

From Shame to Pride:
Politicized Ethnicity in the Kalahari, Botswana

Jacqueline S. Solway

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Résumé

La montée de la conscience ethnique et du mouvement séparatiste parmi des peuples d'origines diverses dans le district de Kweneng au Botswana est ici analysée. Dans ce cas particulier, les Kgalagadi ont transformé, valorisé et ont fait leur une étiquette ethnique stigmatisante qui leur avait été imposée au dix-neuvième siècle et ils en ont fait une image positive à laquelle ils s'identifient et une force d'action politique. L'auteur affirme que les facteurs structurels et culturels sont tous deux à l'origine du changement de la conscience et de l'action politique. On remarque en effet un changement dans le relations de pouvoir lié à un élargissement de la bureaucratie et de l'économie au Botswana; des efforts croissants par les Kgalagadi d'affirmer leur intégrité et le caractère distinct de leur langue, de leur histoire et de leurs traditions; et les interprétations par les Kgalagadi de leurs expériences lorsqu'ils essayent de pénétrer les domaines de la société du Botswana dont ils avaient été exclus auparavant.

Introduction

This analysis considers the rise of ethnic consciousness and the manner in which the subjective understandings of ethnic identities are transformed in Botswana, with particular reference to a group of formerly subordinate peoples, the Kgalagadi.¹ I examine the process of ethnogenesis² whereby the ethnic identity constructed and imposed by politically dominant peoples

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upon a number of subordinated and disparate peoples in the nineteenth century has become a source of pride and a political tool in the twentieth century. The same ascribed and stigmatized ethnic identity that was employed to exclude people from participating in valued activities, gaining access to resources, and holding political power has now been adopted for self-identification. Thus, many members of the stigmatized group use this identity to challenge their dominant neighbour's claims to political hegemony. In this process of ethnogenesis, one generation's shame became the next generation's rallying cry.

In Botswana, the state has been explicitly committed to downplaying the importance of ethnicity. Indeed, Botswana is often singled out as an African country free of the divisive struggles that surround ethnically based politics. One's ethnic background should be irrelevant for voting, taking office, and obtaining employment, education, or land; as well, ethnicity is not recorded in the census. Although official policy has attempted to eradicate the importance of ethnicity, it has by no means been entirely successful,³ and ethnicity appears to be entering the political arena in new ways. For example, the House of Chiefs, one of the few government bodies based upon ethnicity, has been a significant staging ground for ethnic struggle.

In recent years a number of scholars have argued persuasively that ethnic identities emerge and transform in the context of power relations, that ethnic identities have both ideological and material realities, and cultural as well as structural forms, and that while these identities are clearly related to class positions and relations, the two are not simply reflections or masks of one another (O'Brien 1986; Stack 1986; Comaroff 1987; Vail 1991).⁴ From these insights, my analysis follows a double track. I locate the rise of Kgalagadi ethnic consciousness and its politicization in the process of rapid social change, which is tied to an expanding economy and state bureaucracy. This structural context has enabled the realignment of ethnic identities and hierarchies. New forms of consciousness, however, do not spring directly from revised objective conditions, but are mediated by people's experiences and interpretations. Accordingly, this article explores both the cultural and structural conditions which have given rise to the Kgalagadi's new ethnic consciousness.

Recent changes such as urbanization, the commercialization of agro-pastoralism, and the expansion of government power, presence, and services in Botswana have altered the distribution of power, thereby shifting ethnic and class hierarchies. In particular, patronage networks, which once provided a greater organic link between the elite and rural residents and stabilized ethnic hierarchies, are now eroding (see Scott 1972). Expanded opportunities have enabled many Kgalagadi to obtain higher education and employment outside their home areas, and Kgalagadi reflection upon the experiences of

these "sojourners" has been critical in catalyzing ethnic consciousness (see Anderson 1991). In this context, members of formerly subordinate and muted groups (see Ardener 1975) are attempting to assert their voices and claim a piece of the growing "national cake."⁵

Discussions of ethnicity have often centered around the so-called primordialist (Geertz 1973; Isaacs 1975) versus structuralist / instrumentalist (Barth 1969; Bonacich 1980) debate, which, put in somewhat reductionist terms, attempts to determine whether ethnic identity exists prior to, or emerges from, social action. This is essentially a false dichotomy mired in "straw man" type arguments; much recent work (Comaroff 1987; Bentley 1987; Stack 1986) has been directed at reconciling the two approaches in order to reveal ethnic identity as both culturally (not naturally) "given,"⁶ and therefore, at the same time, contingent, subject to structural forces and human manipulation, and historically constituted. Ethnicity is a particular assertion of collective identity, which can be based on either self-identification, external ascription, or both (Barth 1969) and which emerges in specific historical circumstances. Accordingly, it is subject to change with historical conditions. Moreover, as J.L. Comaroff argues, once historically established, "ethnic consciousness enters a dialectical relationship with structures that underlie it; once ethnicity impinges upon experience as an (apparently) independent principle of social classification and organization, it provides a powerful motivation for collective activity" (Comaroff 1987, 312).

The politicization of ethnicity is evident in a variety of late twentieth century political regimes. The extent of similarities among these nation states where ethnicity constitutes a symbol and organizing principle for political movements is unknown. Whatever the connections, however, each case merits its own investigation. In Southern Africa, ethnicity bears particular scrutiny because of the way in which the apartheid state has manipulated and enforced it. The most recent waves of civil strife and widespread violence in South Africa have an ethnic component. Because of Botswana's proximity to South Africa and its close historic and economic links, it might be assumed that analogous factors have contributed to the rise of ethnic movements in both countries (although violence does not characterize Botswana's political struggles). While some parallel processes may be at work, the circumstances and contexts of the two situations are sufficiently diverse to warrant specific analyses.

Three of the most significant differences will be outlined. The most glaring is related to official policy with regard to racial or ethnic differences. First, in overt opposition to South Africa, Botswana, at independence in 1966, adopted an explicitly antiracial (ethnic or tribal) stance, manifested in unambiguous terms by the marriage of Botswana's first president to a white British woman. Second, Botswana enjoys a universal adult franchise and a

"multi-party democracy."⁷ Third, in contrast to South Africa, Botswana has experienced stunning economic growth over the last two decades.

At a time when most African countries have been undergoing economic decline and/or stagnation (at least according to official statistics) and have been subject to coercive economic programs dictated by agencies such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, Botswana has witnessed unprecedented economic growth. The World Bank Report (1992, 219) reveals that Botswana had the fastest growing economy in the world from 1965 to 1990: its growth rate averaged 8.4 percent per annum during this period (South Korea, the second fastest growing economy, averaged a growth rate of 7.1 percent). As a result, Botswana has gone from being amongst the twenty-five poorest nations in the world at independence in 1966 (per capita income was approximately US \$80 [Colclough and McCarthy 1980]) to one of Africa's wealthiest in the 1990s (in 1992 per capita income was approx \$2 650 [Botswana 1993, 4]).⁸ Minerals, especially diamonds, have fuelled Botswana's economic transformation. However, the international diamond market is now weak and diamond production has reached a plateau. Thus, Botswana must think more in terms of stabilization than rapid expansion (Molutsi and Holm 1989, 3).

Ethnicity in the 1970s

In the late 1970s, when I first conducted fieldwork in the western Kweneng⁹ region of the Kalahari, the ethnic identity of local people was a very sensitive issue. The Tswana perjoratively referred to the Bantu-speaking peoples of the desert as (Ba)Kgalagadi. Actually they were more often and even more negatively called "[Ma]Kgalagadi" – the prefix "Ma" indicating subhuman or servile origins,¹⁰ "Ba" referring to humans.¹¹ The "Kgalagadi" referred to themselves only occasionally as Kgalagadi. On official documents and in some other circumstances, they frequently labelled themselves as "Kwena," that is, as members of the dominant Tswana group in the district.

Surprised by this, I pursued the topic of ethnic identification further, by assigning the standard seven class (the highest local education level), to whom I frequently taught English, a composition, entitled "The History of My People." Of a total of eighteen students, several mentioned no collective identity, eight identified "their people" as Tswana or Kwena, and two – by local "clan"¹² or village names; none employed the term "Kgalagadi." In conversation, people tended to identify themselves by "clan" name, and less often by totem or locale, such that the people of the village of Takatokwane would be known as "BaTakatokwane." To anyone familiar with the area and peoples, these nomenclatures would have, in most cases, revealed their identity as "Kgalagadi,"¹³ but their own reluctance to identify themselves as such indicated their ambivalence towards the identity. This ambivalence

can be understood as a response to the stigma carried by that identity, by the term's lack of political salience, and by the weakness of "Kgalagadi" as an identity that captured their sense of collective self.

The tension and discomfort that "Kgalagadi" experienced with that ethnic identity and the eventual transformation of this sentiment are starkly revealed in attitudes and behaviour towards language, both in terms of valourizing their own language and linguistically asserting their identity, something they do now with ease and pride. This is significant, since the act of labeling an identity not only reveals a level of consciousness in relation to that identity, but its articulation contributes at the same time to objectifying its existence. Once asserted, objectified, and established as part of a discourse, an identity is then available for political use (Moerman 1974).

An examination of changing linguistic practices indexes changing ethnic consciousness. Kgalagadi, once hesitant and shy about using their language with outsiders, are now, in some instances, almost aggressive in their desire to assert the integrity of their language and thus their ethnic identity. The language spoken by the Kgalagadi, Shekgalagadi,¹⁴ (Se -[Setswana], She -[Shekgalagadi] - the prefixes indicating both language and "custom") remains unwritten, while Setswana and English are Botswana's official languages and the languages of instruction in school. Within Shekgalagadi all dialects are mutually intelligible, but Shekgalagadi and Setswana are mutually intelligible only after some practice and effort.

Kinship terms, some of the first linguistic forms anthropologists attempt to master, provide examples of the language differences. In Shekgalagadi, a sibling of the opposite sex is referred to as *kgalariyame*. In Setswana, the same term is *kgaitsadiake*. Similarly, a cross cousin is *ndzala* in Shekgalagadi and *ntsalake* in Setswana. While collecting these terms, I first became aware of feelings of shame and inferiority that were expressed linguistically. People would continually tell me the Setswana kinship terms that I then studied. I became distressed, however, when I did not hear them in use amongst villagers. After some time, I questioned my informants, and they admitted that they had been teaching me Setswana terms, because they could not imagine why anyone would want to learn their language.

In a similar vein, Kgalagadi would frequently greet me in Setswana, while greeting my local companions in Shekgalagadi. One cannot rule out the strong possibility that the Kgalagadi's reluctance to teach me their language, or to reveal it to outsiders in general, was not simply a result of their internalized feelings of inferiority. It may well have been, in part, a strategy of secrecy and resistance to limit outsiders' knowledge of them and thus potential for exploitation (Wynne 1989, 83). But this would have been more likely in the past (the nineteenth century), when Kgalagadi property was fair game for the Kwena. Nonetheless, when I did begin to master important phrases in

their language, they demonstrated joyful appreciation. In addition, they almost always accommodated linguistically to outsiders, both in the local area, and when they travelled to the east of the country where Setswana was dominant. Those Kgalagadi residents who had lived or studied in the east and who could "pass" as Tswana because of their linguistic competence were envied and used as cultural brokers when possible. Setswana-speakers resident in the Kalahari (teachers, government extension staff, shopkeepers, and the few spouses who had married in) rarely attempted to accommodate linguistically to Shekgalagadi, in spite of the fact that many had learned it. A local headteacher, for example, was a Tswana who had married a Kgalagadi woman and taught in the desert for over a decade. Yet he never spoke in Shekgalagadi, even to his in-laws, and never lost his sense of cultural superiority. He and other long-term Tswana residents of the Kalahari often spoke disparagingly of Shekgalagadi as a rough and "bushy" language - much like its speakers.

Historical Background

The association of the Kgalagadi with the bush is rooted in history and not, as the Tswana might suggest, in "nature." Although some were already present in the region beforehand, most of the ancestors of current Kgalagadi residents migrated¹⁵ (in several waves) there in the early nineteenth century, as refugees from the wars conventionally termed the *difaqane*.¹⁶ There, they joined the already resident Sarwa and some Kgalagadi. Having been defeated by the Kwena (Tswana), the Kgalagadi had their cattle confiscated and were forced to render tribute (skins, ostrich feathers, furs, and other desert products) to the Kwena.

Tswana polities have been noted for their capacity to absorb foreign peoples, to turn strangers into tribespeople, and to do so without compromising the integrity of their own institutions. Socio-economic systems such as *mafisa* (loan-cattle) and the ward system of "tribal" administration facilitated the integration of foreigners (Schapera 1952). Yet not all peoples were welcomed into the Tswana fold; some remained foreigners, while others became subjects (cf. Hitchcock 1987; Wilmsen 1989; Wylie 1990). In most of Botswana, peoples of the desert - Kgalagadi and Sarwa (San or Bushmen) - were forced to occupy a servile niche in which their physical residence on the periphery - the wild - reinforced, in terms of the dominant Tswana model, their social marginality, lack of standing, and "bushness" (see Motzafi 1986; Solway and Lee 1990). Their pattern of economic integration into the regional political economy, which entailed supplying the spoils of the hunt, further entrenched their identity as bush peoples.

Throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century the Kwena collected tribute from desert peoples, which derived from the hunting-foraging

economy enforced on the Kgalagadi, as opposed to the "civilized" cattle-keeping way of life practised by the Tswana. The desired desert items were those which the Kwena could trade with Europeans in exchange for western goods, particularly firearms. The Kwena needed these to defend themselves against their new neighbours to the east and south, the Boers, who were anxious to obtain Kwena land and labour. Thus, local ethnic politics were put in a much broader regional and world framework.

The Kgalagadi honed their hunting and collecting skills, providing the Kwena with vast amounts of ostrich feathers, some ivory (although local supplies had already been greatly reduced), furs, and skins. The missionary, David Livingstone, who resided periodically with the Kwena for over ten years in the mid-nineteenth century, wrote that while he was among the Kwena he observed "between twenty and thirty thousand skins . . . made up into karosses; part of them were worn by the inhabitants and part sold to traders" (1857, 50).

With the advent of British colonial rule and the founding of the Bechuanaland Protectorate in 1885 the tributary system was officially ended. Taxation, however, replaced tribute, and the two were often indistinguishable.¹⁷ The restrictions the Kwena placed on Kgalagadi trade and property accumulation were eased with the cessation of the tributary system. At this time, Kgalagadi men began migrating as wage labourers to the newly established South African mines. This process facilitated Kgalagadi property accumulation. Although relations between Kwena and Kgalagadi became less coercive in the twentieth century, the Kwena, now with British sanction, still asserted their political control by imposing headmen in Kgalagadi villages until the 1960s, and even later in certain cases.

In terms of infrastructure and development the Kgalagadi have felt neglected. This feeling is justified, since the first schools in the desert were locally built mud and thatch structures established in the mid-1960s. As well, the western Kweneng, unlike the eastern Kweneng had no regular transport service, postal service, telephone service, or agricultural staff (Kramer and Odell 1979). In addition to these more tangible manifestations of "second class" citizenship, all Kgalagadi have experienced discrimination through insults and other sorts of disparaging treatment. Many Tswana still consider the Kgalagadi primarily as hunters and "bush people"; they wish to perpetuate this view. Thus, in 1990, a young man told me, "Still, Kwena come out here and ask to be served meat."

Enforced residence in the desert, similar placement within the encompassing political-economic structure, local cooperation, and intermarriage brought about increasing commonalities in language, custom, and sentiment amongst the peoples who were called Kgalagadi by the Tswana (and

who eventually adopted the name themselves). One quality they keenly shared (and still do) is a sense of injustice, anger, and resentment over their history of servitude. But these sentiments alone were apparently insufficient to lead to the adoption of a common identity.

Ethnogenesis

The Kgalagadi had to some extent embraced the views and values of their overlords and internalized feelings of inferiority. For example, in 1978, an elderly lady described to me the hierarchy of her world: whites were the first born of God, Kwena (Tswana) – the second, Kgalagadi – the third, and the Sarwa (San - Bushmen) – the last. Although by the 1960s and 1970s the Kgalagadi had accumulated cattle at comparable or greater rates than the Tswana, their life in the bush and lack of other Tswana-defined markers of "civilization," such as western-style housing, certain standards of dress, education,¹⁸ and employment still marked them as second class citizens.

This situation was to change however. In the mid-1980s, I first noticed an awakening of ethnic (linguistic) pride in the letters sent to me by young villagers. Several letters greeted me in Shekgalagadi, not Setswana or English; one young woman asked if I would help her write her autobiography in Shekgalagadi, and another said she wanted my help in collecting Shekgalagadi folktales for publication. When I returned in 1990, the bland acceptance of Setswana as the language of instruction in school was being challenged and villagers spoke of the need for Shekgalagadi to join the ranks of written languages. No longer was I being taught Setswana in the village. Around the fire at night the Setswana-speaking university driver who accompanied me to the desert was given nightly Shekgalagadi lessons. I had observed nothing like this a decade before.

The pride exhibited in language was obvious in other social domains as well. With glee, I was repeatedly informed of recent Kgalagadi successes in secondary schools, university, and the job market. Parents told me in 1990, "Our children are mixing with others now, at work and in schools, and doing well. We can see now that we are as good as anyone else." The change in attitude was expressed to me most succinctly by a middle-aged man who, when I told him that I had noticed an awakening of Kgalagadi pride responded:

Yes, I too have observed this and it is a good thing. Now I can take a Kwena as a friend, whereas in the past I would be too deferential. I would bow and squeeze my hat too much when I met a Kwena.

Kgalagadi of the prominent agnatic units have always been proud of their history and from the beginning of my research entreated me to collect and write it.¹⁹ But, in 1990 they became increasingly assertive about the matter.

For instance, I was admonished for having sent copies of my thesis to various national libraries and archives, and having neglected to send one directly to the village. The headman told me with a snarl, "those copies are for the Kwená, we must have one for ourselves."

The Kgalagadi's new attitude is clearly reflected by a student who, after graduating at the head of his university law class (with another Kgalagadi following in second place), wrote to me in 1990: "I'm not trying to sound tribalistic but just underscoring the fact that the so-called tribal superiority of the 'Tswana' is a thing of the past."

Young people, successful in school and the job market, have been doubly critical in catalyzing and crystalizing the change in ethnic consciousness amongst the western Kweneng Kgalagadi. On the one hand, their successes have offered empirical proof to themselves and their elders that the Kgalagadi are as capable at performing in the "modern" sector as the Tswana.²⁰ This empirical proof has not gone unnoticed. It has been significant in the Kgalagadi's own realization of their inherent equality with the Tswana and in overcoming the internalized feelings of inferiority many of them bore.

On the other hand, success has had its limits. The role of these young people can be likened to that of the "Creole pioneers" and "pilgrims," so critical in Anderson's (1991) analysis of the rise of nationalism.²¹ Like the "Creole pioneers" and "pilgrims," young Kgalagadi found that they were capable of achieving according to the universalistic standards defined by their dominant neighbours. However, in most instances, they ultimately failed in their attempts at assimilation and had to confront the fact that they could not escape the stigma of their ethnic origins. Exclusionary bars, which inhibited them from entering certain circles and from taking advantage of established "old boy networks," continued to exist, and they faced discrimination in myriad other ways.²² Their association with other Kgalagadi in town, at university, and in the workplaces where they met and often formed friendships reinforced their indignity over their treatment, their common value, and their common values. Their accomplishments, treatment, and struggles outside the Kgalagadi region have put into perspective their "difference" and contributed to providing a basis for a new ethnic consciousness and "imagined community."

Botswana's economic expansion and development has definitely allowed a large number of young people to acquire higher education and formal sector employment in the 1980s and 1990s. The magnitude of the transformation in just over a decade cannot be overestimated. In 1977, only two children of the village of approximately seven hundred people where I worked had successfully completed secondary school; by 1990, dozens had completed, and

many had obtained or were studying for advanced degrees overseas.²³ By 1990, the same people who, as children in 1978, would not identify themselves as Kgalagadi in written reports were now celebrating their identity and declaring the end of the "so-called tribal superiority of the 'Tswana.'"

In labeling and valourizing their identity, the Kgalagadi not only reveal a heightened level of consciousness regarding their own identity, but they also manifest a general level of ethnic consciousness in the larger social field. Labeling one's own identity necessitates contrasting ethnic labels for others and leads to emphasizing difference as opposed to similarity, a practice in which many Kgalagadi are increasingly engaging (cf. Moerman 1974, 62). Sharp distinctions in custom or appearance do not exist between the Kgalagadi and Tswana. Kgalagadi villages tend to be smaller, less densely settled, and less politically centralized than Tswana ones. This tendency reflects both the desert environment and the fact that paramount chiefly power rested with the Tswana, not the Kgalagadi (Kuper 1970). The Kgalagadi have been more dependent upon hunting and pastoralism than have the Tswana, who have relied more heavily on arable agriculture. The Kgalagadi's orientation is also attributable to the desert environment and the fact that they were forced to hunt and herd for the Tswana.

These factors indicate differences of degree, not kind, however, and are rarely mentioned by the Kgalagadi, when they define their identity in contrast to the Tswana, although ownership of cattle and village life are acknowledged as setting them apart from the Sarwa. Instead, Kgalagadi focus on their language and history. In addition, many Kgalagadi increasingly claim that they are distinguished from the Tswana by their sense of moral superiority. They often point to the greater cohesion and levels of reciprocity in Kgalagadi villages, and they cite the Tswana's treatment of them as evidence of the Tswana's own lack of moral standards.

Politics and Ethnicity

Botswana is by most measures a multi-party democracy, but the ruling party, the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP), which has been in power since independence in 1966, has always held at least two-thirds (and usually much more) of the country's forty plus seats. The major opposition party, the Botswana National Front (BNF), lost seats in the last election of 1989, but gained in popular vote (thirty-five percent), and for the first time, it was able to contest every seat (Molutsi and Holm 1990, 324). The BNF tends to be left of the more pro-capitalist BDP. Generally the divide between the BDP and the BNF has been along rural/urban and not ethnic lines, although ethnically based affiliations have not been entirely absent. Part of the BDP's drought relief strategy has been to redistribute wealth and forestall starvation, but it

has also attempted to stem the tide of urbanization and keep people in the rural areas – not flooding to the towns, where the new urbanites might be more likely to support the BNF.

Local politicized ethnicity has manifested itself in both national and local party politics. Recent district and national elections have been closer than ever before. In the 1970s, the western Kweneng was a stronghold for the ruling party, but now, to the surprise of many, the region has become one of the hotbeds of political opposition. The local MP is still a member of the ruling party, but he is anything but complacent.

The seemingly sudden rise of political opposition in the region has received attention in the national press. For example, on 1 June 1989, a Botswana newspaper, *Mmegi*, ran an article entitled, "BaKgalagadi assert themselves now." According to the article,

There are strong indications that the opposition BNF politicians in Kweneng West will centre their election campaign on the nationalities question. There is simmering discontent among people there over the controversial article of the country's Constitution which identifies only eight "principal tribes" in Botswana.

The article also noted that the president had visited the region, arguing against "tribalism," and quoted an elderly Kgalagadi's response to the president: "It's unfortunate that when some tribal groups demand their legitimate place under the sun they are accused of promoting disunity."

Struggles at the district level have been the most heated. The local district council opposition candidate made a strong showing in the 1984 elections; in the 1989 elections he took forty-six percent of the vote in a two-party race. Between the two elections, the councillor in the neighbouring electoral unit (also Kgalagadi) crossed the floor to the opposition. (In March 1991, I was told that he had crossed back to the BDP majority.) A local opposition leader argued that the ruling party succeeded in 1989 only because of corruption.²⁴ According to this source, the BDP supporters who ran the election intimidated some voters, particularly Sarwa (San or Bushmen), to vote for the BDP. Certain levers, which can influence the votes of such impoverished and vulnerable people as the Sarwa, are easily pressed. The Sarwa are the largest per capita recipients of government-sponsored food relief; any perceived threat to that food source (such as a change of political power) will affect their vote. Indeed, even at the national level, drought relief has been established as people's single most important reason for supporting the BDP (Molutsi 1989, 128).²⁵

Who are the supporters of the BNF in western Kweneng? Further research on this question is necessary; at this point, only some preliminary impressions can be indicated. BNF support seems to come from all sectors of the

Kgalagadi and crosscut all other social criteria. Party politics now divide kin groupings and intersect wealth lines (although the very wealthiest support the ruling party). Some members of the traditional political elite support the opposition, while others favour the ruling party; the same is true for entrepreneurs and others. The individuals who perceive that their personal futures will be affected by a BNF government (through the acquisition of jobs, government favours, or higher status) are relatively few in number and cannot account for the opposition's broad base of appeal.

What, then, are the issues? In general, the local opposition candidate accuses the ruling party of not having a sound analysis:

They do things, like hand out drought relief, without sufficient concern for the long-term consequences. Some farmers have become very wealthy through schemes which subsidize tractor rentals etc., while the vast majority of rural peoples have become more dependent and impoverished (Interview 1990).

The opposition party favours policies geared to wealth redistribution, which are attractive to many people. But more importantly, the opposition candidate ran, and intends on running again in 1994, on a separatist ticket, which promotes autonomy for the western part of the Kweneng District where Shekgalagadi would be spoken and some form of Kgalagadi control over ranch development would exist, so that, according to the candidate, "Grazing land would be left for our children." In this separate district, the Kgalagadi would have their own chief, who would sit in the House of Chiefs, and they would not be under the rule of the Tswana. The local leader, referring to Nelson Mandela's famous trial speech of the early 1960s, claims that secession is an issue for which he is prepared to die.²⁶

Many Kgalagadi of western Kweneng sorely want chiefly representation at the national level. This would give them a wide voice and affirm their sense of themselves as a *morafe* (nation or ethnic group) that is legitimate and equal amongst the other *merafe* (plural of *morafe*) in the country. When Botswana gained independence in 1966, its constitution assured a role for traditional leadership by instituting a House of Chiefs as part of the legislature. This house considers issues related to the *merafe* and customary law, but only advises; it cannot make law. At independence the House of Chiefs was composed of chiefs from the so-called eight principal tribes; since then, seven more chiefs (in a special category of sub-chief²⁷) have been added. The Kwena chief is meant to represent the Kgalagadi of western Kweneng, but few Kgalagadi believe their interests are represented. Moreover, their indirect representation through the Kwena chief is a painful reminder of their continued subordination and "junior" or secondary status within Botswana.

The BNF has capitalized on the resentment that former subject peoples feel towards their former overlords in this regard and has made the

amendment of those sections of the constitution that deal with the House of Chiefs one of its major campaign issues.²⁸ Garnering support in this manner has been important for the BNF in broadening its constituency in the rural areas. A BNF victory in western Kweneng in 1994 and a challenge to the constitution of the House of Chiefs are very likely possibilities. Not all Kgalagadi feel as strongly about seceding, but most believe that national acknowledgement of their equal status, even if it does not take the form of a new district and chiefly representation in the House of Chiefs, would constitute a moral and symbolic victory, affirming their equal status with the rest of Botswana's citizens.

Politics and Patronage

A critical factor in the emergence of politicized ethnicity is a shift in power relations, which is manifest in changing patronage relations. These shifts are largely connected to bases of wealth and state expansion. The nature of the BDP's political elite has been altered, especially in terms of the composition of its private wealth. Molutsi notes that at independence the political elite's wealth derived largely from cattle holdings, whereas now urban-based commercial enterprises are most important (1989, 125). Thus, rural links, especially systems of patronage that have been based to a great extent on cattle loans (*mafisa*) and other forms of rural wealth, are in transition. These relations, through their control over valued property, have contributed to creating and sustaining ethnic hierarchies. Since the political elite now has less of a direct economic link to the countryside, however, they are (consciously or not) severing ties with their political supporters.

Equally important, in terms of the erosion of "traditional" patronage networks, is the increased wealth, power, and presence of the state in rural people's lives. The state, through its bureaucracy, now provides a vast array of services and subsidies; extension offices have proliferated, as have schools, clinics, and other government institutions. Rural residents are less dependent, therefore, upon "traditional," particularly "inter-ethnic," patronage networks to gain access to land and water rights, licenses, agro-pastoral inputs, schooling, food, jobs, health care and other resources.²⁹ In addition, commercialization of agro-pastoralism has also diminished (but by no means eradicated) the importance of personal relations in economic life, and more "businesslike" contractual economic relations are becoming increasingly important. As this process of rationalization unfolds, existing patronage relations are being somewhat dismantled. They have not been eliminated, but new patrons are emerging with different faces and bases of power. The fact remains, however, that it is easier now for rural residents to engage directly with the state and formal sector in order to achieve valued ends.

Conclusion

The BNF has encouraged the expression of politicized ethnicity in the form of opposition party support in Western Kweneng. It, however, found fertile ground for its message; what it provided was not the source, but rather the shape, through which Kgalagadi discontent and aspirations for the future could be expressed and channelled. Kgalagadi discontent is rooted in their history of exploitation, their contemporary experience of discrimination, and their belief that, as a result of their stigmatized identity, development has bypassed their region.

But why, at this point in time, are the Kgalagadi asserting a political claim, and why in this form – politicized ethnicity? In order to answer these questions, it is important to return to issues of power, class, and consciousness. In the nineteenth century, for peoples called Kgalagadi, class and ethnic ascription, but not ethnic self-identity, coincided. In spite of separate origins, Kgalagadi peoples were treated similarly and integrated into the Tswana polity in the same servile and despised niche. That coincidence, however, no longer holds. Tribute ended decades ago, the economy has recently undergone considerable expansion, and some Kgalagadi have gained a foothold in this prosperity.

The Kgalagadi, themselves, are now divided internally along class lines. Although class oppression is not something they experience equally, they all know ethnic discrimination. In the towns and large villages of Botswana, the wealthiest rancher from the desert is still one of the "lowly" "*Makgalagadi*," when his or her back is turned. Any moral or social transgression would still, in all likelihood, be attributed to his/her ethnic origins. The possibilities of encountering such ethnic discrimination and for challenging it have increased in the last decade with Botswana's political and economic expansion. In addition, the schools and other services in the Kalahari are still amongst the poorest in the district. Class distinctions are salient, cross ethnic lines, and define a person's life experiences and opportunities in important ways, but not to eliminate ethnicity.

In spite of the gains many Kgalagadi have made, they remain wary: exploited in the past and uncertain of their treatment in the future, especially in light of the current slowing of economic growth, they are experimenting with ways of consolidating the gains thus far achieved. The time is now ripe in Botswana – the class basis of the political elite is in a process of transformation, organic links between the countryside and the political elite are becoming weaker, and rural patronage networks are breaking down. While new patronage networks are beginning to emerge, their forms and personnel are still in flux. If anything ever was to be gained from continuing their subservient status (even if only superficially), Kgalagadi rewards for doing so now appear even more tenuous than in the past. In this milieu of

rapidly shifting economic and political power relations, new opportunities are envisaged and old restrictions lifted; the rules of the game are open for negotiation in ways that were not possible a decade ago; it is a time when people can test new forms of collective action, challenge existing hierarchies, and assert previously unarticulated and unimagined claims.

F. Barth (1969, 11) clearly stated that ethnic labels are categories of both ascription and/or self-identification; in this case, the transformation of external ascription into self-identification is occurring. But in the process of this appropriation, the actors themselves reworked the ethnic identity and changed it from a negative value into a positive one. What was necessary for such a conversion? Both structural and cultural factors came into play. The structural factors are the altered power relations inherent in the rapidly expanding political economy of Botswana. Although they set the stage for the reworking of ethnic categories, they could not, in any automatic way, affect the actors' consciousness. Human agents, through both their experiences and reflections upon and interpretations of such experiences (cf. Thompson 1968), were essential. As mentioned earlier, both the successes and the failures of young Kgalagadi "sojourners" provided raw material which, upon reflection and interpretation, contributed to a reevaluation of Kgalagadi identity. At the same time, party politics offered an opportunity for the channelling and expression of new ethnic aspirations. With these simultaneous structural and cultural forces at work, the Kgalagadi appropriated and valorized their own previously imposed ethnic identity, rendering it an objectified principle of social organization and a force for political action (Comaroff 1987, 313).

By turning their history and disparaged identity into a political tool, the Kgalagadi can simultaneously redress the past, consolidate gains, and stake a claim for a share of political power. Ethnicity is not the only means of channelling sentiments and organizing people along political lines, nor is it the only avenue available to gain entry into national politics and claim representation. Many Kgalagadi know this and are active on other fronts as well. Nonetheless, politicized ethnicity represents a way to enter a previously closed terrain of struggle.

Notes

1. This article refers specifically to the Kgalagadi living in the Kweneng district of Botswana, and not to those Kgalagadi dwelling in the Kgalagadi district, who have enjoyed greater political representation [see Kuper (1970) for an account of politics in the latter district], or to Kgalagadi residing in other districts of Botswana. To my knowledge, ethnonationalism of similar proportions does not exist amongst Kgalagadi in other parts of Botswana. See Wilmsen and Vossen (1990) for a discussion of Kgalagadi ethnicity in Northern Botswana.
2. Ethnogenesis, as it is used here, refers to the process whereby disparate peoples, often

in the context of political action, come to recognize similar circumstances and shared concerns or goals, to embrace a common identity, and to forge aspects of a common world view (Gailey 1989). This is not to deny that internal differences or other forms of identity may exist because of categories such as class or gender within such a group; nor is it to argue that all members equally embrace ethnic identity, but to acknowledge the growth, to varying degrees, of shared identity.

3. For example, a case of ethnic discrimination received national attention in the mid-1980s. A prominent chief of one of the major Tswana tribes had been, according to the president, engaging in political activity inappropriate to his position. The president sent one of his ministers (a Kgalagadi from the Kgalagadi district) to speak to the chief. The chief refused to listen, saying, "How can the president send a Kgalagadi to speak to a chief?" His following also refused to listen to the minister at the *Kgotla* (central meeting place or court). This case supports my impression, based on visits to Botswana in 1990 and 1991, that ethnic chauvinism amongst the "traditional elite" was on the upswing. With the links among rank, wealth, and privilege diminishing, it seems that the "traditional elite" is using ethnicity to reclaim and consolidate powers, which it perceives to be slipping from its grasp. Also, see Worby (1984) for a salient illustration of the contemporary importance of ethnicity and Wylie (1990) for a fascinating account of ethnic struggles in colonial times.
4. Among examples, see Wolf's (1982) discussion of the growth of ethnicity within the segmented labour market. Bourgois (1988) demonstrates the subtle interplay between class and ethnicity and cultural and material factors in shaping the contrasting experiences of labour market integration undergone by two groups of "Indian" banana workers in Costa Rica. O'Brien's (1986) and Duffield's (1988) analyses consider the development of ethnicity within the context of the segmented labour market in Sudan.
5. I borrow the "cake" metaphor from Young (1982, 80), who, like Geertz (1973), speaks of the expansion of state power with the rise of new post-colonial nations. Both authors highlight the process of groups mobilizing around and valorizing their primordial identities in order to stake a claim to political power.
6. To say that ethnic identity is culturally "given" is not to imply that it is immutable. Instead, it is viewed as a form of identity that draws upon one or many elements of a culturally defined repertoire of characteristics and sentiments. These characteristics and sentiments derive from a set of factors, including an individual's circumstances of birth, residence, body, religion, language, and accumulated life experiences. Which factor(s) will emerge as salient is/are historically contingent. In addition, individuals frequently embrace multiple ethnic identities, which often exist in a nested hierarchy of contextually determined identities.
7. I recognize the problematic nature of terms such as "multi-party democracy" and do not wish to engage in a thorough examination of these issues here. See Holm (1988) and Molutsi and Holm (1989 and 1990) for debates on Botswana's democratic character. However, in spite of whatever qualifications one might place on the existence in democracy in Botswana, the country has held free and open elections every five years since independence, and the ruling party has always been openly contested.
8. The 1992 World Bank report (219) cites Botswana's per capita GNP as \$2 040 US. Botswana's foreign reserves stand at \$2.5 billion US (Molutsi and Holm 1990, 327). However, these stunning figures should not disguise the existence of marked disparities in wealth and deepening inequalities within the country (Good 1992).
9. About two-thirds of the Kweneng district land is Kalahari desert, but only one-third of the population lives there. East of the Kalahari (anglicized version of Kgalagadi) in the *hardveld*, the majority are the Kwena (Tswana), for whom the district is named and

whose chiefs preside, and members of other Tswana groups. In the Kalahari region live the Kgalagadi and Sarwa. The Kgalagadi are the majority in the desert.

10. "Ma" also refers to threatening and "different" strangers, for example, the Matabele and Europeans (Boers are Maburu and other people of European origins are Makgoa).
11. The earliest European accounts on the specific area that I have located refer to the non-Sarwa inhabitants of the region as "Balala." These explorers, R. Orpen (1964 [1908]) and McCabe (Holden 1963[1855]), crossed the desert in 1852-1853. "Balala" is an enigmatic term, occasionally defined as an "ethnic" group, resulting from miscegenation between Sarwa and Bantu, but more often applied to poor people and/or those in a servile position. It is a derogatory appellation and not one of self-identification, but of ascription. When I questioned people in the Kalahari, "Who are the Balala?", some replied that anyone subordinate to you can be a Molala - your younger sibling or an unrelated servant. However, my questions engendered a debate in which some argued it was simply a relational term referring to a subordinate, while others maintained that it was, in some instances, an ethnic label, and that there were Balala living in various parts of the Kalahari. In the late nineteenth century, Kgalagadi were often referred to as "Vaal Pensen," literally, "Tawny Bellies." (BNA HC153/1; Farini 1886, 441-45). Schapera and van der Merwe (1945) note that "Vaalpense" was applied to the Kgalagadi by the Afrikaansers "because of the dirt on their bodies" (153).
12. I put clan in quotes to qualify my use of the term. Kgalagadi kinship is based upon agnatic ideology, but because both cross and parallel cousin marriages receive sanction, discrete descent groups cannot form. The categories I refer to rather loosely as "clans" are large, non-localized groupings, which identify themselves by reference to an apical ancestor. The genealogical depth, size, and composition of the group varies with the apical ancestor identified.
13. Place names reveal one's identity, as do one's apical ancestors for the most part, although some names cross ethnic boundaries. Totems also serve as a means of identification, but more than one Bantu-speaking group may share the same totem (*seano*). For example, buffalo (*nare*) is the totem of the Baboalongwe (one of the larger Kgalagadi groups in the region), and of the Birwa of Northern Botswana. Totemic identification is expressed as *ba bina nare*, literally "people who dance (venerate) the buffalo." Usually, if a totem that is shared by more than one ethnic group is given, its ethnic referent can be determined contextually.
14. Shekgalagadi is a language-dialect (its status as one or the other is contested [Schapera and van der Merwe 1945; van der Merwe and Schapera 1943]) of the Sotho-Tswana language group of Southern African Bantu languages. Sotho-Tswana contrasts with Nguni, the other major language grouping of Southern African Bantu speakers.
15. See Okihiro (1976) for an account of the separate origins and migrations of peoples now called Kgalagadi in the Kweneng District and the process of their incorporation into an encompassing political economy. Mackenzie (1971 [1871]) describes a similar situation for "Kgalagadi" in the region north of the present Kweneng. "Those called Bakalahari . . . 'khcta' or pay tribute to a powerful neighbouring chief. Like their rulers, these vassal-Bechuana are not of one tribe, nor do they all speak the same dialect of Sechuana" (128).
16. *Difaqane*, "forced migration" or "the crushing," refers to the wars that disrupted African societies during the first several decades of the nineteenth century. The causes, and indeed the very existence, of these wars have recently become the subjects of vigorous debates amongst historians of Southern Africa. See, for example, Cobbing (1988) and Eldredge (1992).
17. The British believed that their modernizing influences would signal the end of Kgalagadi servitude. In 1887, after reports of slavery in Bechuanaland, a number of

investigations were carried out. The reports indicated that the Kgalagadi were "slaves" to the Tswana: "Every man in the Khalahari is owned by some man in the Bechuana towns. . . . Most, if not all, the skins and feathers procured by the Khalahari people are taken by their masters. . . . They possess goats and sheep. They have but few cattle as their own; the reason they gave me being that if a man has a few cattle his master is sure to come and slaughter them or take them" (Botswana National Archives, Letter by A. Wookey, HC.153/1). The senior British official in the territory wrote: "I may add that in my opinion the collection of hut tax will have a marked effect in ameliorating the condition of the Bakalahari. . . . the Bakalahari who pay the tax to Government will not be slow to claim the full benefit of the protection to which such payment will according to Native ideas manifestly entitle them. . . . no British subject can lawfully be held in slavery and that within the limits of British Bechuanaland the oppressed have only to come forward and proclaim their wrongs in order to obtain redress" (Botswana National Archives, HC.153/1).

18. Tswana markers of "civilization" have changed with time. Throughout the twentieth century those associated with western education have become increasingly important. Opportunities for Kgalagadi to attend school were limited in part by the difficulties of establishing schools in the remoter regions where they lived. But the remoteness was also created and perpetuated to some extent by the Tswana and colonial rule, because the development of infrastructure in the region was consciously limited. In addition, according to Kgalagadi, the Tswana prevented Kgalagadi from attending some of the better secondary schools (most were in South Africa) prior to independence. Those few Kgalagadi who went to school at all prior to independence often had to board with families in Tswana villages. This dependence upon the hospitality of the Tswana is an example of the way in which patronage networks functioned in the region.
19. Non-clite villagers were both less enthusiastic and less knowledgeable about their past. Genealogies provide the organizing principle and grid around which history is articulated by Kgalagadi. History is implicated in establishing and justifying claims between people. However, "history" is a resource not equally available to all. Amongst Kgalagadi in the community where I conducted most of my research, the vast majority claimed ancestry to the key apical ancestors (although this could be, and occasionally was, contested). Those living in peripheral settlements "had no history" and thus possessed more tenuous claims to certain key resources such as water sources.
20. For instance, the fact that young Kgalagadi had now not only mastered Setswana, but English as well, was significant. One middle-aged man told me, "We used to think that only Tswana could speak English but now we know that we can."
21. This analogy has definite limits. Anderson's analysis is historically specific and refers to the rise of nationalism and nation states less than it does to ethnonationalism.
22. These range from the very personal, where, for example, romances have been terminated at critical moments when one partner realized the other was a Kgalagadi, to more public forms of humiliation such as that mentioned earlier, when a chief refused to acknowledge the political authority of a Kgalagadi.
23. In 1980, primary school fees were abolished and by the end of the decade, secondary school fees were abolished as well. Many new secondary schools were opened in the 1980s, and new formal sector job opportunities were created, although not in sufficient numbers to absorb the majority of school leavers.
24. In general, Botswana is a remarkably uncorrupt country. That government corruption is considered aberrant is evidenced by the recent (1992) resignations of the vice-president and minister of agriculture over inappropriate land dealings.
25. According to the 1991 Botswana Development Plan (21), from 1982 to 1990,

approximately US \$200 million were spent on drought relief. In the mid-1980s, 380 000 people (over a third of the population) were direct recipients of food relief (Botswana 1989). In addition to food relief, Botswana has also launched a labour-based drought relief program and offers massive agricultural subsidies, though which farmers are literally paid to till their fields. In 1990, many of the subsidies were lifted, but in 1992, with a new drought, they have been reinstated.

26. He was clearly exaggerating on this point, but he did want to emphasize how strongly he believed in secession.
27. One of the sub-chiefs is a Kgalagadi from the Kgalagadi district. He represents Kgalagadi from his district.
28. Ironically, if the Kgalagadi actually seceded and gained their place in the House of Chiefs, the hierarchical pattern they had attempted to overcome would simply be replicated in their position vis-à-vis the Sarwa. The Sarwa, a minority in Western Kweneng, would then be represented by the Kgalagadi and their subordination would be further reinforced. Outrage over oppression, in the context of ethnic politics, tends not to be generalized outside the valorized group and, as a result, rarely leads to the elimination of ethnic oppression itself.
29. The Tribal Land Bill, for example, passed in 1968 and put into practice in 1970, which established land boards, lessened (but did not eliminate) "tribal" and chiefly control over district land. For a clear and detailed discussion of the development of land boards in the Kweneng district see Wynne (1989, 347-424). Comaroff (1980) emphasizes the creation of land boards as a critical factor transforming class relations in the Barolong district of Botswana.

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