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**Paul S. Landau**. *Popular Politics in the History of South Africa, 1400-1948.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010. xvi + 300 pp. $90.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-19603-1.

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**Admixture, Amalgamation, and Anomaly: Tilting at Tribes**

Recipient of the African Studies Association's Melville J. Herskovits Finalist Award (2010) and praised in published reviews and by the noted scholars who peer-reviewed it, Paul Landau's highly original take on "highveld" South African politics from 1400 to the National Party victory of 1948 deserves close and serious attention. To begin with, Landau demands that scholars in his field rethink and retool their manner of representing Africans (specifically the "Bantu S-group-speaking farmers") in this region. He is out to win this argument hands down, to transform the literature, not just to add his bit. The immense array of scholarship that he summons is intended to overwhelm. In turn, Landau rejects standard historical vocabulary and moves for the adoption of a new lexicon of naming Africans and their places (abetted by a bevy of words in quotation marks). Moreover he discerns a political process (what he refers to as "one of overlapping movement and the persistence and transmutation of authority-building practices" [p. 246]) that drives political behavior into the early and mid-colonial period. In support he brings on stage and off (and often on again) capsule narratives across a broad space and over four centuries. Landau assumes that his readers are familiar with major events and trends in the region, to which he alludes but briefly. *Popular Politics in the History of South Africa* is not for the lay reader.

Landau articulates six overlapping arguments, but his book may also be understood as having three distinct segments. My (not Landau's) rough terms for these segments are pre-tribal, tribal, and post-tribal. The pre-tribal segment begins with early nineteenth-century encounters between the Bechuana (Tswana) of the northern Cape and travelers, officials, and missionaries, most of whom are British or English Cape subjects. Early white visitors revealed a poor sense of the people whom they encountered but readily wrote them into the permanent record as the leaders/members of homogenous, named entities understood stereotypically as tribes. This opening, which foreshadows the second (tribal) segment, serves as Landau's foil to set the pre-encounter, pre-tribal picture of the people of the Highveld (chapter 2, "History before Tribes"), which is the boldest portion of his argument and the heart of his book.

Landau's pre-tribal frame of reference is the S-group Bantu speakers who stretch from the Zimbabwean plateau in the north, to the Tsodilo Hills (northwest Botswana) in the west, all the way south to the Orange River and the eastern escarpment. Relying on Tom Huffman's archaeological publications, Landau charts the emergence of stone-walled settlement builders in the fifteenth century as his starting point, noting in particular the areas in which the (central) Cattle Plan (CP)-type settlements are located. The link between these and the ZP-type structures (typical of Zimbabwe/Leopard's Kopje) is the Rozwi dynasty, in which *rozwi* assumed ("instantiated" is Landau's preferred transitive) a centralizing role that amalgamated peoples of varying progeny into an association governed from a location that he refers to as a "prestige place." The acceptance of *rozwi* as "prestige place" or "prestige place association" was transmuted southward into the CP-type settlement areas where it became *rotse*, linked to the acknowledged senior Tswana-speaking people labeled BaHurutshe and relocated from the southern Highveld to western Zambia by the MaKololo/BaLozi. As Landau remarks, "We can translate all of these, *rozi*, *rozvi*, and *rotse* as 'prestige place association' signifying political hegemony and power" (p. 56). All prestige place associations and their many offshoots established themselves on a similar principle that used the "twin court" to attach outsiders or accord junior houses recognition within the prestige place "in the idiom of brotherhood" (p. 70). Genealogies were fudged to import non-related residents into the ranked descent line. In Landau's words, "Collateral lines of men

split off, and others formed new alliances in their own interests; sometimes they achieved their aims with a military posture, sometimes without one.... Genealogies might emerge by consensus and cover the tracks of amalgamations" (p. 56).

In the process, over time, the Highveld farmers "nurtured a political tradition capable of accommodating and embracing strangers, one fully formed even before the arrival of Cape 'Korana' and métis into their midst" (p. 73). "Méti" is one of Landau's terms to displace "coloured," "griqua," "bastaard," "bergenaar," and other labels current in the Cape that obscure, in his view, the blended quality of their societies and the ease with which they formed relationships among the Highveld farmers. The latter people Landau refers to are well known to us as the Batlhaping, Barolong, Bahurutshe, Bakwena, Bakgatla, etc., but Landau rejects these labels, because in his view the "ethnic or tribal approach results only in a fog of particularity" (p. 64). Instead he uses totemic or place identities, which are related to the terms above, but which he believes were not heard that way by the people to whom they refer. Thus, in the place of Batlhaping, Landau uses "people of the fish place" (*tlhapi*, "fish," *ing*, the locative), or "the crocodile people" for Bakwena (*kwena*, "crocodile"), etc.

Language means more to Landau than name shifting. He is particularly attentive to what he sees as "analogous morphemes" that signify senior-junior court relationships, which formed the basis of solving problems arising from the inclusion of outsiders or disappointed descendants of royal authority (p. 64). The senior-junior, or twin-court, paradigm spread throughout the Highveld because of what he regards as the constant movement brought by splits, conflict, and other forces leading to relocation and social entry into already settled areas. In his words, "Human struggle fed regional interpretations of the paradigm" (p. 64).

The second, tribal, segment of the book describes what Landau regards as the nineteenth-century process by which tribalization (homogenizing, standardizing) of heterogeneous people–"how Europeans made tribes" (p. 121)–took place. He does this by examining missionary translations of Setswana and by charting land dispossession highlighted by the plight of Moroka's people at Thaba Nchu in present-day Free State. L.M.S. missionary Robert Moffat, based at Kuruman from 1820 to 1870, had much to do with establishing the Tswana lexicon and English printed translations ("the trellis upon which the ivy of religion grew" [p. 76]), a typical outcome of European missionary work elsewhere. Landau credits Samuel Broadbent and Moffat, in particular, with creating an "orthodoxy" of language that "defined and monitored [religious] pedagogy" in a way that infused meanings that obscured original Setswana terms (p. 86). For example, Moffat's use of *modimo* (ancestor ... a man, not a spirit, whose memory "cloak[s] military alliances") to refer to God everlasting befuddled his Kuruman listeners if not striking them as hilarious. Yet such terms, and idioms in Setswana, became permanent biblical expressions that mirrored European notions of belief and made up for what Moffat regarded as a Tswana deficiency of "theological terms" (p. 103).

The case of Moroka is narrated at length to chart the "regional loss of chiefly power" alongside the imposition by European leaders and officials of labels of tribe, native, coloured, and other "glosses" (p. 128). As Barolong, Basotho, etc, became standard ethnic references, they were equated with stereotypical beliefs and customs that remained in flux as Africans were considered moving in the direction of civilization. "This is still the dominant paradigm," Landau asserts, "in public discourse for understanding historical change in colonized places ... from tribal base to 'modernity"' (p. 143). And, from the colonized's perspective, "tribal allegiances" became acceptable, even though they "den[ied] the circumstances of their own generation..., because they were what was left over" (p. 149).

Briefly, the post-tribal segment pertains to the twentieth century, when submerged notions of chiefly amalgamation at prestige places resurfaced in organizations and movements that aimed to offset if not throw off the veneer of colonial authority. Moroka's evolving narrative returns here, representing, in Landau's view, "similar efflorescences of the same political tradition.... South African leaders, Garveyites, ancestor-centered mobilizations, and charismatic Christians, all reintegrated an unnamed ancestor with their pragmatic alliances; and like chiefs to the north, they kept the issue of the land in the forefront" (p. 178). The inclusiveness of the Highveld model was broadly adopted across European-imposed racial lines. The charismatic Andries Le Fleur, of French-Malaysian descent and who led the Christian Kokstad rebellion, "rearticulate[d] the non-racialist and incorporative message, characteristic of past rural highveld politics" (p. 203). Thus in the twentieth century, the tribe assumed a new form, reminiscent of the Highveld tradition, expressed as "the idea of an agglomeration of people clamoring for chiefship and land, who defined themselves by their aspirations" (p. 219). Twentieth-century tribes represent a "drive to unify, according to shared Highveld principles, [and] survived among common peo-

ple … albeit almost entirely in encrypted and altered form" (pp. 245-246).

As much as I stand in awe of his scholarship, of the breadth of his historical sweep, and of his impressive command of Setswana, this last phrase captures my misgivings about Landau's interpretation of South African history. His caveat–"albeit almost entirely in encrypted and altered form"–suggests that Landau sees in historic and recent power-seeking organizations that which he wishes to find while perhaps overlooking other feasible explanations. Landau's emphasis on the "twin-court" arrangement, for example, does not explain the three-division (kgosing, upper, lower) layout of twentieth-century settlements noted by Isaac Schapera and indicated by such well-mapped, late Iron Age sites as Molokwane and Kaditshwene.[1] These examples are a small sample of wide variations in size and arrangements of stone-wall settlements. Bearing in mind that the archaeological study of stone-walled settlements has still to survey even a small percentage of existing sites across the Highveld, it seems premature to encapsulate these widespread populations into a uniform political dynamic.

The broad landscape that Landau describes includes many settlement areas occupied by people he makes no mention of. Though admittedly something of a thicket to walk through, Landau avoids the ethnographic publications of Paul L. Breutz and Nicholaas.J. Van Warmelo, leaving the major sources for reconstructing Tswana history limited to the western Tswana speakers. Landau's broad historical landscape is also highly varied in physical terms, yet the differences one may expect when comparing the people of the crocodile (Bakwena), who border the Kalahari sands, with, say, the people of the crocodile at Molokwane in the fertile, well-watered Ngwaritse plain near Rustenburg, has not been considered as a possible alternative factor in political arrangements.

Difficulties also arise in accepting Landau's extended treatise that "highveld principles" superseded other factors in the exercise of political leadership. The oral literature abounds in struggles for chiefly power; authoritarian regimes; enslavement; multiple group alliances to destroy neighbors; expulsions (including schismatic church members); and failed, not to mention assassinated, chiefs. Rivalries among kin could be deadly.[2] It is fair for Landau to claim that "highland principles" were in play when societies cohered, but he has not demonstrated that they outran the competition for, and exercise of, power.

In general, *Popular Politics*, though not without some excellent biographical vignettes, sometimes reads like a manual of programmed behavior of its historical characters, who perform according to the Landau paradigm rather than appear as individuals in their own right. And apart from the few white personalities engaged seriously with learning Setswana, it is hard to distinguish among this book's Europeans, generally held up to scorn. The "Boers" come into the story infrequently, though their interactions on the Highveld with its indigenous inhabitants have been understood as a complex and not entirely one-sided process. Significantly, these Dutch-speaking immigrants, as distinct from the English-speaking colonists, viewed the people they tried to dominate as followers of chiefs (*kapiteins*), not as ethnonyms or tribes.[3]

Landau is somewhat mischievous in jettisoning ethnic references (Kwena, etc), just because they have been badly mishandled by English-speaking missionaries and officials. The heterogeneous nature of Tswana societies has long been accepted in the published literature (including in Landau's earlier publications), and there is little reason to think the labels widely adopted to refer to them were concocted by latecomers too myopic to recognize them as amalgamated entities. Landau's dismissal of the Tswana as lacking a religious system is likewise mystifying, as it ignores Gabriel M. Setiloane's warning that "the concept 'religion' is a Western phenomenon, defining the deity (GOD) whether it be a Supreme Being, Father, Brother or Mother, and even capable of dying. To do this … would be importing foreign categories and trying to force the African understanding to stand or fall according to whether they make sense to them."[4]

My criticisms aside, *Popular Politics* is an excellent work, produced by a scholar of immense talent, scope, and intellect. At present, few Africanists are as capable as Landau of using indigenous language and its translation in sustained historical analysis.[5] His exploration of the manner in which religion was understood and imbedded in language advances our understanding of the nature of Christian influence far beyond the work of Jean and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa* (1991). For more than two decades, South Africa and Botswana have been the yawning gap left by Leroy Vail's classic collection, *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa* (1989), on the creation of tribes in Southern Africa. Landau has managed alone to fill it (apart from the Transvaal lacuna), a herculean feat, and moreover he connects the pre-tribal phase to the colonial panorama. By and large, the creators of tribes in Vail, however, were African actors adapting to the colonial landscape. Landau has re-

versed and deepened the process. The questions remain, however, are the tribal labels that he dismisses as European figments real and dear enough to the people to which they have long been attached? And are the uniform qualities that Landau perceives among them more revealing than their differences?

Notes

[1]. Isaac Schapera, *Native Land Tenure in the Bechuanaland Protectorate* (Lovedale: Lovedale Press, 1943), 70-71; Isaac Schapera, *The Tswana* (London: International African Institute, 1953), 47; and Isaac Schapera, *A Handbook of Tswana Law and Custom* (London: Frank Cass, 1970), xiii; Julius C. Pistorius, *Molokwane an Iron Age Bakwena Village: Early Tswana Settlement in the Western Transvaal* (Johannesburg: Perskor Printers, 1992), 17, 48; Jan C. A. Boeyens, "In Search of Kaditshwene," *South African Archaeological Bulletin* 55 (2000): 9-10; and more recently, for Marathodi, Mark S. Anderson, *Marathodi: The Historical Archaeology of an African Capital* (Bozeat: Atikkam Media, 2009), 59.

[2]. Isaac Schapera, "Kinship and Politics in Tswana History," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 93, no. 2 (1963): 159-173.

[3]. Among others, see J. S. Bergh and Fred Morton, *"To Make Them Serve....": The 1871 Transvaal Commission on African Labour* (Pretoria: Protea Book House, 2003), 177-184; and J. S. Bergh, "'We Must Never Forget Where We Come From': The Bafokeng and Their Land in the 19th Century Transvaal," *History in Africa* 32 (2005): 95-115.

[4]. Gabriel M. Setiloane, "How the Traditional World View Persists in the Christianity of the Sotho-Tswana," *Pula: The Botswana Journal of African Studies* 1, no. 1 (1978): 27-42, quotation on 38. See also Gabriel M. Setiloane, *The Image of God among the Sotho-Tswana* (Rotterdam: Balkema, 1976).

[5]. University of Botswana linguist Thapelo Otlogetswe judges Landau's chapter 3, "Translations," "an excellent piece," though he questions a few of Landau's renderings and regards some of his translations as transliterations. Thapelo Otlogetswe, personal communication with author, November 23, 2012. Matters of dialectical differences among Setswana speakers await close analysis.

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