I. Hamiwe, 'Aspects of the History of the Student Representative Councils of the University of Botswana, 1976-1995' (BA research essay, University of Botswana, 2003), 18.

19 BNA, S.184/2/1, Government Secretary to Deputy Commandant of Police and all District Commissioners, 21 Jan. 1938.

20 For example see M.R. Gaborone, 'The Metlobo Migrations: A Question of Religious Intolerance Among the Ngwaketse' (BA research essay, University of Botswana, 1987).

## RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

Contact between the Tswana and European missionaries in the nineteenth century led to the Tswana states becoming theocracies.<sup>21</sup> In almost every tribal reserve there was a church, which more often than not wanted to prohibit the entry of any other denomination into the area. The London Missionary Society (LMS) operated in the Ngwato reserve, and jealously guarded its monopoly there. By and large churches in the tribal areas enjoyed the support of the *dikgosi* (chiefs) in those areas. These *dikgosi* helped keep rival churches at bay. However, many Tswana were displeased with the missionaries' onslaught on their traditional practices such as initiation ceremonies, polygamy, and rain-making rites.<sup>22</sup> They were also unhappy regarding the payment of tithes, which they saw as a form of taxation in addition to the already burdensome hut tax introduced by the colonial administration in 1899.

Local Tswana missionaries were also opposed to what they saw as racist attitudes on the part of their white LMS superiors, who were unwilling to promote the locals to positions of responsibility in the church. In the neighbouring South Africa, in the late nineteenth century, similar grievances had led to blacks leaving European churches to form independent African churches as part of a movement called Ethiopianism. In Botswana the response of the *dikgosi* and the colonial government to Ethiopianism was repression.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE VAPOSTORI

In the Ngwato tribal area and the Tati District a denomination known as the Apostolic Sabbath Church of God (ASCG) or Vapostori caused the authorities considerable concern. The Vapostori church originated in Southern Rhodesia as an African response to the hardships of colonial rule. The economic and social problems arising from the resettlement of Africans into crowded and barren reserves as a result of the Land Apportionment Act contributed to their breaking away from European churches, since these showed a marked lack of concern for the conditions of the blacks. These tribulations were compounded by droughts and epidemics, which badly affected peasant production. Taxation by the colonial regime made matters worse.<sup>23</sup>

21 See A.J. Dachs, 'Missionary - Imperialism The Case of Bechuanaland', *Journal of African History*, 13 (1972), 647-58; . Gulbrandsen, 'Missionaries and Northern Tswana Rulers: Who Used Whom', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 23, 1 (1993), 44-83; Rev. J.D. Hepburn, *Twenty Years in Khama's Country* (London, Hodder, 1895); A. Sillery, *John Mackenzie of Bechuanaland: A Study in Humanitarian Imperialism 1835-1899* (Cape Town, Balkema, 1971); P.S. Landau, *The Realm of the Word: Language, Gender, and Christianity in a Southern African Kingdom* (London, James Currey, 1995) and M. Malambane, 'The Role of the London Missionary Society in Kweneng: An Aspect of Missionary Imperialism' (BA research essay, University of Botswana, 1981).

22 For instance see D.B.N. Senabye, 'Missionaries, Administrators and the Demise of the Regimental System in Kweneng, 1885-1945' (BA research essay, University of Botswana, 1981).

23 M.M.W. Tshambani, 'The Vapostori of Francistown' (BA research essay, University of Botswana, 1979), 1.

Returning migrant workers from South Africa brought with them ideas of Ethiopianism and found their fellow blacks in Southern Rhodesia very open to the new religious dispensation. This development worried the Rhodesian government, 'especially because their sermons had political overtones that identified their churches with African nationalism'.<sup>24</sup>

The ASCG was formed by one Johane Masowe in 1923 in Rasupe District. Masowe, a Bungwe who spoke a Nyika dialect and former member of the Anglican Church, claimed to have been resurrected from the dead. The colonial authorities were not impressed with the ASCG and arrested Masowe for not possessing a registration certificate and for allegedly inciting unrest among the Africans. However, he was released for lack of evidence and ordered to relocate to his home district of Rasupe, an order he flouted by remaining with his followers in Hartley District. He was arrested a second time for failure to carry a pass and for tax evasion. 'On his release in March 1933 he was escorted back to Rasupe. Among the Shona of Rasupe the arrest made Masowe something of a martyr, and after his release enthusiastic crowds listened to his sermons'.<sup>25</sup> His popularity extended beyond his fellow Shona people, as he found favour even among the Shona's traditional enemies, the Ndebele, in Salisbury (Harare). Members of Masowe's church came to be known as 'Vapostori', a corruption of the word 'Apostles'.

Masowe's condemnation of the mission church and colonial regime as exploitative and evil saw his popularity and support soar. Payment of tithes to the mission church was very unpopular among unemployed African churchgoers, who viewed tithes as another form of taxation and exploitation. However, his open attack on the colonial regime led to his fleeing Southern Rhodesia for South Africa in 1943.

Masowe had instilled in his followers a strong sense of political and economic independence. They were taught to be self-employed and not to seek employment outside the church. 'Socially, members of the movement [maintained] very few contacts with non-members, whom they perceived as a threat'.<sup>26</sup> Tshambani notes that '[w]ith strong convictions about independence, therefore, the Vapostori after 1943 began to migrate into neighbouring states. The most notable of these were Mozambique, Northern Rhodesia and the Bechuanaland Protectorate'. These migrations were also a result of Masowe's absence and his followers' confrontations with agents of the colonial regime. However, 'as strangers who isolated themselves where they settled, Vapostori encountered a lot of resentment because of their desire for independence'.<sup>27</sup>

24 Tshambani, 'The Vapostori', 5.

25 Tshambani, 'The Vapostori', 6.

26 Tshambani, 'The Vapostori', 8.

27 Tshambani, 'The Vapostori', 10.



In the 1940s there was a split between the Vapostori in Southern Rhodesia and a group of *émigrés* led by Ebrahim Moyo, who settled in Bechuanaland in 1951. By 1953 about 196 members of Moyo's group were resident in Moroka village in Tati (today North East District of Botswana).<sup>28</sup> 'On arrival in Bechuanaland, Vapostori did not attempt to recruit new members. On the contrary, they isolated themselves from the local people, whom they referred to as *marudzi* ("foreigners"). This is interesting since the foreigners referred to locals or their hosts as foreigners. As a result Vapostori were not welcome socially by both the local Kalanga and the white administration'.<sup>29</sup>

Although his group was not welcome to the locals, accounts of the relations between Moyo and Headman Moroka of Moroka village make interesting reading. There were Vapostori in Rhodesia who paid tax to Moroka in order to use their tax receipts as evidence of Bechuanaland citizenship as well as for obtaining entry into South Africa.<sup>30</sup> This also enabled Masowe to get in touch with his followers, and it is said that he was found in Bechuanaland some time in 1952. However, the colonial administration was not pleased about Moroka's accepting the Vapostori into the Tati African reserve, stating that the area was already overcrowded. Needless to say, the Vapostori's anti-establishment inclination and propaganda caused them to be viewed with hostility by the authorities in Bechuanaland. Interestingly, the presence of the Vapostori, while beneficial to Moroka personally, presented a contradiction as far as the government's approach was concerned:

The Vapostori, moreover, were known to the Protectorate officials for their anti-establishmentarianism, which probably influenced the administration's attitude. In 1953 the Administration ordered the Vapostori to return to Manyika in Southern Rhodesia. Vapostori refused to leave and were backed by Chief Moroka, who had a contract with Ebrahim Moyo to mould bricks. Because these bricks would reduce the cost to the colonial administration of building a school for Moroka Village, the administration consented to the Vapostori remaining.

In several ways the presence of Vapostori served Moroka's personal interests. Moyo had also paid tax to Moroka for three years in advance, and many other Vapostori in Southern Rhodesia paid tax to the Protectorate administration through this chief. When the administration offered to reimburse those who could produce tax receipts, no one came forward. Chief Moroka also encouraged Vapostori to remain in order to gain for himself more supporters.<sup>31</sup>

However, in the early 1950s the Vapostori began relocating from Moroka to Francistown, where business was more agreeable. In Francistown their isolation from the larger community earned them the dislike of the local people. The people of Francistown also called them 'Mazezuru', a more common designation for them in contemporary Botswana. Like members of independent churches in other parts of

28 Tshambari, 'The Vapostori', 11.

29 Tshambari, 'The Vapostori', 11.

30 Tshambari, 'The Vapostori', 12.

31 Tshambari, 'The Vapostori', 13.

Bechuanaland, the Vapostori avoided health facilities and Western medicine. Their faith-healing attracted poorer people who could not afford the costs of modern health facilities. Poor urban dwellers and ruralurban migrants were lured to the Vapostori faith by the material accomplishment of its members and its communal aspect, which provided a social cushion in an otherwise individualistic urban lifestyle. However, by the 1950s the Vapostori experienced internal divisions between moderate new converts and conservative hardliners, which led to splits. During 1957 and 1958 the conservative hardliners expelled the moderates from the church. Those expelled established themselves as Vapostori elsewhere. Some moved southwards to nearby Shashe in the Ngwato reserve; later others went as far south as Gaborone and Lobatse.<sup>32</sup> The Vapostori came to Bechuanaland mostly as illegal immigrants, and while their presence in Bechuanaland bothered some officials, they were at the same time of economic value to the territory.

#### BECHUANALAND ADMINISTRATION ON AFRICAN IMMIGRANTS

There had been some disquiet concerning aliens in Bechuanaland shortly before the Second World War.<sup>33</sup> However, this was not as serious a problem as it would become in the late 1950s. In January 1938 the Deputy Commandant of Police had raised concern 'regarding the increasing number of alien natives, principally from Northern and Southern Rhodesia with bad criminal records who are acquiring domicile in the Bechuanaland Protectorate by means of becoming tax payers and thus escaping the penalties of Proclamation No. 10 of 1919'.<sup>34</sup> In order to close this loophole a dispatch was sent to all District Commissioners to solicit the opinions of the *dikgosi*. While most *dikgosi* supported the idea, in the Ngwato area the tribal authorities counselled caution, a position which resembles that of the government of post-independence Botswana in the early twenty-first century regarding Zimbabwean immigrants in the country:

The Acting Chief [Tshekedi] holds the view that while the entry of alien natives into the Bechuanaland Protectorate is not to be encouraged, the principle of maintaining friendly relations with neighbouring States and People should not be lost sight of and he suggests that the indiscriminate prosecution of alien Natives entering the Protectorate without passes is not an altogether judicious proceeding.<sup>35</sup>

Although steps deemed necessary were taken to close the perceived loopholes in the law (African Immigration Proclamation of 1941) by the mid 1950s, as indicated above, the phenomenon of illegal immigrants was religious in nature with a strong

32 Tshambani, 'The Vapostori', 27-9.

33 BNA, S.184/2/1, Government Secretary to Deputy Commandant of Police and all District Commissioners, 21 Jan. 1938.

34 BNA, S.184/2/1, Government Secretary to Deputy Commandant of Police and all District Commissioners, 21 Jan. 1938.

35 BNA, S.184/2/1, District Commissioner (Serowe) to Government Secretary, 3 Feb. 1938.

anti-establishment sentiment, much to the annoyance of both the tribal and colonial authorities. As a result, in May 1957 the African Advisory Council discussed a Draft African Immigration Proclamation.<sup>36</sup> In introducing the motion the Acting Government Secretary summed up the need for amendment of the existing law as follows:

The Territory is faced with what might almost be termed '*mass migration*' [emphasis added] from other countries, sponsored in many cases by pseudo-religious groups. The existing law controlling African immigration into the Territory is contained in Chapter 60 of the Laws of the Protectorate. This law was promulgated in 1941. Under this law, any African domiciled in any part of Africa south of the equator may enter the Protectorate provided he is in possession of a pass signed by a person authorised to sign passes from the country from which such an African wishes to enter the Protectorate. This law has two fatal defects. Firstly, the Protectorate Government has no control of the entry of Africans into the Territory at all since the right to give this permission to enter the Territory is vested in the authorities of the neighbouring countries concerned. All that they require is a pass from the authorities of those countries. Once they have that pass nobody can stop them from entering the Protectorate.

Some of the people that enter in this way may be of an undesirable type. They may be trouble-makers, they may be diseased or they may be types that might become a burden on the people of the Territory.

The second defect is that once such people have gained entry into the Territory under the authority of these passes, they can not be removed from the Protectorate unless they are convicted of a crime and sentenced to imprisonment without the option of a fine.<sup>37</sup>

The principle embodied in the draft law was that while alien Africans would continue using permits or passports to enter Bechuanaland, those wishing to remain in the country for more than 30 days would be required to apply for permission. The draft further indicated that aliens seeking permanent residence would only obtain permits to do so after residence of not less than two years. District Commissioners in consultation with the *dikgosi* were to be responsible for issuing such permits.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, the old Tswana custom whereby the *dikgosi* had the power to control immigration into their tribal areas was to be maintained under the new dispensation.<sup>39</sup>

#### ALLEGATIONS OF VAPOSTORI COMMITTING CRIME IN THE NGWATO RESERVE

A brief explanation of the political climate in the Ngwato reserve as a prelude to the arrival of the Vapostori between 1949 and 1956 is perhaps appropriate. The marriage of Seretse Khama, heir apparent to the Ngwato throne, to the English woman Ruth Williams in England in 1948 tore the Ngwato area into two bitterly opposed camps,

36 Minutes of African Advisory Council (Mafikeng, 1957), 98-9.

37 *Minutes of African Advisory Council*, 99.

38 *Minutes of African Advisory Council*

39 On this traditional power see I. Schapera, *Handbook of Tswana Law and Custom* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1938).

with the group led by Ngwato regent, Tshekedi Khama, opposing the marriage.<sup>40</sup> To many, Tshekedi's regency, which began in 1926, had been ruthless and as the years wore on his enemies proliferated.<sup>41</sup> In 1949 Tshekedi, out of pride and humiliation, went into voluntary exile in the Kwena territory,<sup>42</sup> taking along with him most of the cream of the Ngwato tribal administration cadres – a move which effectively paralysed tribal business.<sup>43</sup> Since Seretse's marriage was viewed very negatively by the National Party regime in South Africa,<sup>44</sup> in 1949 the British imperial government exiled him to England until 1956, following a reconciliation with Tshekedi. Prior to this reconciliation, the dispute between Seretse and Tshekedi and their local and overseas sympathisers raged relentlessly and the situation in the Ngwato reserve remained highly volatile. The Ngwato tribal leadership claimed that illegal aliens or Vapostori capitalised on the confusion and general lawlessness mentioned above and settled in the territory, as a result of which resentment was harboured towards them.

While the authorities were still working on the draft African Immigration Proclamation, in August 1958 one S. Moikwathai (of the Bırwa Area Council) during the Ngwato Tribal Council<sup>45</sup> session 'begged to move that the foreign immigrants who have (sic) settled in our part of the territory from the Transvaal and Southern Rhodesia be dealt with by being repatriated or otherwise controlled'.<sup>46</sup> Moikwathai claimed that 'foreign persons took advantage of the civil strife and disruption amongst us a few years ago and came over from the Transvaal and from Rhodesia to settle in our country'. According to him, 'at first on[e] or few would come, but soon a large . . . [community] followed and gathered around him and established a settlement that grew into bigger dimensions dividing up that part of the country into veritable farms'.<sup>47</sup> He complained that these settlements interfered very much with the cattleposts and 'the legitimate ploughing lands of the Bangwato'. Moikwathai also complained that although the matter had been reported to the local

40 T. Tlou, N. Parsons and W. Henderson, *Seretse Khama: 1921–80* (Braamfontein, Macmillan, 1995) 75–98.

41 D. Wylie, *A Little God: The Twilight of Patriarchy in a Southern African Chiefdom* (Hanover, Wesleyan University Press, 1991), 175. For more information on Tshekedi see M. Benson, *Tshekedi Khama* (London, Faber & Faber, 1960).

42 See O. Gabasiane, 'Tshekedi Khama in Exile, 1949–1959: A Study in the Continuing Influence of the Former Regent on Bangwato Politics in Particular and [on] the Political Life of the Bechuanaland Protectorate in General' (BA research essay, University of Botswana, 1985).

43 C.J. Makgala, 'The Policy of Indirect Rule in Bechuanaland Protectorate, 1926–1957' (PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 2001), 298. On the Bangwato political system see I. Schapera, 'The Political Organisation of the Ngwato of Bechuanaland Protectorate', in M. Fortes and E.E. Evans-Pritchard, eds, *African Political Systems* (London, Oxford University Press, 1940), 56–82.

44 Tlou *et al.*, *Seretse Khama*, 84.

45 On the tribal council system in colonial Botswana see chapter 9 in Makgala, 'The Policy of Indirect Rule'.

46 Khama III Memorial Museum (hereafter KMM), Serowe, Tshekedi Khama Papers (hereafter TKP), Box 5/113, 'Minutes of Bangwato Tribal Council', 13–15 Aug. 1958, 14.

47 KMM, TKP, Box 5/113, 'Minutes', 13–15 Aug. 1958, 14.

Subordinate African Authority (Chief's Representative or District Governor) 'nothing has been done about it, instead the settlement continues to increase'.<sup>48</sup>

As the debate in the tribal council session continued it became clear that the problem of aliens was not confined to the Birwa area. A certain N. Nezobengwa of Kalanga Area Council lamented that the Kalanga district was grappling with the problem 'of illegal squatters from the Tati District and Rhodesia' and 'urged its speedy attention and control by the authorities'.<sup>49</sup> The evidence in the paragraphs that follow seems to lend support to the perception that the illegal immigrants being referred to followed similar religious and social practices as the Vapostori. However, the Ngwato did not make it clear whether the aliens from the Transvaal were Vapostori or not.

One G. Mosinyi of the Shoshong Area Council recommended that illegal immigrants be summarily dealt with by the local Subordinate African Authority.<sup>50</sup> G. S. Seretse (Serowe Area Council), reported having been sent by Rasebolai (African Authority or *kgosi*) to go and investigate the problem of aliens from the Transvaal, Tati and Rhodesia and discovering 'that none of these persons or their settlements had received permission from the authorities'. He also discovered that 'some of these men did not even pay tax'.<sup>51</sup>

A lengthy and disturbing account was given by O. Mphoeng of the Mmadinare Area Council, who lamented that his district was also afflicted by the 'invasion of illegal immigrants'. He gave an example of 'the people of Motsomi, a Bo-Kelele clan from Southern Rhodesia, related to the Bo-Kelele clan of Maborwa'.<sup>52</sup> He continued, '[w]e expected that these people of Motsomi would have liked to join the settlement of their kinsmen there, but they asked to be allowed to settle at Top[i]si, a ranching area where they would have interfered with the grazing of cattle at the cattleposts. When we refused they went away to settle near Mahalapye where, apparently, there was more latitude'. Mphoeng sorrowfully explained that illegal squatters had a predilection for settling near territorial boundaries for the following reasons:

- (i) Cattle lifting; stock theft is facilitated, some members of the group driving stock from our country while other members receive them across the border;
- (ii) Churches with questionable teaching and more questionable if not abhorrent morality are clandestinely introduced into our country; e.g. the Nyika quasi-religious community at Lesenebola whose polygamous practice allow one man to have 4 or 5 so-called wives living in one room.

48 KMM, TKP, Box 5/113, 'Minutes', 13-15 Aug. 1958, 15.

49 KMM, TKP, Box 5/113, 'Minutes', 13-15 Aug. 1958, 15.

50 KMM, TKP, Box 5/113, 'Minutes', 13-15 Aug. 1958, 15.

51 KMM, TKP, Box 5/113, 'Minutes', 13-15 Aug. 1958, 15. On taxation in Botswana during the period under discussion see C.J. Makgala, 'Taxation in the Tribal Areas of Bechuanaland Protectorate, 1899-1957', *Journal of African History*, 45 (2004), 279-303.

52 KMM, TKP, Box 5/113, 'Minutes', 13-15 Aug. 1958, 16. The Birwa (Babirwa) people are found in the Ngwato territory and some parts of Zimbabwe (see J.M. Sekgwama, 'Aspects of the Socio-economic and Political History of Babirwa, 1895-1975' (MA thesis: University of Botswana, 1996).

- (iii) A dangerous situation of a state within a state results – an independent community not amenable to the Administration like other people, e.g. none of their cases are tried at the Court of the Headmen, Subordinate African Authority or African Authority. He warned that the situation was crying out for speedy control by the authorities before it was too late.<sup>53</sup>

The mention of Nyika by Mphoeng is sufficient evidence that the people referred to were the Vapostori. As mentioned previously, the Ngwato area was the domain of the LMS and no other church was tolerated by the tribal authorities, hence the hostility towards Vapostori religious practices.

Mphoeng's assertion was attested to by B. G. Sebeso of the Palapye Area Council, under which Lesenepola fell. Sebeso stated 'that the Lesenepola settlement was a large one and that it had ousted the village of the indigenous Bangwato inhabitants there who have trekked some miles away'.<sup>54</sup> He also claimed that the matter had been reported to the colonial government through Rasebolai, but the government 'pointed out a difficulty, namely that after a resident person had paid tax for two years, as several members of that community had done, he was henceforth regarded by law as a lawful resident of the Bechuanaland Protectorate, and his removal presented serious difficulties'. Again, according to Sebeso, while in some cases an order of extradition was indeed issued for repatriation of the illegal immigrants, it could not be carried out owing to a lack of transport. 'Nonetheless, he urged that the government should be approached with a view to the re-opening of consultations on the subject, and the removal of the immigrants'. O. Shashane, also of the Palapye Area Council, charged that if the illegal immigrants could not finance their repatriation, then they should be collected into village groups with a headman or overseer 'appointed by the Administration as all other inhabitants of our land'.<sup>55</sup>

After everybody else had spoken Tshekedi Khama (representing Tswapong Area Council) rose to make his contribution. He accused the African Authority of having delayed in acting on the matter. The conclusion of Tshekedi's submission is almost a prediction of the situation in Botswana today, with harsh economic and political conditions in Zimbabwe having forced thousands of Zimbabweans into Botswana, putting the country in an extremely difficult situation economically, socially and politically or diplomatically:

Civil strife among us has now ceased therefore there is no longer any excuse for delay or for fearing that any measures applied as suggested by council to deal with this evil would not take speedy effect. We should act promptly regarding this problem of immigrants while we yet have a large measure of control within our hands, and devise means of control, remembering at some time in future immigrants may be introduced into our country by force . . . We must devise ways and means now.<sup>56</sup>

53 KMM, TKP, Box 5/113, 'Minutes', 13–15 Aug. 1958, 16.

54 KMM, TKP, Box 5/113, 'Minutes', 13–15 Aug. 1958, 17.

55 KMM, TKP, Box 5/113, 'Minutes', 13–15 Aug. 1958, 18.

56 KMM, TKP, Box 5/113, 'Minutes', 13–15 Aug. 1958, 1.

Despite the Ngwato tribal leaders' argument that the Rhodesian illegal immigrants were responsible for committing crime, they did not provide concrete evidence to back up these claims. They only speculated that the immigrants were guilty of committing crime, a scenario similar to what obtains in contemporary Botswana as the Batswana make broad allegations regarding Zimbabweans as criminals. In winding up the discussion the Chairman of the Tribal Council and African Authority, Rasebolai, concurred with the submissions of the Councillors. He also blamed the taxation of immigrants, saying that it made extradition and repatriation almost impossible. 'He accepted Council's resolution that the suggestions for controlling this illegal influx of foreign persons be formulated by the General Purposes Committee and placed before Government for consideration'. The sources do not show what action was taken against the illegal immigrants, but by the 1960s the Vapostori were established in Serowe. Settlement in Serowe could mean that the immigrants were following the proper channels for residence and settlement.

Today they are widely referred to as 'Mazezuru' and their women are known for wearing white attire. The Vapostori are found almost exclusively in the working class parts of the country's urban areas. They also reside in some villages. They specialise in hawking, selling their home-made wares among other things, but they are also well represented in the taxi industry. They are said not to be interested in sending their children to school, and they do not rely on medical help from the clinics/hospitals. In mid-2004, during the government's nationwide polio vaccination campaign, the Vapostori refused on religious grounds to allow their infants to be vaccinated. This earned them the condemnation of the media and other quarters. Another stereotype associated with them in Gaborone is that they specialise in black-market foreign exchange. However, they have been accepted as citizens of Botswana and many still maintain relations with their relatives in Zimbabwe, welcoming them on visits to Botswana and being made welcome on visits to Zimbabwe.

## CONCLUSION

An effort has been made in this article to place the issue of the resentment experienced by Batswana towards Zimbabweans in a historical context. Although such a theme calls for further research, this contribution can be considered a starting point. Although the study concentrated on the colonial and tribal authorities in the Ngwato reserve, it is likely that the ideas and feelings expressed were representative of the general populace at the time. While the Batswana, particularly those on the Zimbabwean border, have on occasion illegally crossed to Zimbabwe for various reasons, it appears that illegal crossings by Zimbabweans into Botswana have been more problematic. However, as has been stated in this article, the situation of Zimbabweans is the result of long-standing political and economic hardships suffered by ordinary people at the hands of that country's political leadership. This was the case in both colonial and post-colonial dispensations. On the other hand, it has never

been easy for the Batswana to tolerate those Zimbabweans who entered Botswana and were allegedly guilty of committing crime. Unfortunately, the actions of Zimbabwean criminals have led to angry Batswana indiscriminately accusing all Zimbabweans in the country of being troublemakers. Needless to say, this has the potential to cause a serious diplomatic row between Botswana and Zimbabwe.