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Peter Sanders. *The Last of the Queen's Men: A Lesotho Experience.* Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press; Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 2000. 175 pp. $24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-86814-353-5.

Richard F. Weisfelder. *Political Contention in Lesotho, 1952-1965.* Roma, Lesotho: Institute of Southern African Studies, 1999. ix + 171 pp. $20.95 (paper), ISBN 978-99911-31-23-8.

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Decolonization in Lesotho

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Students of the political history of Lesotho will need to consult these two books. Both authors were there in Lesotho to witness the tumble of events and personalities that led to independence in 1966. Peter Sanders, as Chief Electoral Officer actually participated in those events in an arguably decisive way. He helped negotiate the Westminster model of parliamentary election that, in retrospect, enormously damaged the country's political culture. This model of democracy was desired by almost all of the major political actors in Lesotho. Yet it clearly exacerbated partisan and sectarian factions in the country to gave rise to debilitating and seemingly intractable spasms of violence. The recent "results" (as Basotho sardonically refer to the bloody aftermath of the 1998 elections and SADC intervention) were but the latest instalment of this post-colonial tragedy.

Sanders' book is a hybrid. In part it is a memoir of his life as a colonial officer in the dying days of British rule in Basutoland. It also gives an insider view upon the political processes that resulted in the unexpected electoral triumph of the ostensibly conservative Basuto National Party (BNP) over the ostensibly radical Basutoland Congress Party (BCP) in 1965. About a third of the book discusses Sanders' subsequent work as a historian of precolonial Lesotho. Sanders is best known for his biography of the founder of the nation, Moshoeshoe I, and, with Mosebi Damane, for compiling Sesotho praise poems about that foundational period. An appendix of the book serves as a vigorous response to critics of his interpretation of those poems (Leroy Vail and Landeg White, above all, but also Ntsu Mokhehle, the leader of the BCP and author of a highly romanticized polemic upon Moshoeshoe).

Sanders acquits himself well in all three sections. He

acknowledges errors of judgement or approach by himself and by the British administration in general. He is sympathetic to the anti-colonial sentiments of many Basotho. But he makes a strong case that the British, including himself, were trying to do their best as they extracted themselves from a role which they had only adopted in the first place with great reluctance. "Best" in this context meant treating Basotho fairly when they did not always do so with each other, and listening carefully to the often wildly shifting and irrational demands of Basotho politicians.

Sanders' retrospective conclusion is that the Westminster model of democracy and political independence were not appropriate for Lesotho in 1966. Rather, the British should have insisted on institutions that better reflected Sesotho traditions of governance. They should also have done more to prevent the rise of segregation and apartheid in South Africa. The latter prevented consideration of what was then and what still remains probably the only realistic strategy for political stability and economic development in Lesotho: incorporation into a democratic South Africa.

A weakness in Sanders' analysis, of course, is that the British were instrumental in giving rise to segregation and apartheid. Western corporations and individual British subjects continued to reap big profits in a cozy lifestyle from South Africa even as well-intentioned minor officials struggled in dusty colonial outposts to cope with the consequences. Thus, while it is important to recall and to honour individuals like Sanders, the bigger picture forces us to question British integrity.

Richard Weisfelder, by contrast, is an American who came to Basutoland as a Ph.D. candidate in political science. He followed the leaders of the different parties around the country during the 1965 campaign. He conducted extensive interviews and closely monitored ephemeral political literature. More so than is usual in his discipline, Weisfelder wrote up his research with keen attention to history. This research is finally available as a book, revised and condensed from the dissertation. It sheds important light on the origins and nature of political violence in one of the few African nations where such violence can emphatically not be blamed on tribalism.

Weisfelder's strongest contribution is in his questioning some of the central myths of the historiography of the period. He brings out evidence of divided opinion in the Catholic mission, for example. Citing his interviews with Leabua Jonathan and other BNP leaders, he makes it difficult to sustain the accusation that that party was a creature of expatriate priests. By careful analysis of election statistics he shows as well that women did not on the whole vote "conservatively" by instinct but were acutely perceptive of strengths and weaknesses of the rival party platforms and personalities. Indeed, the evidence he presents of pigheadedness, shameless opportunism, and authoritarianism among the so-called radical or mass parties should put to rest any romantic illusions about the kind of democracy that would have followed had those parties rather than the BNP won in 1965.

To my mind, two big gaps remain unaddressed in this otherwise thorough account of the period of decolonisation. First, the influential role of Paramount Chief during the crucial administrative reforms of the 1940s and in the formative years of nationalist politics, was filled by a woman, Amelia 'Mantsebo Seeiso. Weisfelder, in a longstanding tradition ('Mantsebo does not even make Sanders' index, for example), does not investigate what her actual role was in these years but relies instead on arguably sexist dismissals of her as a ruler. Neither on this, nor on other gender-related political concerns, does Weisfelder particularly engage with feminist political scientists or, for example, my own research.

Second, many mysteries remain about the spate of alleged medicine murders in the 1940s and 1950s that fundamentally shook British confidence in their administration and that became one of the BCP's first and most successful political axes to grind. To be fair, investigating such a sensitive (and indeed, ongoing) issue is perhaps an entirely new research project.

That said, Weisfelder complements Sanders to make an important contribution, not just to the historiography of a small and apparently idiosyncratic country, but also to our understanding of the consolidation of racial capitalism in South Africa.

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