

Some historical background on minorities in Botswana

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Multi-ethnic societies

As studies of the history of minorities in Botswana by UB research students have repeatedly found, the main context in Botswana in the modern period has been the pattern of incorporation within multi-ethnic societies. George Manase's study of the OvaHerero¹ showed how a cattle-oriented people, arriving as destitute refugees, were able to establish a position of some prosperity in a Tswana-ruled society. On the other hand, Phanuel Richard's study of Basarwa in the Kgatleng showed how an initial complementary relationship developed into subordination.² The outcomes are different, but in each case the development took place in the context of an over-arching multi-ethnic society rather than between independent groups.

The territory taken over by Britain as the Bechuanaland Protectorate consisted principally of a cluster of Tswana-ruled *merafe* (kingdoms or proto-states). These were in most cases multi-ethnic kingdoms, though two (the Ngwato and Tawana states) were much more varied in composition than the others. In them, a variety of groups were incorporated in a complex hierarchy. The ruling elite was in each case Tswana,³ with the partial exception of the BaLete where the ruling elite was of Ndebele origin, but long since assimilated to Tswana language and culture.⁴ The population however included Tswana (both of the chiefly clan and of other lineages) and other groups who generally had an inferior status. The exact status of non-Tswana groups varied, but it has been suggested that the main categories were commoners (such as Kalanga), foreigners (such as OvaHerero) and serfs (such as Basarwa and many Bakgalagari). Historically, groups have sometimes moved from one category to another. To exercise rights, it was necessary to be a member (as opposed to a subject) of a *morafe*, which usually meant being a member of a recognized ward. This excluded the great majority of Basarwa.⁵ To the south-east, Tswana predominated, but in the north-west a small minority of Batawana ruled over a diverse non-Tswana majority.

The origins of this situation are the subject of some debate. The basic pattern of settlement in Botswana is broadly agreed: KhoeSan being the earliest inhabitants, Bantu-speakers arriving later. The main Tswana ruling groups of BaKwena, BaNgwaketse and BaNgwato seem to have established themselves in Botswana in the 18th century, though Sotho-Tswana speaking people had already been present for a long time before this.

¹I am grateful to Prof. Neil Parsons for his extensive assistance with this paper

George Uasana Manase, "The politics of separation: the case of the OvaHerero of Ngamiland", in Bruce Bennett (ed.) *Essays on Twentieth Century Botswana History* (Pula: Botswana Journal of African Studies, vol. 13 nos 1&2, special issue, 1999, pp. 3-13. (Originally B.A. dissertation 1984)

² Phanuel Richard, "Basarwa subordination among the Bakgatla", *ibid.* pp. 14-23. (B.A. dissertation 1980)

³ Because of the modern use of Motswana/Batswana to indicate a citizen of the Republic of Botswana, "Tswana" will be used in this paper to indicate the Setswana-speaking ethnicity.

⁴ I. Schapera, *The Ethnic composition of Tswana tribes*, (London: LSE, 1952) p. 1.

⁵ K. Datta & A. Murray, "The rights of minorities and subject peoples in Botswana: a historical evaluation", in John Holm & Patrick Molutsi (eds) *Democracy in Botswana: The proceedings of a symposium held in Gaborone, 1-5 August 1988* (Gaborone: Macmillan Botswana, 1989) p. 59.

What is less clear, however, is how the pattern of relatively large, multi-ethnic, Tswana-ruled states developed. Historians talk of processes of "state-building", especially in the early and mid 19th century in the aftermath of the Difaqane, but the details are disputed.

It used to be generally assumed that the dominant Tswana groups had displaced, absorbed or subjugated the rest of the ethnic groups when they first established themselves in the territory. By this view, the Basarwa or Bushmen, who were seen as having been pre-agricultural hunter-gatherers since time immemorial, had been losing out steadily to more "advanced" groups, first the BaKgalagari and then the Tswana, over a long period. However, alternative possibilities have been suggested. Notably, E. M. Wilmsen (in *Land Filled with Flies*⁶) suggests a much more discontinuous history. In his view, the major Tswana groups were by no means dominant at the start of the 19th century, but were small groups of perhaps only a few hundred people. KhoeSan peoples, though no doubt including hunting and gathering within their economy, were to a large extent pastoralists, and engaged in trade (through Tswana middle-men) in game products. The Difaqane, which caused huge disruption throughout the region, led to a major movement of refugees.⁷ The Tswana chiefdoms were quick to recover and were successful in rapidly incorporating new groups within their society, in a process of snowball growth. In these rapidly expanding states the BaKgalagari and Basarwa were largely dispossessed. Later in the 19th century, as hunting declined in importance, Basarwa became increasingly surplus and were relegated to the periphery, forced to rely on foraging.⁸

Wilmsen's model goes further than everyone would agree. However it is useful to be reminded that the structures of the recent past are not necessarily of long standing.⁹ A connected question is the history of the Bakgalagari. Were the Bakgalagari an earlier migration than the Tswana,¹⁰ or were they (as many 19th century observers speculated) simply the losers of relatively recent conflicts among the Tswana? Or are both of these suggestions wrong? Linguistic studies have generally concluded that SeKgalagari has been a separate branch of Sotho-Tswana for a considerable time. Archaeological studies based on pottery styles have found evidence of both the "Moloko" and "Eiland" traditions, apparently living side-by-side since at least the 14th century, and it has been argued that these represent the ancestors of the later "Tswana" and "Kgalagari" groups respectively. Since the Eiland tradition appears older and is found far to the east, it may represent a Sotho-Tswana substratum out of which the Moloko tradition emerged. All this suggests that it is not really a case of "the Tswana" arriving recently, but of the modern

⁶ E. M. Wilmsen, *Land filled with flies: a political economy of the Kalahari* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

⁷ It is notable that the SeNgwato term for the "foreigner" category of citizen was *bafaladi* (refugees).

⁸ It is interesting to note that David Livingstone reported that the BaKgalagari were clearly subordinate to the Tswana, but that the "Bushmen" were relatively independent. "A few Bechuanas may go into a village of Bakalahari, and domineer over the whole with impunity; but when these same adventurers meet the Bushmen, they are fain to change their manners to fawning sycophancy; they know that, if the request for tobacco is refused, these free sons of the Desert may settle the point as to its possession by a poisoned arrow." David Livingstone, *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa*, chapter 2.

⁹ Phanel Richard's study "Basarwa subordination" is especially valuable for documenting the processes of Basarwa subordination within living memory.

¹⁰ This was the tradition reported to Livingstone (Livingstone, *Missionary Travels*, chapter 2) and widely held subsequently.

rulers and states being recent.¹¹ It is interesting that the earliest European visitors tended to record words in forms which seem more like modern SeKgalagari than modern Setswana (most obviously "Kalahari"). It is a curious sign of the marginalization of the BaKgalagari that "Kgalagadi" (the Setswana form) has been promoted as "more correct".

Colonial attitudes

The Bechuanaland Protectorate consisted of eight major Tribal Reserves, some areas of land alienated to settlers such as the freehold blocks, and Crown Lands. This paper concentrates mainly on the patterns found in the Reserves, which were the successors to the pre-colonial proto-states. They constituted the heart of the Protectorate, and in many ways they seem more relevant than the settler areas to Botswana's post-independence traditions. However, I hope to deal with the other areas more fully in a subsequent paper.

The Bechuanaland Protectorate was for most of its existence considered as an administrative rather than a "national" unit. The alienated areas were to some extent seen as outposts of the South African and Rhodesian settler states, while in the Reserves "national" identity was constructed, if at all, on the basis of the *morafe*. Thus the BaKgatla's magnificent school¹² was the Mochudi *National* School, and the Dutch Reformed Church in the Kgatleng attempted to acculturate itself as a "National [Kgatla] Church".¹³ Insofar as there was a wider identity, it was often that of "South Africa" in the broader sense that term had had before it became the official name of the Cape-Orange-Natal-Transvaal Union in 1910. For the BaRolong and the BaKgatla, the border of the Protectorate cut through their territories.

As has often been noted, the British administration in the Bechuanaland Protectorate was minimal, leaving most of the work of government to the paramount chiefs. The Bechuanaland Protectorate was, as the name suggests, technically a protectorate rather than a Colony. However, it is a mistake to attach any great importance to this distinction in explaining the nature of British administration.¹⁴ The distinction was, from the British point of view, an historical and technical one, and did not (at least by the start of the twentieth century) imply any significant difference in administration. Many writers seem to be unaware that many other African colonies were also technically protectorates. Indeed, in a number of cases (including for example Kenya) a single colonial territory consisted of a part which was a Crown Colony and another part which was a

¹¹ The linguistic case was first made in I. Schapera & D.F. van der Merwe, *A comparative study of the Kgalagadi, Kwena and other Sotho dialects*, Communications from the School of African Studies, new series, no. 9 (Cape Town: University of Cape Town, 1943). See also P. Dickens "A preliminary report on Kgalagadi vowels", *African Studies*, vol. 37 no. 1 pp. 99-106; Sabine Neumann, "Kgalagadi und Tawana: zur Identifizierung zweier sprachlinger Einheiten", Magisterarbeit, Universitat Bayreuth cited in Lars-Gunnar Andersson & Tore Janson, *Languages in Botswana: Language ecology in Southern Africa* (Gaborone: Longman Botswana, 1997) p. 197. For the case based on pottery, see Catrien van Waarden, "The Later Iron Age", in Paul Lane, Andrew Reid & Alinah Segobye (eds) *Ditswa Mmung: The Archaeology of Botswana* (Gaborone: Pula Press & Botswana Society, 1998) pp. 147-8.

¹² Now the Phutadikobo Museum.

¹³ I. Schapera, *A History of the BaKgatla-bagaKgafela* (Mochudi: Phuthadikobo Museum, 1980) (first published 1942) p. 24, Bonkie Moitoi, "A History of the Dutch Reformed Church in Mochudi" (research essay, University of Botswana, 1995).

¹⁴ Numerous examples of this misconception can be cited.

Protectorate, and yet was administered as a single unit.¹⁵ The main practical consequence was that, because a protectorate was not technically British soil but a foreign area controlled by Britain, its inhabitants were not (as in a colony) British subjects but British Protected Persons, which in some legal matters meant they had fewer rights.¹⁶

So it is not the fact of being a Protectorate which is significant. Rather, we need to look at what *purpose* the Bechuanaland Protectorate served for Britain. The British Empire was supposed to serve British interests, but not every part of the Empire served the same function. The Bechuanaland Protectorate was not believed to have any economic value of its own, but had been acquired for its perceived *strategic* value in controlling and exploiting other territories which *did* have economic value. The Bechuanaland Protectorate was initially taken over as part of the complex regional manoeuvrings between Britain and the Boer republics (and to a lesser extent Germany) in the late 19th century. After the Boer War this particular purpose no longer applied. Britain initially envisaged it (and the other High Commission Territories) as becoming part of a Greater South Africa; but as South Africa's interests diverged from Britain's this option became less attractive. Administering the Bechuanaland Protectorate was therefore, from a British point of view, an obligation with few rewards.

Thus it was that, even by the standards of other African colonies, the Bechuanaland Protectorate was run on a shoestring with a tiny colonial staff. The main object of the administration was to avoid trouble. Many officials, even in the early twentieth century, disliked the idea of transfer to South Africa. The officials could see no plausible positive goals.

This is the basis for their reliance on the major chiefs, the successors of the Tswana kings who had been the rulers of the main proto-states at the time of the takeover. (The chiefs of two relatively small *merafe*, the BaLete and the BaTlokwa, were able, by luck and careful diplomacy, to achieve Paramount status due to accidents of geography which placed their territories on the far side of the Railway Corridor from the main *merafe*.) Britain had started out with a system of cautious overlordship, rather than direct rule, because of the circumstances of the takeover (a peaceful one) and the limited objectives (for strategic control no more was necessary). The arrangement was continued because it was the easiest solution for the tiny, poorly-funded and lethargic administration.

Consequently, the colonial government generally did not want to become involved too deeply in the chiefdoms' internal affairs, including issues of ethnic subordination. In any case, ethnic inequality as such was not entirely excluded even in principle. Colonial administration accepted that inhabitants' rights could vary according to ethnic or other categories (within the Bechuanaland Protectorate Europeans, Asians and Africans were dealt with differently for many purposes) What was unacceptable in principle was positive oppression or maltreatment, but, since nothing much could be done, it was better to ignore it.

¹⁵ The takeover of Bechuanaland initially followed this pattern, with a Crown Colony (British Bechuanaland) in the nearer area and a Protectorate in the hinterland, but the Colony was transferred to the Cape Colony.

¹⁶ This point was of importance in the case *The King v. The Earl of Crewe: Ex parte Sekhoma* [1910] King's Bench 576, cited in A.J.G.M. Sanders, *Bechuanaland and the law in politicians' hands* (Gaborone: Botswana Society) p. 25, in which it was held that Sekgoma Letsholathebe could not obtain a writ of *Habeas Corpus*.

One effect of this situation was in fact to increase the power of the chief *vis-à-vis* his subjects.¹⁷ In precolonial times a chief who became too unpopular might be displaced by force, or people could secede from his rule. Now, force was forbidden and secession would require the permission of the colonial government, which was unlikely to be forthcoming.

In some parts of Africa, colonial governments used tactics of "divide and rule" in relation to ethnic groups. But in the Bechuanaland Protectorate, it was quite the reverse. The administration had no interest in the sort of rule which dividing would permit; rather they wished to maintain the power of the chiefs as the most convenient form of government. Attempts by minorities to resist Tswana power were swatted down, with the colonial government backing the chief.

A notable example is that of the BaBirwa. Following their forced removal by Khama III from the Tuli Block to Bobonong in the Bamangwato Reserve, they attempted to sue Khama. But the administration blocked the case from coming to court. First the Resident Commissioner ruled that Malema, the chief of the BaBirwa, was not entitled to sell cattle to pay a lawyer; and then the Imperial Secretary¹⁸ ruled that Malema could not have legal representation at all—a ruling made without, apparently, any very clear legal justification. An administrative enquiry was held at Serowe, at which Malema was intimidated. Not surprisingly, the enquiry denied the BaBirwa any compensation, and even a recommendation for the removal of the headman appointed by Khama who had been responsible for excesses was rejected by the High Commissioner.¹⁹

In another well-known case, that of the conflict between Tshekedi Khama and the BaKalanga bakaNswazwi, at one point Tshekedi was prepared to allow the Nswazwi to secede but the colonial administration refused, unwilling to set precedents favouring dissident minorities.²⁰

Another case is that of the BaKhurutshe of Tonota, who were persecuted for practising Anglicanism within the Bamangwato Reserve, where only the LMS church was permitted. The dissidents were compelled to come and reside at Serowe—a traditional punishment for separatism. The British response to this began strongly with declarations of the importance of religious freedom, but died away in confusion and contradictions, torn between principle and the need to uphold Tshekedi's authority. British inaction is especially remarkable when one considers that Tshekedi was suppressing not an African Independent Church but the local branch of the English state Church.²¹

However, although ethnicity was involved, the element of religious dissent must also be taken seriously in this case. The officials escaped from the issue of religious freedom by persuading themselves that the Anglicans were merely using religion as a cloak for separatism, but this was

¹⁷ This was not always the outcome, as there could also be effects undermining the power of the chief in some areas. But for a capable chief such as Tshekedi Khama, the new situation definitely provided opportunities.

¹⁸ The head of administration in the office of the High Commissioner.

¹⁹ Diana Wylie, *A little god: The twilight of patriarchy in a Southern African chiefdom* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1991) pp. 149-55.

²⁰ Wylie, *A little god*, p. 167.

²¹ Bruce S. Bennett & Maitseo M. M. Bolaane, "British policy in the case of the BaKhurutshe Anglicans of Tonota: Paradoxes of authority in colonial Botswana", unpublished seminar paper presented to the UB History Department seminar, 1999; Paul Landau, *The Realm of the Word: Language, gender and Christianity in a Southern African kingdom* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1995) pp. 161-73.

at best a half-truth. It is a mistake to try to reduce the issue to being "really" about one thing or the other. As with many other African peoples of the time, religion and church organization were an important part of the construction of identities, but the religious parts of identities are no less "real" than the "ethnic" parts. Still, it is significant that inasmuch as the issue could be seen in ethnic terms, the administration would come down clearly on the side of the chief.

The great exception to this pattern was Charles Rey, Resident Commissioner from 1930 to 1937. Rey wanted to *do* something with the Bechuanaland Protectorate—he had been appointed by Amery with the brief of breaking away from the older traditions of Bechuanaland Protectorate administration²² and developing the territory economically. Amery's object was not in fact an independently viable colony, but preparation for what he saw as inevitable incorporation into South Africa—Amery hoped that a developed territory with a strong British settler component would be a counterweight to growing Afrikaner power in South Africa. Whether Rey entirely agreed with this longer-term goal is unclear—he was at this stage of his life violently antipathetic to South African Afrikaners and frequently made a point of distinguishing his Protectorate from the Union. Some of his projects seem to reflect a Rhodesian rather than South African orientation.²³ However he certainly agreed with Amery's immediate objectives. Because of this, Rey *did* want more control of the Bechuanaland Protectorate, in accordance with the more usual pattern for colonies which were to be exploited directly. This meant undermining the power of the chiefs, especially since (led by Tshekedi Khama) they were deeply suspicious of economic development. Rey could not understand what seemed to him a dog-in-the-manger attitude, but in fact Tshekedi realized that developments such as mining would be a step toward South African control or settler power. (Tshekedi was more generous than Rey in his assessment of his adversary: in later life he commented that he believed Rey genuinely wanted to improve the lot of the common people.²⁴)

Rey was not, despite the hopes of some, particularly favourable to ethnic minorities. However, he did pick up the issue of the status of Basarwa serfs or hereditary servants in the hope of using it against Tshekedi Khama and other chiefs.

The colonial government had long turned a blind eye to the status of the Basarwa. In 1887, the Colonial Office had asked for a report on them, and the early officials who responded expressed considerable disquiet at the treatment of the Basarwa, using the term "slavery". By the early twentieth century, however, a degree of callousness had appeared, with the Government Secretary offering to supply a "specimen" of the Bushmen to an Austrian scientific explorer. After the First World War, the League of Nations' enquiry into slavery put the administration on

²² Neil Parsons has described two strands to this: a "missionary" tradition emphasizing paternalistic welfare and resisting commercial exploitation from South Africa, and a "mercenary" tradition, derived from the police force which was the bedrock of the administration, accepting such exploitation. See Neil Parsons, "Mercenary and Missionary Traditions in Colonial Administration: Colonel Rey and the Resident Commissioners of the Bechuanaland Protectorate, 1884-1966" in J.F. Ade Ajayi & J.D.Y. Peel, *Michael Crowder Memorial Volume*; also Neil Parsons "Charles Rey And Previous Commissioners Of The Bechuanaland Protectorate", UB History Department web-site, <<http://humanities.ub.bw/history/bw/colad2.htm>> or <<http://ubh.tripod.com/bw/colad2.htm>>.

²³ Charles F. Rey (eds N. Parsons & M. Crowder), *Monarch of All I Survey: Bechuanaland Diaries 1929-37* (Gaborone, Botswana Society, 1988), p. (xx).

²⁴ Alfred Merriweather, *Desert Doctor Remembers: The Autobiography of the Rev. Dr Alfred Merriweather, CBE, POH, MD, FRCPE, DTM&H* (Gaborone: Pula Press, 1999) p. 137.

the defensive, and it was tacitly agreed that whatever the status of the Basarwa was, it must be shown not to be "slavery".²⁵

In 1926 Simon Ratshosa raised the issue publicly in the hope of embarrassing Tshekedi, and the administration, while denying that slavery existed, made a public declaration²⁶ on the rights of Basarwa. Schapera noted that "this declaration made no immediate practical difference to the position of the Sarwa",²⁷ though there was evidence of some genuine effort by at least some officials to prosecute the worst cases of ill-treatment. In 1930 Tshekedi himself requested an official enquiry to clear up what he saw as misconceptions. This resulted in the "Tagart report" (to the government)²⁸, which criticized Tshekedi and made some suggestions for how the position of the Basarwa could be improved.²⁹

At this stage Rey was talking of strong action over the position of the Basarwa.³⁰ In practice, however, he did not do as much with it as might have been expected, partly due to the difficulty of controlling what happened away from the handful of government stations, but also perhaps because, with characteristic impatience, he tended to focus on more dramatic issues (such as the "flogging of Phinehas McIntosh") which he hoped would break the power of the chiefs sooner rather than later. Rey's attitude to the Basarwa was ambivalent. His outburst about the uselessness of "preserving a decadent and dying race, which is perfectly useless from any point of view"³¹ has been quoted more than once, but his diaries show a degree of genuine sympathy in individual cases. Rey had no respect for the cultures of the Basarwa, but he generally thought that individual Basarwa should have the chance to escape servitude and become "civilized": at the very least, he disapproved of their being actively ill-treated.

Rey was also interested in the position of the BaKalanga. In 1930 he wrote that "They [the BaNgwato] rule over a sub-tribe the Bakalaka who are in fact a much better people than the

²⁵ At the end of the nineteenth century, Khama III of the BaNgwato took some steps which were at least publicly presented as a liberation of Basarwa serfs. These policies have often been seen as cynical or at best ineffectual. During the conference proceedings, however, Prof. Neil Parsons suggested an alternative interpretation. He noted that Barry Morton has recently argued that Khama III's property reforms in favour of women were genuine but were reversed by his successors (Barry Morton, "The evolution of women's property rights in colonial Botswana, 1890–1966", *Pula: Botswana Journal of African Studies* vol. 12 nos 1–2 (1998) pp. 5–21). Prof. Parsons suggested that Khama's reforms concerning Basarwa might fall into the same category.

²⁶ This was made by the High Commissioner, Lord Athlone, on a visit to Serowe.

²⁷ Isaac Schapera, *A Handbook of Tswana Law and Custom* (first published 1938) (Munster-Hamburg: International African Institute, 1994) p. 252. It seems that no arrangements were made to inform the Basarwa of their new rights (Mabunga Nlshwa Gadibolae, "Serfdom (*Bolata*) in the Nata area 1926–1960", *Botswana Notes & Records*, vol. 17 (1985) p. 27), although complaints by Ntebogang and Sebele may indicate that there was some effect (BNA S.61/1 cited in *ibid.*)

²⁸ E.S.B. Tagart, *Report on the Masarwa and on corporal punishment among the natives in the Bamangwato Reserve of the Bechuanaland Protectorate*, London: Dominions Office, (Dominions no. 136, confidential), Oct 1931. This was followed by a report to the LMS: A.J.Haile (chair), *The Masarwa (Bushmen): Report of an inquiry by the South African District Committee of the London Missionary Society* (Tiger Kloof, Vryburg: LMS Book Room, March 1935).

²⁹ Janet Hermans, "Official policy towards the Bushmen of Botswana: A review, part I", *Botswana Notes and Records*, vol. 9 (1977) pp. 55–67.

³⁰ Mabunga Nlshwa Gadibolae, "Serfdom (*Bolata*) in the Nata area 1926–1960", *Botswana Notes & Records*, vol. 17 (1985) p. 28.

³¹ Hermans "Official policy" p. 66.

Bamangwato... hard workers, wealthy, and much better men in every way." He noted John Nswazwi (Mswazi)'s grievances.³² But he rapidly became impatient with Nswazwi.³³ Rey also gave some support and encouragement to K.T.Motsete (seen by Tshekedi as a Kalanga separatist) with his Tati Training Institute.³⁴ In 1936 he was keen to get ethnic data in the census, with a view perhaps to showing Tshekedi to be a minority ruler. Rey was also interested in attacking the power of the BaTswana rulers of Ngamiland, of whom he had a low opinion.³⁵

After Rey, however, there was a reversion to the earlier policy. The Resident Commissioners who followed Rey did not share his views on the development of the Protectorate, and were anxious to restore good relations with the chiefs. The administration refused to support the Tati Training Institute's appeals for renewed American aid money (on which it was dependent) and it was forced to close by 1942. In a further episode of the struggle between Tshekedi and the BaKalanga bakaNswazwi in 1945, the Resident Commissioner (A. D. Forsyth Thompson) not only backed the chief but even had RAF aircraft fly over the village to impress the dissidents with the government's backing for Tshekedi.³⁶

The most dramatic reversal, perhaps, was in the case of the Basarwa. In 1943 an RAF aircraft made a forced landing in the Kalahari. The two men aboard escaped unhurt, but then disappeared. The next year, evidence emerged that they had been killed by a group of Tyua Basarwa, who were afraid that the men would report them for killing a giraffe (a protected species). The Tyua were tried, and although they were acquitted for lack of evidence, the government was in little doubt of their guilt.³⁷ The result was disastrous for the Basarwa. The administration decided that the Basarwa needed to be much more closely controlled, and the Resident Commissioner met with Tshekedi Khama specifically to arrange for the restoration of the chiefs' control. The meeting was recorded in a file with the somewhat sinister title "Masarwa, control of".³⁸ The Basarwa of the area were moved to the Bamangwato Reserve to put them under Tshekedi's control, and their guns were confiscated (which by preventing them hunting game removed the alternative to working for cattle-owners). The fact that control was to be reimposed suggests that the earlier policies of "freeing" Basarwa may not have been entirely ineffective.³⁹

A note on "tribes"

³² Charles F. Rey (eds N. Parsons & M. Crowder), *Monarch of All I Survey: Bechuanaland Diaries 1929-37* (Gaborone, Botswana Society, 1988), p. 18, entry for 24 March 1930.

³³*Ibid.* p. 32 (16 June 1930)

³⁴ See Charles F. Rey (eds N. Parsons & M. Crowder), *Monarch of All I Survey: Bechuanaland Diaries 1929-37* (Gaborone, Botswana Society, 1988), p.261n.12; T. Mooko "New voices before the Second World War", F.Morton and J. Ramsay (eds), *The Birth of Botswana: A History of the Bechuanaland Protectorate from 1910 to 1966* (Gaborone: Longman, 1987) pp.98-101.

³⁵ See e.g. Rey *Monarch of all I survey* p. 102 (1 April 1932), p. 133 (17 June 1933)

³⁶ J. Ramsay, "Resistance from subordinate groups: BaBirwa, BaKgatla Mmanaana and BaKalanga Nswazwi", in F.Morton and J. Ramsay (eds), *The Birth of Botswana: A History of the Bechuanaland Protectorate from 1910 to 1966* (Gaborone: Longman, 1987), pp. 64-8.

³⁷ Robert K. Hitchcock, "Kuacaca: An early case of ethnoarchaeology in the Northern Kalahari", *Botswana Notes & Records*, vol. 23 (1991) pp. 223-33.

³⁸ BNA S.303/8/1, cited in Gadibolae, "Serfdom (*Bolata*) in the Nata area", p. 27.

³⁹ Later still, in the 1950s, there was a new exodus of Basarwa from Ngwato farms when the Colonial Development Corporation began paying cash wages on its ranches. (Gadibolae, "Serfdom (*Bolata*) in the Nata area", p. 30).

The question of ethnicity in Botswana has been confused by ambiguous terminology; above all, by the word "tribe".

The word "tribe" was adopted by European observers to describe patterns of social and political organization which seemed to have no close equivalents in their own societies. The word, which derives from classical Latin, had been used by the ancient Romans to describe "barbarians" in western Europe. The term was thus not in itself racist, since it originally applied to the Europeans' own ancestors, but it did imply an idea of a "lower stage" of cultural development. Unfortunately, it became reified in the twentieth century, especially as the concept of "Indirect Rule" became the dominant model for British colonial administrators. Colonial government would operate through existing social institutions, which were believed to be "tribal". This encouraged the fixing of previously fluid ethnic identities, and the conversion of other forms of group identity into ethnic ones, since it was "tribes" which the British would recognize and deal with. In Southern Africa the process was further encouraged by migrant labour in South Africa, where migrants were often officially organized by "tribal" categories.

In Botswana, the term "tribe" is used in at least two quite different senses. In the Bechuanaland Protectorate, the term "tribe" was used to describe the Tswana-ruled proto-states which were converted into Reserves, and this usage has been continued in post-Independence official use. "Tribe" here translates *morafe* in the sense of state or chiefdom. It is a political, not an ethnic unit. All the subjects of the Ngwato chief were, in the eyes of the Bechuanaland Protectorate administration, members of the "Bamangwato Tribe". It is in this sense that Schapera entitled his famous study *The Ethnic Composition of Tswana Tribes*,⁴⁰ a title which would make no sense if "tribe" was understood as an ethnic group.

However, the term "tribe" is also used to denote an ethnic group. (In Africa as a whole this is probably the more common use.) This is the sense of the word in, for example, the phrase "the Kalanga tribe", and is usually what is meant by the pejorative term "tribalism".

This ambiguity might not matter if writers were clear which they meant, but in fact it is not uncommon for writers to slip from one sense to the other without noticing. Some writers have translated *morafe* as "ethnic group", writing for example of "the chief of the Bakgatla ethnic group". This usage is clearly wrong if the writer means the Bakgatla chiefdom. (On the other hand it is possible to talk of a "Bakgatla ethnicity"⁴¹ in the sense of an ethnic identity pertaining to the core group of the Bakgatla chiefdom. Such an ethnicity would not include, for example, Basarwa subjects, but would include Bakgatla who happened to live elsewhere.)

The idea of "national" identities of the *merafe*, incorporating all inhabitants under a chief, never really succeeded in the Protectorate. Here a crucial fact is the circumstance that the Bechuanaland Protectorate incorporated a *cluster* of pre-colonial states within a larger unit. In Lesotho and Swaziland, the colonial territory equated to a single African kingdom; thus, it was clear as independence approached that the old chiefdom must evolve into a new nation-state,

⁴⁰ Isaac Schapera, *The Ethnic Composition of Tswana Tribes*, Monographs on Social Anthropology no. 11, (London: London School of Economics, 1952).

⁴¹ F. Morton, "Land, cattle and ethnicity: the creation of Linchwe's Bakgatla, 1875-1920", in W.A. Edge & M.H. Lekorwe (eds), *Botswana: Politics and Society* (Pretoria: J.L.Schwaik, 1998) pp. 43-61.

with the Paramount Chief becoming King. Let us imagine for a moment that Khama's Country had become a Protectorate alone. At independence it would have become, like Lesotho, the new nation-state of GammaNgwato, with all its inhabitants having a new "Ngwato" national identity whatever their ethnicity. But in fact, of course, that did not happen. The Protectorate was bigger than any one *morafe*, weakening the push toward such incorporation; while at the same time, the strongly hierarchical relationships between Tswana overlords and others weakened the attractiveness of such incorporation.

The point is relevant to the present discussion of revising the Constitution to elevate the position of non-Tswana chiefs. It is frequently stated that the Constitution only recognizes eight major tribes, at the expense of other ethnic groups, but in fact there is, formally, no such provision. What the Constitution provides, in section 78, is that the eight *Chiefs* who had the status of Paramount in the colonial era enjoy *ex officio* membership of the House of Chiefs. The House also contains representatives of the "Sub-Chiefs" who held authority *outside* the colonial-era Reserves.⁴² Thus for example the Chief of the BaTswana sits as chief of the "Batawana Tribe" in the sense of a territorial and political unit. Obviously this does, in fact, advantage Tswana at the expense of others since the eight major chiefs are all Tswana—the pre-colonial states were all Tswana-dominated—but the Constitution does not *formally* recognize any ethnicities: it recognizes the rulers of political entities. None of this is intended to criticize the present proposals for a more inclusive system; it is merely to suggest that it would be helpful to be clear about the original rationale, which was that the eight chiefs were existing rulers, not that they represented particular *ethnicities*.

The confusion has arisen because of the change since 1966 in the nature of chiefship. After Independence Sir Seretse Khama quietly but decisively transferred the bulk of the chiefs' powers to national and democratic institutions. Chiefs are not now the powerful territorial rulers they were before 1966, but have developed a different role in the House of Chiefs. They act as spokesmen and interpreters of traditional culture—as "traditional leaders". They also provide an alternative method for the representation of opinion, which does not challenge the primacy of the ordinary democratic process but complements it. Hence a problem arises for those Batswana who do not consider themselves citizens of the *morafe* headed by a given chief. Some Batswana who belong to groups other than the *morafe*'s core group, though not necessarily all, feel that the chief does not represent *their* traditional culture or interests. Those who were historically subjects rather than members of the *morafe* are probably least likely to identify with that *morafe* and least likely to feel represented by it, and may not regard themselves as members of the traditional pan-ethnic *morafe* at all. "Tribe" is thus understood in the ethnic sense rather than in the sense intended by the drafters of the Constitution. The widespread misunderstanding of the original significance of section 78 indicates that its premises are out of date. Hence the call for a more inclusive House of Chiefs, which would include a wider range of traditional leaders in accordance with this revised understanding of the House's function.

This brings us back to the point with which this paper opened: the history of Botswana is a

⁴² "The *ex-officio* Members of the House of Chiefs shall be such persons as are for the time being performing the functions of the office of Chief in respect of the Bakgatla, Bakwena, Bamalete, Bamangwato, Bangwaketse, Barolong, Batawana and Batlokwa Tribes, respectively." Constitution of Botswana, ch. 5, part III, s. 78. The four Elected Members represent the Sub-Chiefs of the Chobe, North-Esat, Ghanzi and Kgalagadi districts (s. 79).

history of incorporation in complex multi-ethnic societies, not a history of discrete, separate groups. It is a fundamental mistake to think of the Batswana of the past as belonging to one or other of a set of mutually exclusive identities. Identities were multiple and layered,⁴³ just as they are now, when one person can be simultaneously a MoTawana, a Northerner, and a Motswana. The idea of single, mutually exclusive identities has tended to make such questions as the composition of the House of Chiefs seem a zero-sum game, in which one group must lose for others to gain. But if we start instead with Botswana's long historical tradition of sophisticated multi-ethnicity then perhaps the question can be seen as one in which everyone stands to gain from a fuller representation.

⁴³ Paul Landau notes, for example, that in the 1860s "one might be a MoKaa and a loyal MoNgwato as well as a MoShoshong..." Paul Stuart Landau, *The Realm of the Word: Language, Gender and Christianity in a Southern African Kingdom* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1995) p. 6.