



‘Makererization’: Politics, Leadership and Management at the University of Botswana from 2011-2017

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I recently visited a friend in Soweto to pay my condolences after his wife died. While I was still in the process of greeting my bereaved friend, he said to me, “Thabo, I understand that you are the new Vice Chancellor for the University of Botswana, my condolences to you”!

Professor Thabo Fako

Abstract

This article examines an aspect of higher education leadership and university management through a critical appraisal of the leadership style and tenure of Professor Thabo Fako as Vice Chancellor (VC) of the University of Botswana (UB) from 2011 to 2017 and his attempts to dismantle the reforms of his predecessor. It addresses the important role played by the intersection between character, political strategy and administrative leadership in higher education reform. The article thus examines the manner in which these concurrently affect democratic and good corporate governance at university institutions, and as well the risks they pose in engendering widespread fear and institutional paralysis. It is written against the backdrop of a paper in 2004 by this VC castigating organizational restructuring undertaken by UB during that period. The article argues that state intervention in the selection and appointment of university management stalled reform and introduced a leader rendered paranoid by the selection process. ‘Makererization’ is used here to refer to the marginalization of UB by government through reduced funding and the VC’s persecution of university staff and students.

Keywords: Makererization, political patronage; paranoia; victimization; elite interests; corruption; higher education leadership; university management.

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Résumé

Cet article examine un aspect du leadership de l'enseignement supérieur et de la gestion des universités à travers une évaluation critique du style de leadership et du mandat de recteur de l'Université du Botswana du Professeur Thabo Fako, de 2011 à 2017, et ses tentatives de réforme de l'institution. L'article aborde le rôle important joué par un mélange de caractère, de stratégie politique et de leadership administratif dans la réforme de l'enseignement supérieur. L'article examine donc leur impact combiné sur la gouvernance démocratique et la bonne gouvernance managériale dans les établissements universitaires, ainsi que les risques qu'ils posent en engendrant une peur généralisée et une paralysie institutionnelle. Il est écrit contre une publication, en 2004, par ce recteur condamnant la restructuration organisationnelle entreprise par l'Université du Botswana pendant cette période. L'article soutient que l'intervention de l'État dans le choix et la nomination de la direction de l'université freine les réformes et introduit des dirigeants devenus paranoïaques du fait du processus de sélection. Le terme « makererisation » est utilisé en référence à la marginalisation de l'Université du Botswana par le gouvernement à travers la réduction du financement, et la persécution par le recteur du personnel universitaire et des étudiants.

Mots-clés : « makererisation », favoritisme politique, paranoïa, victimisation, intérêts d'élite, corruption, leadership de l'enseignement supérieur, gestion universitaire.

Introduction

According to the highly experienced former leader of several universities in the United States, Kenneth Shaw:

Leading is a process of persuasion and example by which one person induces others to take action in accordance with the leader's purpose and the institution's mission, vision and values.... I don't believe any leader can be successful without aligning his or her purposes with those of the institution and the people it serves and is served by. In fact, I'll go so far as to say that any leader who ignores values, vision and, people is doomed to a tenure of frustration and failure (Shaw 1999: 10).

Shaw aptly captures the aggressively opinionated and tantrum-prone Fako's fate as UB's ruthless leader from 2011 to 2017. Although six of UB's Vice Chancellors since its inception in 1982 faced protests and petitions by staff and students, Fako's Vice Chancellorship and leadership style were the most contentious and confrontational. Like most public universities the governance of UB while adhering to principles of good corporate governance

has a democratic touch to it. For instance, the process of recruiting vice chancellors and deputy Vice Chancellors for a maximum of two terms of five years each stipulates that after University Council has made the decision to advertise a position, management advertises it. Thereafter, candidates submit applications with a statement detailing their achievements and their vision for the institution. This is followed by candidates undergoing requisite tests with joint committee of council and senate shortlisting, interviewing and making recommendations to Council as the institution's highest decision making body (University of Botswana 2004). The nomination process constitutes something of an electoral college providing a popular mandate to a successful nominee.

A list containing the name of the candidate who gets the nod alongside the runners-up is then submitted to the Minister of Education and Skills Development who can either endorse the candidate or recommend an alternative.¹ Traditionally, this had been a mere formality as ministers often endorsed the name of the candidate leading the pack. In 2011, the name of historian, Professor Brian Mokopakgosi, former deputy Vice Chancellor for academic affairs at UB (1998-2008), appeared in the private media as Council's nominee. However, for the first time the minister decided against Council's choice and went for someone who was said to have been distant seventh in the shortlist. The 'fortunate' and history-making candidate was Thabo Fako.

The media noted that after the ruling Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) experienced its first split in 2010 the Minister for Education and Skills Development had convened a team of influential citizens sympathetic to the party to help it recover from the setback. Among the names mentioned in this group was that of Fako. Therefore, it was clear to the media that political maneuvering parachuted him into the vice chancellorship position in appreciation of his activism for the ruling party. Ominously, Mokopakgosi had previously co-authored a journal article concluding that unlike the impoverished opposition parties, BDP relies on "its incumbency to reward party activists and supporters by appointing them to positions in the diplomatic and civil services, and the councils, land boards, and tribal administration" (Molomo and Mokopakgosi 2000: 7). It seems Fako became the beneficiary of this patronage system which was largely not about meritocracy, and was susceptible to corruption and mismanagement.

Whereas in recent times BDP politicians have openly advocated that leadership positions in government and parastatal organizations be given to active and card-carrying party members, in the past there was room for merit instead of political expediency. Botswana's second president, Sir Ketumile Masire (1980-1998) writes that "People like Klaas Motshidisi,

commissioner of labour, and Mike Molefane, who headed the Botswana Development Corporation, to name but two, were well known to have links to opposition parties. But as long as they were professional in their jobs, there was no reason for us to deprive the country of their skills just because of their politics” (Masire 2006: 99). In 2016 former UB sociology lecturer, Dr Patrick Molutsi despite being a capable administrator, could not continue being the chief executive officer (CEO) of Human Resource Development Council (HRDC) owing to his historical links with the opposition Botswana National Front (BNF). He was replaced by a well-known BDP activist and a former UB lecturer. A consistently star performing and prize-winning CEO at Motor Vehicle Accident Fund (MVA) could not have his contract renewed because his political affiliation was not clear (Malema 2016: 53).

The sociologist Fako’s attitude was at variance with Botswana’s national principle of *botho* which is “one of the tenets of African culture – the concept of a person who has a well-rounded character, who is well-mannered, courteous and disciplined” (Republic of Botswana 1997: 2). It is further said that “‘*Botho*’ defines a process for earning respect by first giving it, and to gain empowerment by empowering others.... It disapproves of antisocial, disgraceful, inhuman and criminal behaviour, and encourages social justice for all”. Experts on leadership studies do consider behavioural aspect or interpersonal relations. While many UB staff members dismissed Fako as a psychopath and a mean-spirited megalomaniac whose misguided word was law, this paper examines aspects of his character that undermined good corporate governance at UB under his watch. He tried to ensure that any real or make-believe challenge to his misrule was “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short”, to borrow Thomas Hobbes famous dictum.

There are parallels between Fako’s character and that of Joshua Galeforolwe, another chief executive of a government owned enterprise – Air Botswana. According to David Magang, former cabinet minister for transport and communications under which Air Botswana fell, Galeforolwe was a skillful manager who transformed Air Botswana from a loss-making into a profit-making entity. “His Achilles heel... was his inability to get along with the people in his charge. He was not, in behavioural science terms, the country club variety of manager. Some of the people he frustrated, owing apparently, to his lack of empathy and his uncompromising personality, quit the company” writes Magang (2008: 613). Magang further observes that “others took to extreme measures only associated with make-believe, Hollywood-type stunts, like a Motswana pilot who plunged the aircraft he was piloting into two others parked on the runway and died in the process”. Whereas the Air Botswana board took into account Galeforolwe’s star performance at the enterprise “they were of the view that the effectiveness

of a leader was not solely about how impressive the figures in the balance sheet were; *botho* did count as well and was, in fact, of equal importance. They recommended that he be dismissed". However, for Fako compromised *botho* and despotic impulse may not have been major factors in his fall from grace but his open criticism of the ruling elite's treatment of UB in relation to its supposedly politically connected private competitors.

Fako's attitude and leadership style dovetails with Francis Nyamnjoh and Nantang Jua's observation below in terms of leadership of African universities.

Among other people much of the information in this paper was provided by current and former employees of the UB through email and verbal communication. I avoid disclosing most of their names because some were worried about possible victimization.²

The 'Makerization' of the University in Post-colonial Africa

The economic and political deterioration in post-colonial Africa has in many respects been mirrored by the state of higher education or the university. Africa's mostly state-owned universities served the agenda of unaccountable ruling elites which severely curtailed academic freedom and productivity. To this effect, Nyamnjoh and Jua observe that:

Education in Africa, from colonial times to the postcolony, has been the victim of various forms of violence, the most devastating of which is the violence of cultural and political conversion: externally and internally driven initiatives and processes intended to domesticate, harness, transform, alter, remodel, adapt, or reconstruct Africa and Africans through schools and universities to suit new ways of being, seeing, doing, and thinking. As a result of such violence, educational systems have privileged mimicry and transformed epistemologies informed by partial theories to metanarratives of arrogance, superiority, and intolerance of creative differences. Even when clear alternatives are imagined to the current irrelevance in education, economic difficulties render their realization extremely difficult. Repressive states have perpetuated and capitalized upon this predicament by manipulating desperate academics into compliance and complicity with mediocrity (Nyamnjoh and Jua 2002: 1).

In addition to the politicization of the university in Africa noted by Nyamnjoh and Jua, it has been severely affected by underfunding, brain drain, undue government interference, disturbances and closures (Onyejekwe 1993). Persecution by governments led to many emerging and vocal African scholars fleeing their countries for Western universities where they became household names in their different fields. This includes Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Ali Mazrui in Kenya, Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka in Nigeria, and Mahmood Mamdani in Uganda.

Whereas universities across sub-Saharan Africa have experienced this development, one example that stands out and is used as a reference point in this paper is the once celebrated Makerere University in Uganda. Established in 1922 as a college by British colonialists Makerere's reputation became so impressive that it later became a regional university for East Africa and *alma mater* for some of the region's statesmen such as Julius Nyerere, Mwai Kibaki and Milton Obote among others. Renowned scholars such as the literary critic Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and political scientist Mahmood Mamdani are Makerere's alumni. Makerere even earned itself the nickname 'the Harvard of Africa'.

Some observers trace the decline of Makerere to the political turmoil and civil war that afflicted Uganda in the 1970s and 1980s. In 2009, Chancellor of Makerere, Professor Mondo Kagonyera, blamed Makerere's decline "into intellectual dwarfism on President Idi Amin's dictatorial government between 1971 and 1979, when intellectuals were intimidated and afraid to identify themselves in society" (*Sunday Vision* 18 July 2009).

Whereas, the government of Yoweri Museveni, starting in 1986 following the civil war, brought some recovery to Makerere this was later followed by reduced funding and stagnation. Mahmood Mamdani in his book *Scholars in the marketplace* examines the neo-liberal reforms at Makerere from 1989 to 2005. He concludes that while the study focuses on Makerere "it also illuminates larger issues raised by neo-liberal reform of higher education. Because neo-liberal reform at Makerere has been held up by the World Bank as the model for transformation of higher education on the African continent, these issues have a particular resonance for the African context" (Mamdani 2007: vii). This development led to the commercialization and even "massification" of higher education which Ane Turner Johnson and Joan B Hirt, and Bob Jessop describe as "academic capitalism" (Johnson and Hirt 2011; and Jessop 2017). Like most universities in Africa mismanagement of funds by Makerere authorities and massification of education also contributed to failure to regain its past glory. Makerere's fate was not helped by emergence of new universities which ended its traditional monopoly.

It should be noted that reduced state funding of universities and commercialization or commoditization of education or knowledge became a global phenomenon which affected universities even in Western countries, South Africa and Botswana owing to globalization (Tabulawa 2007). Whereas UB has had its fair share of disturbances and closures over the decades, the country's phenomenal diamond-led economic growth saw UB being well-funded. The institution was able to attract some leading scholars from both Africa and the West. However, in recent years Botswana's economy has faced serious challenges with unemployment of graduates and others reaching a disturbing level.

Until about a decade ago UB was the only university in Botswana and to some extent this contributed to its prestige. Just like Makerere the emergence of other public and private universities have given UB severe competition for students and government funding. So intense has been this development that UB had to respond by branding itself in a bid to become attractive to potential students particularly during the tenure of Fako's predecessor, Professor Bojosi Otlhogile.

It should be noted that unlike governments in other African countries, the Botswana government largely avoided direct persecution of academics which became Fako's one-man crusade. The deportation of political science lecturer Professor Kenneth Good in 2005 (Pegg 2005 and Taylor 2006) was a rarity. President Festus Mogae (1998-2008), who deported Good, only accused UB citizen academics of being preoccupied with narrow issues of personal welfare as opposed to national development, and also said they promoted tribalism in Botswana (Makgala and Gumbo 2017).

Thabo Fako's Condemnation of Organizational Restructuring at UB

By the last decade of the twentieth century UB was engaged in organizational reforms during which Fako was an active participant by virtue of being the institution's Deputy Vice Chancellor. His one term as Deputy Vice Chancellor ended in 1998 and around 2004 he penned a paper entitled "Reflections on organizational restructuring and change in a southern African university: The case of the University of Botswana". Here he says that the contemplation of organizational restructuring at UB in the mid-1980s was not a response to any major management crisis but proactive planning meant to usher in a more effective management as the institution anticipated significant growth.

He writes that the organizational restructuring UB was embarking upon was influenced by larger global managerial revolution traceable to the 1950s in the United States, and escalated in Britain during Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's administration. The objective of restructuring was to deal with issues "of overworked senior management; a weak middle management; a weak administrative and technical support staff; inefficient, costly, overstaffed and under-utilised operating levels; a reward system that had little relation to performance; and poor staff morale" (Fako c.2004). Fako's verdict is that:

After most aspects of organisational restructuring were implemented at UB, unprecedented administrative paralysis, logistical failure and inexplicable delays crept into the system.... There was uncertainty, helplessness, cynicism, low morale and a sense of despair as predictable, understandable

and, therefore, acceptable outcomes became a thing of the past. Demands for explanations of inaction, delays and unacceptable decisions punctuated Minutes of Departmental and Faculty level committees.

Positions of administrative responsibility held by academic and non-academic staff assumed unprecedented importance. *Authoritarian arbitrariness and top-down communication increasingly replaced open and transparent consultation, democratic participation, consistency, predictability and relative efficiency within the institutional decision-making system* [emphasis added].

He further observes that “the new managerial ethic, which places administrators before academics, and systematically excludes them from meaningful participation in building the character and traditions of the university, has denied the institution creativity and vitality”. Instead of UB being run efficiently the restructuring process only led to “tangible failure, decline and deterioration” (Fako c.2004).

Professor Bojosi Otlhogile’s Organizational Restructuring

In 2003, Professor Bojosi Otlhogile, law lecturer and a cultured man, succeeded American Professor Sharon Siverts (1998-2003) as the new Vice Chancellor. Otlhogile’s tenure coincided with the emergence of new tertiary institutions and private universities. Competition for students and government funding became fierce with UB being at the receiving end. Later government subvention to UB was also significantly reduced owing to slow economic growth and competing national priorities.

Otlhogile responded by introducing radical and far reaching reforms to UB’s organizational structure with emphasis on decentralization. The reforms were spearheaded by Deputy Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, Professor Frank Youngman. The restructuring was also inspired by UB’s 25th anniversary in existence with a perception study undertaken for people to say what they thought of UB and its future. Among others, the result of the study was a recommendation for repositioning of UB to compete effectively with the new players. This development also led to the rebranding initiative which entailed visual and non-visual aspects. The visual aspects involved changing the design of UB’s logo to an abstract entity believed to be in sync with modernity (Makgala 2018). Another visual aspect was the replacement of UB’s gowns with new ones depicting colours of Botswana flag and national brand. According to Professor Otlhogile, the national colours were adopted in this way before they could be “usurped by newcomers” in the higher education industry (Makgala 2018).

The non-visual aspects of the rebranding exercise were in the form of a new document called "Strategy for Excellence". This was about repositioning UB as a truly African university with its research output intensified. However, despite the refrain of intensifying research what actually happened was intensification of bureaucracy with countless committees and endless meetings. Performance management system (PMS) was also introduced and its stringent demands made it unpopular with members of staff. Academics complained that PMS was more stringent for academics than management and support staff.

Another reform in the conditions of service was that one could be promoted to the rank of associate professor only if they had a PhD. The new conditions also borrowed heavily from the natural sciences in terms of publication requirements. For instance, heavy emphasis was placed on publication of articles in peer reviewed international journals as opposed to books. This one-fits-all condition was strongly opposed by people in humanities but to no avail.

Another non-visual reform was an initiative called revised organization of the academic structure (ROAS). It sought to radically change the arrangement of faculties into schools and make enrolment for programmes and course offerings flexible to students. Over the years UB had been accused of being too rigid in its course offerings which made it hard or impossible for students to enroll for courses they liked across different faculties. Nevertheless, the reforms recommended by ROAS were seen as too radical and cumbersome by some section of the academic staff.

During Otlhogile's tenure major and ultra-modern facilities such as construction of the school of medicine, stadium and olympic-size swimming pool among others, which had been initiated by his predecessor Sharon Siverts, were completed. Nevertheless, like all UB Vice Chancellors before him, Otlhogile also received petitions from staff and students protesting against his administration and even calling for his immediate resignation. In some instances court cases were instituted against his commissions or omissions sometimes by the student representative council (SRC) and staff trade unions. In his farewell speech in March 2011 he said that "I know I presided over some very controversial projects over the years. The policy on political activities on university campuses, parking and Performance Management System. Policy on political activity and PMS were deemed to undermine academic freedom" (Baputaki 18 March 2011).

Nevertheless, as Vice Chancellor, the modest Otlhogile commented extensively on draft articles given to him by emerging scholars which boasted their morale. He also made time to review articles sent to him from journals such as *Botswana Notes and Records*.

Thabo Fako as New Vice Chancellor

When Fako became the new Vice Chancellor in April 2011 the UB community, which had yearned for change, gladly welcomed him. Like with previous appointments of new Vice Chancellors the mood and hopes were high. This was articulated by Never Tshabang, president of University of Botswana Academic and Senior Support Staff Union (UBASSSU):

Fako has served the university with dedication, honour and distinction.... He [Tshabang] stated that deteriorating working conditions and low staff morale resulting in demotivation and the loss of staff, flawed Performance Management System, thorny supplementary examinations, impending reorganisation of academic structures [ROAS], bad parking policy, acerbic employer-employee relations and the lack of organisational democracy among other challenges, are clear indicators of crisis.

Tshabang said that UBASSSU trusts that under Professor Fako they will collectively meet the real, many and serious challenges they face, including staff welfare. "The union is looking forward to a healthy working relationship with Professor Fako, that UB be able to deliver on its core business and be a leading academic centre of excellence. We also want to appreciate the government's choice of Professor Fako as the next Vice Chancellor of the UB", he said (18 March 2011).

Once in office it did not take long for Fako, the "messiah", to pursue with zealotry the reversal of his predecessor's reforms. Unclear instruction was issued setting aside some aspects of PMS. The requirement of PhD in promotion to the professorial level was lifted among other conditions. ROAS was also set aside to great acclaim. This development gave rise to excitement by staff with a colleague in the department of sociology, sending an email giving highly positive feedback before the customary first 100 days elapsed for Fako.

Fako also strongly campaigned against the marginalization of UB by government which was giving more resources and hefty remuneration to staff at the recently established Botswana international university of science and technology (BIUST). This development adversely affected UB as it lost key staff to BIUST for greener pastures. In his campaign Fako enlisted support of the country's political parties by inviting their representatives to his office to plead with them. He told the politicians that the competition between UB and BIUST was unnecessary and could prove counterproductive instead of the two complementing one another as public universities. "Dr Kesitigile Gobotswang, the Secretary General for Botswana Congress Party (BCP), who is also a former UB academic says the crisis facing the University of Botswana is the politicisation of the institution by the government and

lack of tolerance for ideas from the opposition parties. Gobotswang says they are worried by the composition of the University of Botswana council which he alleged is predominantly made up of members of the ruling party” (Masokola 2015).

The matter was also raised in parliament as a concern that the once mighty UB was being brought to its knees by government. This seems to have done the trick because not long after housing and car allowances of about 40 per cent of staffs’ salaries were introduced at UB.

At the national level there was a groundswell of dissatisfaction by the public and political leaders against the new logo. People complained that unlike the old logo the new one did not clearly depict UB history and national heritage (Makgala 2018). Fako’s administration reinstated the old logo much to the delight of many at UB and nationally.

With the economy not doing well and government subvention to UB decreasing Fako became more spirited in his approach to government which he accused of giving preferential treatment to private universities. For its part, government through minister for newly established ministry of tertiary education, science and research claimed that UB was no longer attractive to potential students because it offered courses the market no longer needed. While the private media appreciated this reasoning it also supported Fako and argued that government should not let a public university like UB decline while supporting private universities some of which had inadequate and poor facilities such as libraries among others. The media classified these as “fly-by-night” institutions and ruling party politicians were suspected of receiving kickbacks from them. Occasionally, damaging reports appeared in the media whereby foreign lecturers at some of these institutions were exposed as having spurious qualifications.

In October 2016 President Ian Khama officially opened a magnificent ultra-modern sports complex at UB and Fako capitalized on the event to plead with him to protect and jealously guard against the trivial use of the designation “university”. “He said that university along with other major national institutions, such as the national army and the police force, were regarded everywhere as an integral part of the core institutions of a sovereign state therefore the permission to use the title ‘university’ must not come willy-nilly” (*Sunday Standard* 20 October 2016).

Fako’s One-man Reign of Terror and Makererization of UB

Fako set the tone for despotism early once ensconced in his imperial throne seemingly consumed by insecurity, paranoia and incorrigible snobbery. He unleashed a reign of terror on staff and students, and generally made the

atmosphere at the institution one of fear. Reports emerged that meetings he chaired often had toxic mood as discussions were not collegial with colleagues dressed down and harangued like hooligans sometimes in the presence of their juniors. He was also reported to have been in a habit of spending a lot of time in meetings bragging and raving about his alleged direct contact with the presidency of Botswana. The shenanigan was ostensibly calculated at intimidating and intensifying fear among those bombarded with it. Fear had become the order of the day at UB and this was not helped by whispers that the notorious and dreaded Directorate on Intelligence Services (DIS) operated on UB campus. At one point during the faculty of humanities board meeting the head of the department (HoD) of English expressed his frustration owing to some UB procedure, and true to form instead of Fako politely correcting him, he went berserk and lashed out at him claiming that one of the words he had used was totally unacceptable. The poor HoD was forced to apologize profusely like a hapless pupil to a schoolyard bully. As if the HoD's sincere apology and trepidation were not enough, not long after Fako summoned the dean of humanities and the "offending" HoD to his office to further pursue the matter.

It is also said that it was not uncommon for deputy Vice Chancellors, directors, deans, and heads of departments to be threatened with dismissal. Some of them were indeed removed from their positions rather unceremoniously. Some of these officials could not bear the abuse anymore and resigned or threatened to resign.

In 2011, Deputy Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, the affable Youngman resigned presumably owing to Fako's onslaught on the reforms Youngman and Otlhogile had initiated as the rebranding exercise. The suspension or abandonment of ROAS was believed to have been the final straw that broke the camel's back. Possibly, Fako was also settling old scores in certain instances. Commenting on the development Never Tshabang cautioned that while staff members were pleased with Fako setting aside ROAS, he ought to tread careful and avoid targeting and hurting people but rather concentrate on doing what was of greater good for UB (Keoreng 28 July 2011). However, Tshabang's wise counsel went unheeded.

Toxic relations also emerged between Fako and the staff of the newly established school of medicine. Since it was hard for UB to recruit medical experts, "competitive" remuneration packages were put in place to recruit and retain them although this was not necessarily successful (kebaetse *et al.* 2016). (This was before the introduction of housing and car allowances mentioned above). It looks like Fako would have none of this and decided to significantly reduce their wages as he believed that nobody should earn more than him

(Weeks 27 June 2015). A good number of staff in the school of medicine, some of whom were recruited from North America and Europe, resigned. Fako's onslaught and resultant paralysis on the multi-billion pula medical school makes for grim reading as told by staff members of the school:

The high ranking committee (HRC) was established by cabinet to oversee the planning and costing of the establishment of the medical school. Importantly, the HRC was a decision making platform for all the important stakeholders....

Shortage of doctors and frequent outages of essential drugs and equipment not only make medical training difficult but also demoralises instructors and learners.... These problems and difficulties were exacerbated by the collapse of the HRC in 2013 as UB no longer saw its usefulness. The new Vice Chancellor, Professor Thabo Fako, was of the opinion that the school no longer needed the special project status but should function as all other schools and faculties of the university. This decision, however, aborted many of the early gains and significantly delayed others including the creation of training positions for the MMed programmes, the implementation of the joint staff agreement and commissioning of the [university] teaching hospital....

The collapse of the HRC destroyed the vehicle that was driving the commissioning of the hospital, which is still not yet open....

The failure to establish training positions for the MMed trainees, as recommended by the HRC, is significantly impairing the school's ability to train specialist doctors for Botswana (Nkomazana *et al.* 2016: 237, 239-240).

At Okavango research institute (ORI) in Maun, Fako denigrated staff and whimsically demanded that they justify why the institute should not close down and staff relocated to UB's main campus in Gaborone. The humiliation was so unbearable that some staff members including the director of ORI resigned. In another curious development the dean of faculty of social sciences, Professor Happy Siphambe and his deputy were dragged before a disciplinary committee and stripped of their positions following allegations of misconduct. When the chairman of UBASSSU, Professor Thapelo Otlogetswe, was informed and sought clarity on the matter he was also frogmarched to a disciplinary hearing (Mooka 17 January 2016).

The dismissed dean took UB to court for reinstatement and later won the case. A lecturer in the law department, who had appeared alongside the former dean at the disciplinary hearing, later applied for promotion to the associate professor rank but was denied it after all due processes had endorsed his dossier. Naturally, he strongly suspected victimization for his close association with the former dean.³ Charges of misconduct were laid against an unprecedented number of staff members accused of alleged misconduct of one form or the other. Most of them sued UB and won. It

was said that the five years of Fako's tenure witnessed UB being sued more than the previous decades put together, and it lost most of the cases with costs. This disturbing trend was even discussed in parliament.

In what seemed to be a case of pull him down syndrome, this author was obdurately and callously subjected to psychiatric and psychological examination for simply pleading that he continue passionately and productively leading research and mentoring instead of being conscripted into a bureaucratic position. His dean, Professor Andy Chebanne, was severely reprimanded and harassed at every turn ostensibly to force him to resign from the deanship for trying to reason with the hierarchy on the matter. It was only when legal action was resorted to by the author that the hierarchy beat a hasty retreat and sanity prevailed. Appointments to departmental headship were generally characterized by double standards as the Vice Chancellor sometimes rode roughshod over departmental nominees and imposed his choices, sometimes seemingly as "reward" or punishment for the appointee. The bullying, mobbing and victimization of staff with the Vice Chancellor's alleged connivance seemed widespread with some cases having severe psychological consequences on the victims (e.g. see Pheko 2018).

Media reports appeared indicating that Fako was on the offensive against some professors whom he believed were plotting to dislodge him. Deans of the faculties of humanities and education were mentioned alongside that of social sciences as being on the firing line for their alleged ambition. "Of these three, Prof Siphambe is seen as the greatest threat to Fako since he is the potential next Vice Chancellor, while Prof Tabulawa [education] is seen as the most cantankerous, and an instigator. Fako fears that when his contract ends it may not be renewed and he may be replaced by Prof Siphambe. To try and thwart this, Fako has charged Prof Siphambe with gross misconduct and dragged him before a disciplinary committee" (*Mmegi* 30 January 2015). This scenario is not being recounted here for its validity or otherwise but to demonstrate that Fako's leadership style created a conducive environment for conspiracy theories and claims of witch-hunt.

Fairly early on Fako clashed with director for legal affairs and his deputy leading to their immediate resignation from UB at the same time. Another major resignation was that of deputy Vice Chancellor for academic affairs, Professor Otlogetswe Totolo.

Another serious concern was Fako's penchant for appointments on prolonged acting basis which seemed to have been a delusional strategy of his consolidating power but had negative impact and paralysis on UB. It is said that by the time he bit the dust almost a quarter to about half of UB management positions were not substantial but acting.⁴ The resignation

of director of legal affairs saw the position remaining vacant for about five years with Fako himself being the acting director. This development brought to a halt matters of projects money. UB lost millions of pulas and US dollars in relation to research funds because things would pile at the Vice Chancellor's desk for months on end. For example, UB including ORI had a German funded project called Southern African Science Service Center for Climate Change and Adaptive Land Management (SASSCAL), ORI's share in this project was P10 million (about US\$1 million), at some point ORI had to wait for almost seven months for Fako to append his signature and have the money allowed into UB. In 2016, ORI had a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) funded project to prepare the Chobe Integrated Landuse plan, they waited for months for permission from the Vice Chancellor to sign the document until UNDP gave up on ORI and gave the project to somebody else (Email from Mbaiwa, 18 March 2017). At one point two professors in the faculty of humanities secured the desperately needed funding of P500,000 from National AIDS Coordinating Agency (NACA) but Fako refused point-blank to sign the contract. Many other projects were lost to UB in similar fashion.

The previously simple and straightforward application for sabbatical leave became a protracted, inconsistent and frustrating process. Some applications were returned for revision on the grounds that they had too many planned activities. Ironically, in some cases where applicants had tried to have fewer planned activities in line with new developments their applications were rejected as too lean.

Unlike his immediate predecessor Fako was too aloof and did not respond to emails for assistance on academic exercises. David Magang, a former long serving cabinet minister, influential entrepreneur, member of the BDP, and a prolific writer informed the author that in 2015 Fako agreed to be a keynote speaker at the launch of Magang's book entitled *Delusions of grandeur*. Nonetheless, towards the day of the launch Fako reneged on his promise arguing that the book was too critical of government's economic policies. It seems he did not want to be seen as consorting with people who express critical but constructive views on his political patrons. It also explains his attitude towards academic freedom.

Dashed Hopes: News of Fako not Extending his Contract

Very early in 2016 news broke that Fako would not seek contract renewal for a second term. Ominously, contracts for deputy Vice Chancellor finance and administration and his colleague deputy Vice Chancellor student affairs had ended a year prior.

In this section we also turn the focus on the students and Fako's leadership. Media reports indicated that just like staff rejoiced when Fako became Vice Chancellor "Students were also looking up to Fako as their concerns were not addressed during Otlhogile's era" (Ranthatsa 11 February 2016). However, the relations between Fako and the student community also became acerbic. This is better explained by the journalist Janson Ranthatsa:

Kago Mokotedi who served as the president of the Student Representative Council said Fako never deserved to be the Vice Chancellor hence his decision to step down comes as a relief on the part of the students.... 'Fako lacked accountability and viewed the SRC not as equal stakeholders but his adversary.... It was during his reign that; politics were banned within campus, popular student bar, 411 closed, intervarsity games were suspended, SRC was ripped off its benefits like free on campus accommodation and malicious charges were laid against the SRC', he explained. Mokotedi called on the relevant authorities to review the procedure on the appointment of the Vice Chancellor and the chairman of the university council adding that the current one was flawed.

Another former SRC president, Jacob Kelebeng said Fako was too philosophical and autocratic hence reluctant to solve problems emanating at the university. 'As someone who served under his leadership twice, I realised that Fako's working relationship with students and academic staff was shaky because of his favouritism and pettiness'.... Kelebeng said the only thing he appreciates about Fako is his decision to change the university logo though the university spent millions of pula on the exercise (Ranthatsa 11 February 2016).

Another former SRC president, Richard Khumoekae, said Fako was "bossy and too rigid for the contemporary world" (Mooka 29 January 2016). It should be noted that the SRC has over the years been the bastion of opposition activists, and this may explain the friction between student leaders and Fako as they belonged to rival parties.

Interestingly, it was also alleged that Fako was stepping aside because he had fallen out of favour with his principals at the ministry. It was claimed that the reason for this was government's interference in the running of UB. In particular, the state of the art university hospital at UB was said to be a facility government wanted to control directly which frustrated Fako.

Advertisement for the Vice Chancellor position was made. Many staff members and students looked forward to change of regime at UB. However, hopes were soon dashed when Fako's contract was renewed by the minister. The reasoning was that all critical three positions of deputy Vice Chancellors had been filled up with new and inexperienced office holders. The departure

of Fako would have meant that even the Vice Chancellor would be a new official, a situation deemed as working against continuity. Nevertheless, Fako's autocratic leadership did not change, and in November 2016 a newly elected UBASSSU executive committee submitted a hard hitting petition with a long list of 36 grievances against Fako's leadership since 2011.

UBASSSU's Hard-hitting Petition Against Fako's Leadership

It should be stated that the presentation of the petition to UB council chairman, Parks Tafa, was characterized by very low attendance by staff and union members. This summed up the extent of fear of victimization that gripped the institution. Tafa's chairmanship had always been controversial as it was seen as politicization of council by virtue of him being an office holder in the ruling BDP. The petition declared a motion of no confidence on Fako and demanded Tafa to send him packing within seven days of the petition.

The litany of grievances outlined in the petition included lack of consultation with staff by Fako since his appointment in 2011. It was said that he had disregarded the practice of collegial annual address of staff to update them on the implementation of the university's strategies in fulfilling its mandate (UBASSSU 8 November 2016). The petition indicated that Fako had only addressed staff on 20 October 2016 after almost six years. Even then his address was dismissed as having lacked substance.

He was also accused of having suspended ROAS yet even as late as November 2016 "we don't know nor understand what the status of ROAS is since its unceremonious and questionable suspension without a word from Council" (UBASSSU 8 November 2016). To be fair to Fako, for all his sins when he stopped ROAS this was hailed as a step in the right direction by the then leadership of UBASSSU as noted above. Nevertheless, the petition worried that Fako did not replace ROAS with an alternative coherent organizational restructuring arrangement. He was also accused of unilaterally trying to institute unsanctioned restructuring of UB among others through the centre for continuing education (CCE) which was stopped through litigation by affected staff members.

The Vice Chancellor's administrative and decision-making style and operations were said to be arbitrary, authoritarian, clouded with secrecy, and prejudicial to the affected individual staff members whose welfare and career paths were disrupted while the effective functioning of their departments and units was also curtailed.

UBASSSU raised serious concern regarding lack of or delayed admission of students which had unpleasant implication on the security of employment for the academic staff owing to declining student numbers enrolling at UB. It was felt that the Vice Chancellor had failed to convince government to fully support UB in terms of having sufficient students in programmes it offered.

Concern was also expressed on “a growing trend where minutes of some upper decision-making structures are indiscriminately manipulated to put staff at a disadvantage in disciplinary matters”. This was said to be institutionalized as no action was ever taken against the perpetrators by the Vice Chancellor whom at one point he himself was accused of forgery by altering council minutes in order to end a contract of a staff member. The victim took the matter to Court of Appeal and its president was reported to have been shocked by Fako’s forgery of the council minutes (Pheage 8-14 February 2017).

Fako’s penchant for expensive international travel was pointed out as disturbing. “We have never been taken into confidence about the institutional benefits of the Vice Chancellor’s globetrotting in his first term of office. The only obvious benefits we know of are those accruing to him in terms of the pleasure of the adventure of global travel, and meeting billionaires (as he has sometimes bragged about it), as well as personal emoluments in the form of per diem claims” (UBASSSU 8 November 2016).

The union also demanded that council involve the union in instituting a committee of inquiry to investigate a broad range of allegations of maladministration, corruption and financial irregularities during Fako’s tenure.

Government’s Suspension of Fako and his Face-saving Resignation

UB’s financial woes worsened as 2016 wore on and the minister responsible for UB and his deputy were unbending on their position that UB should adapt or perish in the new higher education market. However, given Fako’s arrogance and craving for globetrotting he could not appear at some critical platforms such as parliamentary committee on statutory bodies and enterprises (PCSBE) to make a case for UB. In September 2016 Fako sent his deputy Vice Chancellor for student affairs (also acting as deputy Vice Chancellor for academic affairs), Professor Martin Mokgwathi, to represent him at PCSBE and this greatly annoyed the committee chairman, Guma Moyo. He condemned Fako’s attitude of not appearing before the committee himself as out of order and undermined it. He even threatened to jail him for what he felt amounted to insolence. Moyo also worried that Fako had previously avoided appearing before public accounts committee (PAC) of parliament. The annoyed Moyo chased Mokgwathi away (Batenegi 19 September 2016).

It was not until November 2016 that Fako swallowed his pride and made an appearance at PCSBE. Perhaps, mindful of the UBASSSU petition, he set aside his political loyalty and made a strongly-worded accusation of government as seemingly hell-bent on starving UB of funding and students to ensure its demise. It was reported that projected figures showed that private institutions would enroll more students than public institutions. According to a report produced by HRDC “the enrolment at tertiary level has almost doubled, rising from 31,129 in 2007/08 financial year to 60,583 in the 2014/15 financial year. During the 2014/15 financial year, out of the 60,583 students enrolled in tertiary institutions, private tertiary institutions accounted for 42.6 per cent of the students. A drastic growth by almost all private institutions” (Masokola 29 November 2016). This phenomenal growth of private tertiary institutions was taking place alongside controversial debate questioning their credibility, ownership, accreditation, quality of courses they offered and professionalism of some of their staff.

Fako was also reported to have said that “government should understand that the university has already made some commitments by signing contracts with academic staff and such decisions by government continue to sink the university in crisis” (Masokola 29 November 2016). It was stated that in addition to the above concerns government had also failed to pay UB tuition fees for three consecutive financial years. Fako said that the institution needed about P1 billion to cover operational costs but for the past three years it received P776 million, P714 million and P703 million respectively.

He then went for the jugular as “he openly stated that some private institutions have been given an illusion of being a ‘university’ while in actual fact they are not, given their capacity, resources and the learning environment. To me a university is a prestigious institution, and the name ‘university’ should be protected” (Masokola 29 November 2016). This seems to have been an effective presentation of which Moyo sympathized with and blamed government and HRDC for UB woes. Private newspaper editorials also supported Fako and lambasted government’s mistreatment of UB. National trade unions also threw their weight behind UB against what was viewed as unfair competition.

In mid-January 2017 it was reported that council was under pressure to devise a strategy to sack Fako as a result of expression of no-confidence in the direction he was leading UB. It was alleged that Fako and Dr Alfred Madigele, Minister for Tertiary Education, Research, Science and Technology, had fallen out and their relations ebbed very low. “Impeccable sources say Fako’s remarks blaming the Government for under-funding, as well as harbouring intentions to collapse the UB, was the last straw that broke the camel’s back” (Kayawe 13

January 2017). When reached for his side of the story Madigele dismissed the view that Fako's tirade at PCSBE had any impact on his ministry's relations with UB. "As a Ministry, we are concerned about the way things are at UB, as well as the negative perception that has been created around it", Madigele was cited as saying (Kayawe 13 January 2017).

To make matters worse for Fako, students went on strike complaining of delayed payment of their subsistence allowance by government. In the process some students rioted, destroyed property and looted shops on campus. Madigele responded by closing UB until 6 March 2017. This development took place while Fako was away.

Communication appeared stating that Fako had been suspended but soon it was announced that he had tendered a resignation letter (UB, 17 March 2017). He immediately went on sabbatical leave which he had made very difficult or impossible for others – a case of double standards. Former SRC president, Mokotedi, who claimed to have chafed under the full wrath of Fako's yoke or "the Fako Syndrome" as he called it, danced on the grave of Fako's doomed second term tenure through a letter in the media (Mooketedi, 24 February 2017). Nonetheless, like any despotic ruler throughout history, Fako also had his praise-singer(s). For instance, a lone staff member, who disparaged UB professors, described him as "a great leader and a good Vice Chancellor". In mid-April an anonymous pro-Fako diatribe appeared in the *WeekendPost* slandering UB professors. It also vilified and de-campaigned those perceived as angling to succeed Fako as Vice Chancellor (Anonymous, 15-21 April 2017). The vicious and libelous diatribe also pontificated on how UB could be run efficiently.

Following Fako's exit an acting Vice Chancellor was appointed with indication that by September a new substantive office holder would be anointed. However, by the beginning of November no one had been appointed. Fako's legacy of having many management positions held on acting capacity affected the functioning of UB because some office holders, who hoped to be appointed on substantive basis, were unwilling to make decisions that would jeopardize their chances. This paralysis led to a disappointed European Union university teacher development advisor joking that the UB was like Hollywood because everybody was "acting".

The Likely Reason for the Ruling Elite's Loss of Confidence in Fako

It is highly unlikely that Fako was suspended for aggravating the alleged negative perception of UB. The BDP does not take kindly to party member criticizing its government in public. Even in parliament members who express strong reservations against government have been forced to retract their

statements and apologize publicly. In a worse-case scenario a parliamentarian for Tonota constituency was recalled as the party's candidate for the general election. This development took place despite the parliamentary immunity guaranteed to members against victimization (Molomo 2012).

The BDP demands total obedience and praise-singing from its members. Therefore, for Fako, who had been done an extraordinary favour with the Vice Chancellorship, criticizing government could have made him viewed as disloyal. His castigation of government for supporting what was seen as "Micky Mouse" universities may have rubbed some elements in the ruling elite with vested interest in these institutions the wrong way. An editorial comment by the local and private *Telegraph* newspaper is quite instructive, "the biggest challenge to University of Botswana has come from political corruption.... Government officials, clearly taking instructions from their political masters have been capricious and manipulative in their disbursement of tuition fees" (*Telegraph* 3 November 2016). It continued, "over the recent years we have seen private colleges that have no claim to being called colleges enjoying excessive patronage in the form of government sponsored students. There is now ample evidence that suggests some of the money ends up lining the pockets of these political elite, a thing that could not happen had the money been sent to finance students at the University of Botswana". It has been observed that in recent years government has shown astonishing unwillingness to combat growing elite corruption and mismanagement (Mogalakwe and Nyamnjoh 2017).

One wonders why Fako ran riot at UB for such a long time without council reining his despotic impulse in. We can only hazard an informed guess that as a political appointee his political patrons had to maintain a fiction of confidence on him, and it was not until Fako started openly campaigning against government's funding of private universities at the expense of UB, hence threatening interests of sections of the ruling elite.

Interestingly, while UB was being turned into Botswana's Makerere, by October 2017 Professor Totolo as Vice Chancellor of the well-funded BIUST was swearing "to turn BIUST into Botswana's 'Oxford'," (*WeekendPost* 28 October to 3 November 2017).

Although we use the rather unpleasant history of Makerere University to illustrate grim developments at UB, to be fair to Makerere, in recent years it has consistently performed much better than UB in terms of international rankings based on research output.⁵ This has not been helped by continued reduced government funding which led to contracts of several eminent professors not renewed with real possibility to impact negatively on UB's international standing.

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated the impact of Thabo Fako's leadership style on UB management that led to institutional paralysis at UB. This was a result of the ruling party cadre deployment common in sub-Saharan Africa and flies in the face of the widely acclaimed public service initiatives which emphasize competence and merit as well as on *botho* or *ubuntu*.

For Fako, victimization and humiliation became his stock-in-trade in dealing with those he felt somehow undermined his authority or misrule. Bad interpersonal relations made him an uncompassionate (mis)ruler as opposed to a *botho*-driven leader in the twenty-first century. As a political appointee the natural expectation was that he protected and defended government and not castigate it. Acting against this expectation was tantamount to betrayal of elite interests for which he seems to have paid a price.

Notes

1. The Ministry has since changed names but here we stick to the name that was in use at the time.
2. Contributions were received from Professor Andy Chebanne, Professor John Holm, Professor Jacqueline Solway, Professor Joseph Mbaiwa, Dr Tachilisa Balule, Professor Lovemore Togarasei, Dr Joseph Tsonope, Dr Boga Manatsha, Mr Isaac Ndai-Paulos, Mr Sandy Grant and Prof Francis Nyamnjoh.
3. Email communication from Dr Tachilisa Balule, 20 March 2017.
4. Email communication from Professor Joseph Mbaiwa, 18 March 2017.
5. For instance see <https://www.afterschoolafrica.com/4768/top-100-universities-in-africa/> and <https://answersafrica.com/top-50-universities-in-africa-latest-rankings.html>

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