

Traditional leaders of the Bakgatla-ba-ga-Kgafela and their succession story¹

by

J S MOHLAMME*

*Sedibelo-o-mollô se a fša se a tlišaologa, sa re se fša metse ya falala,
ya tšhaba maputlela, ya nna makgaoganyana: morula o kgothi-kgolo, Bakgatla,
bana ba sefatana sa Moruleng,
barwa-mpša-e-jele-mpšana-ya-yona, dithata tsa Molefe a Masilo,
tse di jeleng mokgoro di o lala.*

Translation:

The curse that is fire, if it burns it melts and when it burns villages scatter and flee in splinters and fragments:
the morula tree with a thick stem
the Bakgatla are children of the concavity of Moruleng, sons of the-dog-has-devoured-its-own-pup forces of Molefe of Masilo that ate the hut in which they slept.²

Introduction and background

The name Bakgatla is shared by several groups of Bantu-speaking people inhabiting the central and western districts of the Transvaal³ and the south-eastern parts of Botswana. Among the more important of these groups are:

I have departed from the anthropological practice of dropping prefixes before the names of peoples. My reason for retaining them is that this is how the people refer to themselves and would like to be referred to likewise by those writing about them. Thus we say the Bakgatla and not the Kgatla. The latter form, however, has been reserved for adjectival use, eg. Kgatla genealogy, Kgatla regiments, etc.

Prof. J.S. Mohlamme is head of the Department of History at Vista University.

I am deeply indebted to the late Professor E.S. Moloto, a distinguished academic and meticulously careful linguist, for the translation of this praise poem. *Vide* E.S. MOLOTO, "The growth and Tendencies of Tswana Poetry", (D.Litt et Phil., Unisa, 1970), pp. 72-73.

3. For the purpose of this study we will refer to the names of the provinces as they stood before the 1994 general election.

Traditional leaders of the Bakgatla-ba-ga-Kgafela

- (1) the Bakgatla-baMoseletla,⁴ in the Hammanskraal and Pretoria districts of the Transvaal;
- (2) the Bakgatla-ba-ga-Kgafela, in Botswana, Pilanesberg and Nylstroom;
- (3) the Bakgatla-ba-ga-Mmanaana, in the Bangwaketse and Bakwena regions of the present Botswana;
- (4) the Bakgatla-baMmakau, at de Wildt near Pretoria and in Hammanskraal;
- (5) Bakgatla-ba Motsha, in the Hammanskraal and Nylstroom districts of the Transvaal; and
- (6) Bakgatla-ba Seabe, in the Hammanskraal and Pretoria districts.

According to Kgatla geneology, Botlolo, Malekeleke's direct descendant in the fourth generation, had two sons, Mogale (?Mokgatle) and Tabane.⁵

Early in the seventeenth century the group divided. A large section under Tabane moved to the north, and subsequently became divided into the modern Bakgatla-baMmakau of de Wildt near Pretoria, and Bakgatla-baMotsha, Schilpadfontein (Marapyane), in the district of Pretoria. Mogale, Tabane's elder brother, remained at Diroleng⁶ (Rustenburg district). Later this group moved eastwards to a place called Mmu-Mosweu (commonly known as Makapan's Location) near Hammanskraal. It was here that the Bakgatla-ba-ga-Kgafela also broke away. One story relates that Mogale had a son, Matshego. Matshego, who died in about 1650, had no male heir but only a daughter named Moselethe, in his great house. In the second house he had a son called Kgafela. The clan split on the issue of who was to succeed Matshego. Kgafela and his followers, who decried the idea of being ruled by a woman, broke away and they called themselves the Bakgatla-ba-ga-Kgafela. Those who remained with Moselethe became known as the Bakgatla-

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4. This is the most senior of all the Bakgatla tribes. In fact, if the Tswana had a paramountcy like, for example, the Ama-Zulu, this would be considered the paramount tribe among the Bakgatla.
 5. The early history of the Bakgatla already has its classic in the shape of I. SCHAPERER'S *Short History of the Bakgatla and Ditirafalo*, and it is not likely that any further research would reveal significantly much more. It was felt, nonetheless, that for the sake of providing a background to this study it should be briefly recapitulated. For further reading, see I. SCHAPERER, "A history of the Bakgatla-baga- Kgafela of Bechuanaland Protectorate", in *Communications from the School of African Studies*, Cape Town, New Series 3, July 1942 and *Praise poems of Tswana Chiefs*, (Oxford University Press, London, 1954); W.L. Maree, *Uit Duisternis Geroep*, (Voortrekkerpers, Johannesburg, 1966); T. Tlou and A. Campbell, *History of Botswana*, (Botswana Publishing Company, Gaborone, 1984); R.F. Morton, "Linchwe I and the Bakgatla Campaign in the South African War, 1899-1902", *Journal of African History*, 26(2), 1985, pp.169-191 and also P.L. Breutz, *The Tribes of Rustenburg and Pilansberg Districts in Ethnological Publications*, 28, (Government Printer, Pretoria, 1953) which have been consulted in writing this article.
 6. It has not been possible for me to establish the exact location of Diroleng from those interviewed.

baMoseitha (hereafter ba Moseitha)⁷ This was probably towards the end of the seventeenth century.

It is said that after separating from the baMoseitha, the Bakgatla-ba-ga-Kgafela (hereafter Bakgatla) sojourned at several places such as Ntsane (near Makapanstad), Molokwane at the confluence of the Pienaars (Moretele) and Crocodile (Odi) rivers and Tsekane (near Leeuwpoort in the district of Waterberg). Kgafela died at Tsekane and was succeeded by his son Tebele.

Under Masellane (Tebele's son and successor) they moved west and established themselves between the Crocodile River and the Pilaansbergen in the country of the Bathhako. They eventually settled at Mabule, a hill on Kruidfontein (Lesetlheng) north-west of Saulspoort,⁸ in the Pilaansbergen, with small outstations at Dithubaruba, Maremapoong, Sefikile, and Tlhaka-le-Moetse, alias 'Manakaditelle' (Middelkuil). Masellane's sons, Madise and Mare, died before they could rule over the Bakgatla. Kgwefane, son of Mare, ruled from about 1760-1770. After that the Bakgatla were ruled in succession by Molefe (died ±1790), Mmakgotso (c.1790-1795), Pheto (c. 1795-1810), Senwelo (c. 1810-1815), Letsebe (c. 1815-1820) and Pilane (died ±1850) who was succeeded by his eldest son Kgamanyane, who ruled the Bakgatla from c. 1851-1874.⁹ (See Appendix A for the Bakgatla line of Chiefs).

Kgamanyane (1851-1874)

In the 1850s much of the Transvaal had already come under the control of the

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7. According to TRANSVAAL COLONY, A short history of the native tribes of the Transvaal (Government Printer, Pretoria, 1905), p. 27 the Bakgatla-baga-Kgafela broke away from the baMasetha "upon the death of Mokgatle, ... for reasons unknown". Schapera found another version in *Mosupa-Tsela*, xix (4), April 1932, p. 4, which states that the Bakgatla were originally part of the Bakwena, and lived for a long time at Mabyanamatshwaana (Swartkoppies), near Brits. Then they began moving south, leaving behind the section now known as baMfatha (Babididi). Afterwards the bagoMmanaana broke away. The others continued to move on, until they reached the Ntwana mountains (?)*, where they settled. Here there was a dispute about the chieftainship. Moseitha should have succeeded, but his (her?) brother Matshego refused to acknowledge him and seceded with part of the tribe. The latter then became known, after Matshego's son, as Bakgatla-baga-Kgafela. Subsequently the baMmakau and the baMotsha also broke away. I. SCHAPERA, *A Short History of the Bakgatla*, p. 2. fn 3. (*Most probably Ntsuanatsatsi, cf. M. LEGASSICK in L.M. THOMPSON (ed.), *African Societies in Southern Africa* (Heinemann, London, 1969), p. 100.)
 8. Saulspoort is a corruption of Tsheole's Poort. This is the capital of the Bakgatla people, also called Moruleng or Mmammitlwa or Mphe-Batho.
 9. Kgamanyane ruled the Bakgatla from about 1851-1874. A variant version has 1848 as the beginning of his reign; this is less satisfactory considering that the *Masoswê* regiment (Kgamanyane's own age-regiment) was created only in 1849. See I. SCHAPERA, *Handbook of Tswana Law and Custom* (Frank Cass, London, 1970), p. 317). It must be remembered that according to Tswana law and custom, before initiation a male was not considered to be a man, no matter his age, and could not attend the *kgotla* (court session), advise the chief or marry.

emigrant Boers. This was during the reign of Chief Kgamanyane, son of Pilane, after whom Pilandsberg/Pilaansbergen (Pilanesberg) was named.

By the time Kgamanyane became chief, the Boers had already taken effective control of much of the Transvaal. With the departure of Mzilikazi's Amandebele from the Transvaal in 1837-38 the Boers claimed that all the Africans in the territory north of the Vaal River (Noka-e-tshetlha/Lekoa) were their subjects, and subsequently liable to labour taxation. They maintained that the "Bible made Ham a servant of servants, and servants these children of Ham must always remain",¹⁰ and of course, according to the Boers, the Africans were the children of Ham destined to occupy a position of inferiority for all eternity. The Bakgatla, like many other Africans, were forced to provide free labour on the Boer farms. The Boers also employed the Bakgatla as auxiliaries in their wars against other African chiefdoms: In Kgamanyane's praises (*maboko*) lengthy reference is made to the help the Bakgatla gave the Boers when they fought against the Baga-Mokopane (1854) and the Basotho of Moshweshwe (1865-66).¹¹ It is said that Kgamanyane was related by affinity to King Moshweshwe of Basutoland (today Lesotho). The legend is that just before the outbreak of this war, Kgamanyane sent a messenger to Moshweshwe with this message:

*Kè lemawana le ntlha pedi
le tlhabelang kobo le moroki tshekedi
ke re ke le kwano ke koo
ntlha nngwe kè tswele borokgwe,
ntlha nngwe lekebi.*

Translation:

I am the awl with two points
which pricks the *kaross* and the mender aslant
while I am this end, I am that end
one leg wearing a trouser and the other
a loin skin.¹²

The gist of the message is that Kgamanyane was torn between two loyalties, i.e.

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10. W.M. MACMILLAN, *Bantu, Boer, and Briton*, (Oxford University Press, London, 1963), p. 359. See I. SCHAPER, *A Short History*, p. 10; *Traditional Histories of the native tribes of the Bechuanaland Protectorate* (Lovedale Press, South Africa, 1954), p. 175; and *Praise Poems*, p. 65. In the Boer-Moshweshwe War of 1865-66 Kgamanyane drafted the *Masoswé* (his own regiment), the *Mangana* and the *Mathukwi* regiments in support of the Boers, *albeit* against his wish as can be seen from the message he sent to the Basotho monarch.
 12. E.S. MOLOTO, "The Growth and Tendencies of Tswana Poetry", pp. 90-92.

between the dominant white race and fellow blacks, the latter relationship strengthened by a marriage. Hence the message of Kgamanyane to Moshweshwe was heavily laden with emotion because that event presented a test of blood loyalty as against legal loyalty to the conqueror.

It is said that Kgamanyane was autocratic, and that this caused some of his brothers to secede from him. In about 1861 Kgamanyane's half-brother, Tshomankane (*alias* Engeland) of the *Mangana* regiment, broke away with a portion of the clan and settled at Bopitiko (Doornhoek/Engelandskraal), a hill at Ledig near the present site of Sun City. Another half-brother of his, Letsebe, led another splinter group to Molorwe (Janskop), and later crossed the Marico River (Madikwe) and settled with Bakwena Chief Sechele at Dithebyane.

When Kgamanyane fled Saulspoot on 1 August 1869, to escape from oppressive Boer rule, he sought refuge among the Bakwena of Sechele. Chief Sechele settled Kgamanyane and his followers at Motshodi (Mochudi) on the banks of the Ngotwane River. Many of his people stayed behind under Mokae, one of his half-brothers. At Mochudi he was eventually joined by Letsebe and his group.

Kgamanyane died in 1874, it is still believed today, as a result of a beating by Paul Kruger. He was succeeded by Lentswe, his eldest son in the great house. After Kgamanyane's death Tshomankane's brother, Tshwenyane, returned to Lesetlheng (Kruidfontein) with the group that had hived off with Tshomankane.

While living in Mochudi, Lentswe tried to maintain his authority over the Bakgatla in the Transvaal by retaining the loyalty of the Saulspoot Bakgatla. He purchased the farms Saulspoot 269 (Moruleng), Modderkuil 565 (Manamakgotheng), and Kruidfontein 649 (Lesetlheng).¹³

Mokae

Mokae, son of Moselekatse (not to be confused with the Amandebele leader), was Kgamanyane's half-brother in the 10th house. When Kgamanyane departed from the Transvaal in 1869, Mokae remained with a section of the Bakgatla at Saulspoot. In 1894 he participated in the Boer-Mmalebogo War by drafting three regiments, the *Matlakana*, the *Makoba* and the *Majanko* in support of the Boers.¹⁴

When the South African War broke out in 1899, Mokae approached the small white community at the Saulspoot mission and offered his people's assistance to the

13. F. EDMESTON, Sub-Native Commissioner, Pilansberg Ward to the Native Commissioner, Western Transvaal, Rustenburg, 27 April 1903, NA. 672/03, Lt. G. Vol. 114, No. 3289.

14. According to the *SHNTT*, p. 37 "In 1894, war broke out between the Boers and Malaboch, because they would not pay taxes."

Republican government. It is said that Mokae was sent back home with the words:

't Is een oorlog tusschen blanken en wij willen niet dat gekleurden zich er in mengen zullen.¹⁵

Whether this rebuff could deter Mokae is doubtful. No sooner had hostilities broken out than Mokae and two young Boers had galloped into Mochudi probably to urge Lentswe to throw in his lot with the Boers. Lentswe arrested them, handed the two Boer captives over to the British, and Mokae remained in detention in Mochudi for the duration of the war.¹⁶ Lentswe then appointed Dithlake, son of the renegade Tshomankane, to deputise for him in Moruleng until 1902. Indeed it may be an excess of courtesy to spend so much time on Mokae, a man who had no interest in improving the lot of his people, except to ingratiate himself with the government that was progressively enslaving them. However, continuity requires his inclusion in this article.

The South African War (1899-1902)

When the South African War broke out in October 1899, the Bakgatla soon became involved, despite a tacit agreement on both sides that "kaffir tribes" were not to be deployed. They fought three engagements against the Boers and lost none. One was at Derdepoort in November, one in February 1900 at Kaeye Pits and the other at Moreteletsi in September 1901. As the war progressed, some Boers fled their farms and the Bakgatla occupied them, especially in and around the Saulspoort area. The Boers retreated before the advancing Bakgatla up to the vicinity of Pretoria. Until the end of the war, the Bakgatla captured Boer cattle, some of which had been stolen from the Bakgatla before.¹⁷ Bakgatla raids into the Transvaal were so successful that at one stage Lentswe held undisputed sway over a large territory stretching from the Magaliesberg near Pretoria to Matlabas (Motlhabatse) north-west of Thabazimbi.¹⁸ After the war Lentswe installed Ramono as chief at Saulspoort.

15. W.L. MAREE, *Uit Duisternis Geroep*, pp. 159-60.

16. R.F. MORTON, "Linchwe I and the Kgatla campaign in the South African War, 1899-1902", *Journal of African History*, 26(2), (1985), p. 177. A variant version states that Mokae and his trusted general Majadibodu were arrested by the Bakgatla at Moruleng who accused them of being traitors, and handed them over to Lentswe in the Protectorate. *Vide* Schapera, *Ditirafalo*, p. 183. (This version has also been confirmed by my informants at Moruleng.)

17. cf. E.F. KNIGHT, *South Africa after the War*, (Longmans, London, 1903), p. 268.

18. *Vide* SCHAPERERA (trans & ed), *Praise poems of Tswana Chiefs*, p. 100 and L.W. Truschel, "Nation-Building and the Kgatla the role of the Anglo-Boer War", in *Botswana Notes and Records*, vol. iv, (1972), p. 189.

Ramono (1903-1917)

At the end of the war Lentswe asked the British authorities in the Transvaal to recognize his authority over the Transvaal Bakgatla as well. On 13 May 1903, two Bakgatla Headmen, Littake Pilan (sic), (it should be Dithake Pilane), and Kgori K. Pilane, and two Bakgatla Chiefs, Segale Pilane and Ramono K. Pilane, petitioned His Excellency Sir Arthur Lawley, Lt. Governor of the Transvaal Colony, saying:

We are two sections of Bakgatla, one in Pilansberg and another in Bechuanaland Protectorate, and we most humbly ask from our British Government to join us together into one section by abolishing between us the laws relating to passes, simply because we are just of the same blood, bone and flesh.¹⁹

The request of the Bakgatla was refused on the grounds that Lentswe was a resident of the Protectorate and therefore outside the jurisdiction of the Transvaal government. The reply of the Secretary for Native Affairs to Lentswe ran as follows:

It is not practicable for your paramount Chief Linchwe who lives in Bechuanaland, to exercise his chieftainship in this Territory; nor can the general Pass system be disturbed to meet the convenience of the members of your Tribe who are living in two Territories.²⁰

But a compromise was reached in terms of which Lentswe was allowed to nominate a deputy to act for him in the Transvaal; in this way he could control his people there, while his deputy would be officially recognized by the Transvaal government.²¹ Lentswe accordingly sent his full brother Ramono of Kaeye Pits fame to Moruleng in 1903 as chief of the Transvaal Bakgatla.

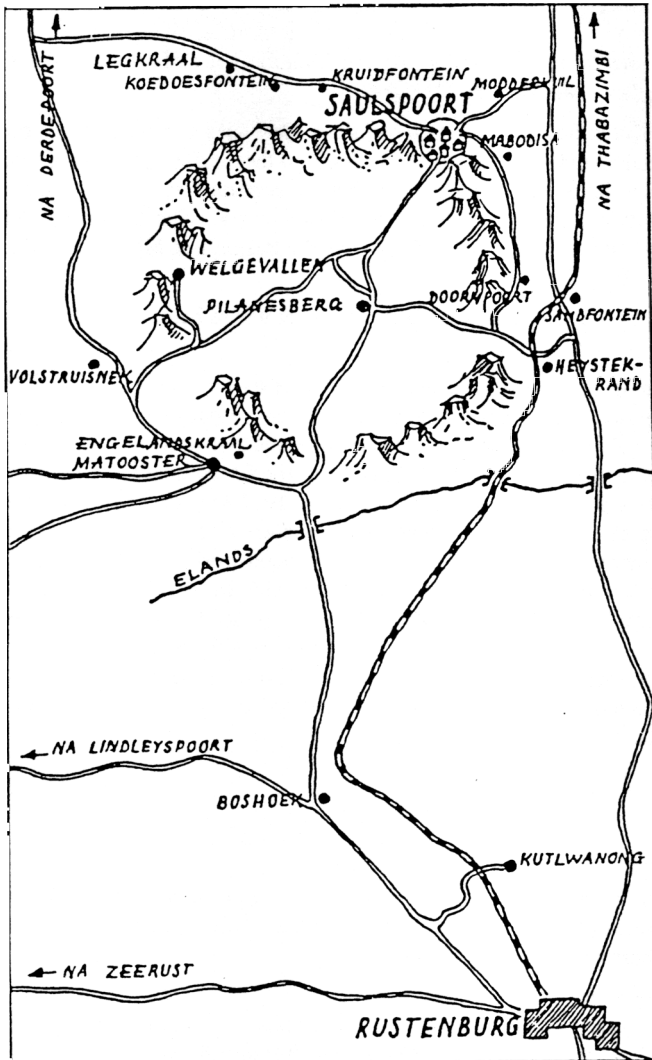
The decision by the British government in South Africa not to recognize Lentswe's authority over the Transvaal Bakgatla, had far-reaching implications for the chieftainship at Mochudi and at Saulspoort. It meant that henceforth even though the Bakgatla at Saulspoort regarded themselves as Lentswe's subjects and paid tribute to him, legally they were under a different administration and in no way bound by any decision emanating from Mochudi. For this reason we will no longer concern ourselves with the chieftainship in Mochudi. We are now going to concern ourselves with the chieftainship in the Transvaal, especially after the South African War of 1899-1902.

19. Petition from People of Bakgatla re-cattle and land lost during the War to His Excellency Sir Arthur Lawley, Lt. Gov. of the Transvaal Colony, 13 May 1903, Lt. G. vol. 114, Mo. 3289/03.

20. W. Windham, Secretary for Native Affairs, to Chief Segale K. Pilane & others of the Bakgatla People, 2 June 1903, N.A. Papers 672/03, Lt. Gov. vol. 114, 3289/03.

21. Mafeking registry J. 496 cited by SCHAPER in *A Short History of the Bakgatla*, p. 20.

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Map of Maruleng and environs

(Source: W.L. MAREE, *Uit duisternis geroep.*)

Ramono, of the *Makoba* regiment, was born between 1854 and 1859. He was

Historia, 44(2), November 1999, pp. 328-44.

Lentswe's younger brother in Kgamanyane's great house. Ramono had taken an active part in the fighting during the South African War, especially at Derdepoort and Kaeye Pits, and during the war with the Bakwena when still a *Legwane* (an uninitiated Mokgatla boy).²²

The Dutch Reformed Church had since 1864 been consolidating its position as the official church of the Bakgatla. In Ramono they had a true pillar of strength for the church. Ramono made generous financial contributions towards the church and the education advancement of his people in general. The legendary Debora Jacoba Retief (Borrie), who worked amongst the Bakgatla at Mochudi for 42 years, once called him

die enigste Christen wat sy geken het wie se beurs ook waarlik bekeerd was.²³

He evinced the same enthusiasm at Saulspoort. Here he extended the Dutch Reformed Church building and took personal responsibility for the costs. Over and above all other financial contributions he made towards the progress of education and Christianity among his people, he also paid the salary of one of the evangelists out of his pocket. He died on 23 January 1917 and was buried next to his father at Mmasebudule (Rhenosterfontein). His second wife, Bogadi (née Moloto) (the first having died in Mochudi), continued the good work he had started. She organized church women and in 1937, when funds were being raised for the building of the George Stegmann Mission Hospital at Saulspoort, the Bakgatla Christian Women Union, under her able leadership, contributed £100 towards the nurses' home;²⁴ an enormous amount of money in those days, especially considering the economic position of a country that was just beginning to recover from the depression of the 1930s.

Dialwa (1917-1922)

After Ramono's death Lentswe appointed Dialwa, his half-brother in the fourth house, regent over the Transvaal Bakgatla. Dialwa ruled for 5 years only and had to abdicate on account of ill-health.

22. It is said that during this war a party of Bakwena crossed into the Transvaal and looted cattle from Ramono's cattle post, Mmotso, near Witfontein (Kwa-Disake/Modimong), whereupon a group of *Magwane* (uninitiated boys) led by Ramono pursued them and recovered the cattle at Matlabas (Mothabatsa) after having sent the captors fleeing helter-skelter, *Vide* SCHAPER, *Praise Poems*, p. 100.

23. W.L. MAREE, *Uit Duisternis Geroep*, p. 218.

24. *Ibid*, p. 229.

Ofentse (1922-1942)

Upon the abdication of Dialwa, Isang (second son of Chief Lentswe), who had taken over from his ailing father as regent in October 1920, sent his full brother Ofentse (born 1888) of the *Mafatshwana* regiment to Saulspoort to act as Regent, as the heir apparent to the throne (Tidimane, R. Pilane) was by then a minor. He ruled the Bakgatla for 20 years and died on 12 January 1942.

It was during Ofentse's term of office that the chieftainship in the Bakgatla Tribal Administration suffered another set-back. In 1927 the Union government passed the Native Administration Act, 1927 (Act No. 38 of 1927), according to which the Governor-General became the Supreme chief of all Africans in the Union of South Africa. Under sub-section (7) of section two of the Native Administration Act, 1927 (Act No. 38 of 1927), as amended, the Governor-General could recognize or appoint any person as chief or headman in charge of a tribe (chiefdom) or a location, could depose any chief or headman and could prescribe the duties, powers, privileges and conditions of service of chiefs and headmen.²⁵ These powers were later contained in Proclamation No. 110 of 1957 which further reduced the remaining powers of the African chief.

The 1927 Act specifically reduced the African chief to a creature in the hands of the Governor-General on whose mercy and whims he was entirely dependent. What this Act meant for the Bakgatla royal house in Mochudi was that all hopes of its recognition by the Union government in Saulspoort were shattered. In fact this act adversely affected the entire African Administration across the length and breadth of the Union.

Ofentse was succeeded by his only son, Thari, ("Gadinkame", as he was known), who ruled the Bakgatla from 25 January 1943 to the second half of 1949 when he had to resign from office because of heart trouble.

T.R. Pilane (born 9 June 1907)

Chief Tidimane Ramono Pilane (popularly known as Ted) of the *Matshama* regiment was educated at Tiger Kloof (1920-27) and Lovedale (1928-32). Before taking over the chieftainship of his chiefdom he served in various capacities in the administration of his people, including a short period as a teacher at Moruleng. He also served as a clerk with the Imperial Civil Service in Bechuanaland from 1936 to 1949, when he relinquished the job to take up his rightful position among his people at Moruleng.

25. Statutes of the Union of South Africa, 1927, Vol. 1, Govt Printer, Cape Town, 1927, p.316.

On 14 October 1949 Tidimane, eldest son of Ramono, who was then 42 years of age, was installed Chief of the Bakgatla-ba-ga-Kgafela in the Transvaal by Chief Molefi Pilane of Mochudi. He has held this position until very recently. Those who were present on that memorable day of 14 October 1949, still remember distinctly that Chief Molefi, in addressing the Bakgatla, made it unequivocally clear to them that he had come to install a chief of the Bakgatla, and not a regent and that henceforth the new chief would act independently of Mochudi since he had full jurisdiction over Ramono's subjects, the Kgafela Kgatla.²⁶ On that occasion a blunder of monumental proportions was also committed by the Bakgatla of Saulspoor. Disregarding the Transvaal government's decision of 1903 regarding Lentswe's authority over the Transvaal Bakgatla, the Bakgatla compromised the new chief's position by agreeing that he should not don the leopard skin on his coronation day.²⁷ The reasoning then was that only a member of the senior house in Mochudi may don the leopard skin. The chief in Saulspoor may at best trample on it (the leopard skin), to indicate the subservience of the royal house at Saulspoor to that in Mochudi. The negative effects of the events of 14 October 1949 only became evident 45 years later as will be indicated later in this paper.

In 1961, when it was thought that South Africa was in the process of giving its black people independence that would be internationally recognized, Chief Pilane was elected first chairman of the Tswana Territorial Authority. We remember distinctly how on that memorable day of April 21 1961, Chief Pilane in his inaugural address challenged the Pretoria government to give the black people of South Africa "*Thuto e e sa pekwang*" (unadulterated education). Did Pretoria heed the request? Without going into details of the effects of Bantu Education, suffice it to say that the track record of that Department was disastrous in the extreme.

(See Appendix B for the genealogical tree of the Bakgatla chiefs)

There is a saying among the Bakgatla-ba-ga-Kgafela that

"Dikgosi tsa Kgatleng di ilwa ke setsho" (Bakgatla chiefs are hated by the *setsho*) (meaning, few Bakgatla chiefs have lived to see their heirs pass through the second stage (*setsho*) of the *bogwera*, male initiation ceremony). Indeed, this assertion seems to be true for according to available literature and accounts of tribal historians, the only Bakgatla chiefs who have enjoyed long life were Masellane, Kgwefane, Molefe, Lentswe and Tidimane. The rest died in the prime of their lives.

26. Testimony of Headman Molefe S.D. Pilane (12 June 1995).

27. It is important to note that the Bakgatla had previously disregarded another government ruling before, viz. that of the former Boer government, concerning Lentswe's authority over the Bakgatla in the Transvaal. "In 1895 President Paul Kruger had granted the tribe independent status from the parent tribe at Mochudi", P.L. BREUTZ, *History of the Batswana*, p. 342.

In June 1995 Chief Tidimane turned 88. At this advanced age many of his subjects rightly wished to know when he would relinquish the chieftainship so that Prince Merafe, the heir apparent, could be installed. Some of those interviewed said that the official installation of the heir apparent seemed to be stalled by the fact that there appeared to be some disagreement between the royal houses at Phuthadikobo (Mochudi) and Mmamitlwa (Saulspoot) regarding the role to be played by the senior royal house in Mochudi during the installation of the new chief. It would seem that the royal house in Mochudi, which is considered by some as the "paramount" house, should not allow the new chief at Saulspoot to depart from tradition and don the leopard skin on his inauguration. This view is, however, vehemently rejected by some Bakgatla at Moruleng, who are aware of the various legal and political developments that have taken place in both Botswana and South Africa since 1903. At this point it is significant to note that unlike, for instance, the Basotho and the Ama-Zulu, there is no paramount chief among the Bechuana. We are reminded here of a timely warning that was given by Mr C. Bruce Young, Secretary of the Department of Bantu Administration and Development, at the inaugural session of the Tswana Territorial Authority (TTA) in December 1961 at Mafeking, who said:

The history of the Tswana is, of course, that, in the past, the various tribes and clans split up. The result is that there is no paramount chief here as you have, for example, in Zululand. Anybody who seeks to aspire to a paramouncy here may be looking for trouble A chairman and a vice-chairman have been elected. This does not mean that they will exercise powers or functions over the individual chiefs and tribes. It means that they have certain functions and duties to perform in the capacities to which they have been elected.²⁸

The foregoing excerpt is of particular relevance to the current succession strife in Saulspoot. It vindicates the stand taken by some Bakgatla people that the chief in Mochudi is in fact not a paramount chief, but rather a senior member of the royal house among the Bakgatla-ba-ga-Kgafela. Be that as it may, sooner or later a new chief must be installed at Moruleng. It is only hoped that when that time arrives wise counsel will prevail and the installation of the new chief will be such that the incumbent will not in any way play second fiddle in the Bakgatla tribal affairs. This is very crucial considering that South Africa is now on the threshold of a new political dispensation where the new chief will be expected to be equal to new challenges of his time, as have his predecessors responded to the opportunities of theirs. As an outsider I cannot say how the Bakgatla people should resolve their

28. Tswana Gebiedsoverheid: Notule van Sittig van 1961 en Inkomste en Uitgawe Begrotings vir Finansiële jare 1961-1962 en 1962-1963, p.14.

differences. All I can say is that whatever decision is taken, the Bakgatla people dare not do something for which posterity will not forgive them.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to state that my only objective in presenting what I have said is to recapitulate the history of the Bakgatla people so that the people themselves can get a clear picture of how to chart their way forward. Two points in particular have become abundantly clear: Firstly, we have seen how the various repressive governments of South Africa have through legislation progressively eroded the authority of the African traditional leaders in this country to the extent that they ultimately found themselves having been reduced to the position of paid agents of the state. Some of them were so dehumanized that they were being used by state apparatus to oppress their own subjects! Secondly, we have established that although there are strong blood-ties between the Bakgatla of Saulspoort and those of Mochudi, today the chief at Mochudi has no legal right over the Bakgatla of Saulspoort.

By way of an update it is fitting to state here that the succession strife among the Bakgatla has resulted in a legal wrangle. The matter was brought before the Supreme Court of Bophuthatswana in Mmabatho on the 4th day of December 1995. Judgement was passed in favour of the two respondents, Chief Linchwe II (Lentswe) of Mochudi, Botswana, and Nyalala Pilane, Saulspoort, son of the then reigning chief's younger brother.

Appendix A

Bakgatla chiefs

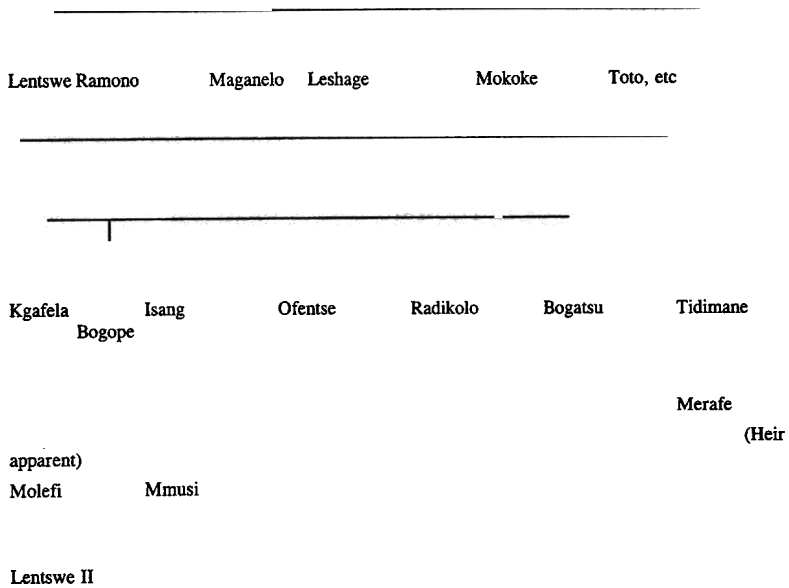
Kgafela		
Tebele		
Masellane		
Mare		
Kgwefane	c. 1760-1770	
Molefe	c. 1770-1790	
Pheto	c. 1795-1810	
Letsebe	c. 1815-1820	
Pilane	d. 1850	
Kgamanyane	c. 1848-1874	<i>In the Tranvaal</i>
Lentswe	1875-1920	Ditlhake (deputy) 1900-1902
Isang (regent)	1920-1929	Ramono 1903-1917
Molefi	1929-1936	Dialwa (regent) 1917-1922
	1945-1958	Ofentse (regent) 1922-1942
Mmusi (regent)	1936-1942	Thari (regent) 1942-1949
	1958-1963	Tidimane 1949-1996
Bakgatla (regent)	1942-1945	
Lentswe II	1963-present	

Source : I. Schapera, *A Handbook of Tswana Law and Custom*, p.308.

Appendix B

Genealogical trees of the Bakgatla chiefs

Kgamanyane



Sources: Adapted from I. SCHAPER, *A Short History of the Bakgati*, pp. 28-19, and *Praise Poems of Tswana Chiefs*, p. 44.

Appendix C

Kgatla Regiments *

Regiment	Leader	Location	Date
Masoswê	Kgamanyane Pilane	Mabule	1849
Mangana	Tshomankane Pilane	Tlhaka-le-Moetse	1856
Mathukwi	Bogatsu Pilane	Moruleng	1863
Mafatlha	Maganelo Kgamanyane	Moruleng	1869
Matlakana	Lentswe Kgamanyane	Mochudi	1874
Makoba	Ramono Kgamanyane	Mochudi	1880
Majanko	Modise Kgamanyane	Mochudi	1884
Mantwane	Mochele Kgamanyane	Mochudi	1892
Makuka	Kgafela Lentswe	Mochudi & Moruleng	1901
Machechele II	Isang Lentswe	Mochudi & Moruleng	1911
Mafatshwana II	Ofentse Lentswe	Mochudi & Moruleng	1915
Madima	Radikolo Lentswe	Mochudi & Moruleng	1915
Machama	Molefi Kgafela	Mochudi	1928
Magata	Mmusi Kgafela	Mochudi	1938
Mafiri	Ramono Isang	Moruleng	1947
Mangope	Mokoke Linchwe	Mochudi	1955
Mathulwa	Linchwe Kgafela	Mochudi	1963
Masoswê II	Rramonye Pheto Kgafela	Mochudi	1975
Madingwana	Pulane Pilane	Mochudi	1976

The last *bogwera* (male initiation ceremony/formation of an age-set) in its original, pre-Christian form among the Bakgatla took place in 1901 with the formation of the *Makuka* regiment. The age-sets formed after 1910 were called “confirmation regiments”.

* Sources: I. SCHAPER, *A Handbook of Tswana Law and Custom*, p. 317, and *Bogwera*, p.19.

Opsomming

Tradisionele leiers van die Bakgatla-ba-ga-Kgafela en hul opvolgingsverhaal

In hierdie artikel gee die skrywer 'n uiteensetting van die wyse waarop daar te werk gegaan is om die opvolgingsproses in die tradisionele samelewing van die Bakgatla van stapel te laat loop. Daar word veral op die herinterpretasie van lofgedigte gekonsentreer.