

STRUGGLES OVER WATER, STRUGGLES OVER MEANING: CATTLE, WATER AND THE STATE IN BOTSWANA

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INTRODUCTION

In a recent paper on 'The state and social processes in Africa', Lonsdale (1981) convincingly demonstrates the poverty of assuming that any *one* 'grand theory' is able to explain the complex relations among state, social process and class struggle and other equally complex social phenomena. Images of the state as parasitic (as in formulations of the 'Asiatic mode of production'), as an epiphenomenon of property relations or as a neutral mediator, individually fail to grasp the complexity of states' organization and action (Jessop, 1977), yet each clearly evokes an important dimension of that complexity. The fact of political and economic domination has to be dealt with but equally the often contradictory quality of state power reflects the fact that the mediating institutions and ideologies between dominating and dominated are the objects and arenas for competition and struggle among different social groups and categories. The recognition that one has to deal analytically not with a monolithic entity but a set of institutions that are subject to being 'redefined, added to and patched' (Lonsdale, 1981: 2) is important. The challenge, then, is to devise analytical means that capture such processes and allow us to unravel the dynamic of contradictions rather than merely note their pervasive character.

This paper is a modest attempt in this direction. The case described is the introduction of deep bore-wells (boreholes), under a group form of private ownership, into the African areas of the Bechuanaland Protectorate in the early 1930s. The analysis requires that we also move back in time, into the pre-colonial Tswana chieftdom and forward, albeit briefly, into present-day Botswana. The central analytical intent is to demonstrate that the political control of the key resources of water and pasture land, which engages state action in the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial eras, may be elucidated by thinking of the processes involved as struggles over meaning as much as struggles over resources, and as an oscillation between the contradictory needs for incorporation and exclusion.

Any means of accumulation, or the process of political domination with its concomitant competition over material resources, can be fully understood only by recognizing the centrality of struggles over meaning. This is because claims to use and control resources and to exercise authority over things and people are premised on an ideology² or a set of meanings. Struggles over resources or over power, then, necessarily take place in terms of such meanings. These meanings are both shared and disputed: different categories or groups assign different meanings, different definitions or different emphases at different times to known concepts, events and acts. Hence, one event, one institution or one concept may be defined and interpreted in a number of ways and in ways that contradict each other. Such contradictory interpretations may be articulated not only by different groups but also by the same group (or individual) depending on the audience or constituency addressed or on the particular situation requiring an interpretation.

At their establishment in the 1930s the borehole syndicates¹ or groups of cattle-owners who jointly owned and managed the new boreholes, were considered to be both exemplars of strong traditions of collective effort as well as represen-

des clauses du décret montre son ambiguïté dans deux secteurs, à savoir celui de la question de la validité toujours en existence des formes de bail coutumières et celui du transfert et du louage de la terre rurale. L'examen des arguments technocratiques élaborés au cours de nombreuses années par des économistes agricoles en faveur d'une réforme semblable à celle inscrite par le décret, et fondés sur les 'défauts et inconsistances' supposés d'un système traditionnel rigide de propriété, démontre des ambiguïtés parallèles en ce qui concerne le statut futur de la tenure coutumière. Ces contradictions émergent à partir de la divergence d'intérêts entre la bureaucratie de l'état (et ses clients potentiels) et le propriétaire terrien, contre lequel le décret est un outil potentiel d'expropriation plutôt qu'une réforme.

L'impact du décret est examiné tout d'abord en termes généraux et ensuite en rapport à ses effets locaux dans la région de Ibokun, une communauté située juste à l'intérieur des limites du nord de la ceinture de cacao qui a vu, depuis le début du siècle, l'adoption étendue de la vente des récoltes pour un revenu et influx de locataires émigrants de la région vers son nord. L'examen de l'histoire du peuplement et des institutions gouvernant les droits de propriété et le contrôle de la terre dans la région révèle, qu'en dépit des vues de ceux en faveur de la réforme, la flexibilité même du système de bail coutumier a permis un accès facile à la terre et pour les natifs et pour les émigrants. Cette flexibilité est retracée jusqu'aux conditions politiques et sociales de la propriété et montre qu'un modèle de pratique légale coutumière est erroné.

Les effets du décret sur ce système de bail furent en fait mineurs, bien que pour la plupart contraires aux objectifs évidents de la réforme. Les pratiques coutumières continuèrent en dépit de leur illégalité, qui plus est certains locataires tournèrent à leur avantage l'inaptitude des cours à exiger le paiement des loyers. Les conséquences spécifiques de la réforme sont liées aux facteurs politiques au niveau local. En dépit de ses effets limités à présent, le potentiel expropriant du décret et l'énorme puissance discrétionnaire qu'il place dans les mains des fonctionnaires de l'état demeurent très significatifs.

tatives of a new spirit of progressive enterprise. An examination of the manner in which these views were articulated, different emphases made and opposed interpretations presented, tells us a great deal about the stakes at issue and the political manoeuvres over relative authority and resource control. We also observe the level of skill exercised in the manipulation of meaning, which can make ambiguity a strength but which also produces contradictions out of the inconsistencies and incompatibilities of ideas and of actions. The use of 'tradition' will be seen to be a key example of these points. For tradition may be called on to legitimize current practice; it may be construed as a model to be followed; or it may be condemned as a model that is out of date and that needs to be surpassed.

In addition to a focus on the struggles over meaning, a second analytical thread of the paper is on the oscillation and tension between incorporative and exclusionary forces, and between collective and hierarchical social forms. Many of the paradoxical and contradictory characteristics of the case derive from historical variations in how pressures toward exclusiveness have confronted the countervailing pressures of incorporation. This is traced in the pre-colonial Tswana chiefdoms, and among the Tswana elite cattle-owners and the borehole syndicates both during the Protectorate and up to the present.

CATTLE, WATER AND THE STATE: THE PRE-COLONIAL TSWANA POLITY

The Tswana pre-colonial polity (*morafe*)¹ was centralized and hierarchical. It focused spatially on a central town (*motse*) and politically and ritually on the chief (*kgosi*) and his *kgotla*, the great public assembly, the central place of authority and ritual. The chief was ritual as well as political head and received tribute of crops, labour and other products in return for his rainmaking, governance of the arable cycle and political overseeing of internal and external relations. The administrative sub-units of the chiefdom were termed small polities or nations (*meratshwana*), or towns (*motse*), terms which indicate their relative autonomy. Each of these sub-units, as well as each of the groupings making up the sub-units, had its own *kgotla* or place of authority — its public space. By the colonial period at least, this term, *kgotla*, became that most generally used to designate the sub-units rather than the terms 'small towns' or 'small polities', and was translated as 'ward', a word that has passed into administrative and scholarly usage. In Setswana, *kgotla* may refer to a range of social groups with authority over designated people and/or resources. It might be glossed most succinctly as an association with legitimate stewardship over corporate resources.

Cattle constituted the major form of wealth and the pre-eminent means of political authority and chantage in these Tswana polities. In turn, these networks of cattle exchange formed part of a productive system which combined livestock husbandry, crop production and trade. Trade in iron and other metals was once important for Sotho-Tswana groups (Legassick, 1969), but by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the important trade goods were skins, ivory and ostrich feathers, which enabled the chiefs to obtain guns, waggons, iron, consumer goods like cloth, coffee and dishes and, later, ploughs. The success of the Tswana chiefs of the western Transvaal and the area to be known as Bechuanaland in controlling this trade lay in no small measure on their ability to monopolize the labour of semi-servile groups.⁵ But the chiefs' ability to exert control over trade routes was facilitated by the fact that the semi-arid conditions of these regions require

travellers to keep to certain well-watered routes, which can then be policed more easily than those in other conditions.

Water was clearly necessary to the very establishment of the central towns and to successful cattle husbandry. Yet, while the emphasis on rain and water in Tswana thought, symbol and ritual parallels that of cattle (see Kuper, 1981), the centrality of control over water points to the political organization of Tswana chiefdoms has been generally neglected by historians and anthropologists. Yet examination of travellers' accounts of the various Tswana groups (as well as others such as Ndebele, Griqua, Koranna, not to speak of the whites) demonstrates the importance of this control. The need to find new water sources lies behind much of the mobility, even of entire chiefdoms, and many of the struggles between chiefdoms focused on water sources. Early travellers remarked that the most common source of conflict between groups was over grazing pastures, but when one realizes that these pastures were in fact defined by the presence of water sources, one can restate the conflicts as being over water.

A major type of reward allocated by a chief to favoured subordinates was that of being *modisa* (lit. herdsman) or overseer over certain areas. The value of this office lay not so much in the land itself as in the control over the subordinate groups living there, and in the fact that these areas centred on water points and provided pastures for the herds of the overseer and his followers. So valuable were these perquisites that there was intense competition over their allocation within a chiefdom, similar to the conflicts between rival chiefdoms. The observations by the missionary John Mackenzie on the way in which wealthy and powerful Tswana established exclusive claims to water sources (Kinsman, 1980: 8) points up a central contradiction in the office of *modisa*. Although culturally conceived as a stewardship, the role also entailed the privilege of prior appropriation of the resources under stewardship. This contradiction between guardianship and privileged use runs throughout the system, from the role of chief, through heads of wards, families and so forth, and is present today in the syndicate organization itself.

Critical features of the Tswana chiefdom relevant here are first, the contrast between the collective identity of the nation or 'tribe' and its internal hierarchical and ranked order. Parallel contrasts are those between deference to rank and an ethic of equivalence,⁶ and between privilege and constraint. The Tswana chief was seen as the supreme ruler and ritual head but also as the spokesman for a consensual politics among the 'mini-polities' of the chiefdom. Tswana chiefs of the nineteenth century were described as being constantly attended by the leaders of those constituent units and as consulting with them on affairs of state (Burchell, 1967), while Casalis, the missionary to the Sotho, remarked on the 'haughty retainers' of the paramount. Many Europeans contrasted the confederative and consensual character of Sotho-Tswana politics to the more overtly authoritarian, coercive and directive role of the Zulu paramounts.

While the Zulu state has therefore often been seen as a stronger and the Sotho-Tswana a weaker form of authority, the reverse seems to have been the case. The more significant contrast lies in the long history of Tswana institutions of centralized and hierarchical authority. For it is precisely this institutional rootedness that has facilitated the skilful manipulation of the ideological repertoire, that is, of the range of meanings and key ambiguities in the idioms and practices of authority and rank, that we see over the past hundred odd years.

In the Tswana pre-colonial polity, a genealogical ranking principle underwrote differentiation and inequality; to be a leader was to be senior, to be a junior was to be subordinate: the term for a 'child' could refer to a beloved son, a poor kinsman, or a wretched herder, servant or captive. Thus, 'kinship' and the 'political' were deeply entwined together throughout the Tswana system. In recent years some authors have turned to the Marxian Asiatic mode of production or to a tributary mode (Godelier, 1978; Amin, 1978; Bonner, 1980; Wolf, 1981) in attempts to conceptualize the apparent contradiction central to pre-capitalist polities: namely, that between domination, hierarchy and privileged appropriation of products and labour on the one hand, and on the other, forms of communal or corporate holding of basic resources, especially land, with guaranteed rights to these for all recognized members. But these two-level models fail to capture the dynamic interaction between the solidarities evoked by 'kinship' (Wolf, 1981) and the status inequalities of 'political' organization. It was precisely this ambiguity of reference and conception among Tswana that facilitated the slipping of the collateral branches of chiefly lines into commoner status, of impoverished individuals and families into servitude, of junior kinsmen into clients or servants, and, in reverse direction, facilitated the movement of the fortunate up through the ranks.

CATTLE, WATER AND THE STATE: THE PROTECTORATE ERA

Fleeing in 1871 from the oppression of the Transvaal Boers under Paul Kruger, the Bakgatla sought the protection of Sechele, the powerful Kwena ruler of the area to the west, across the Oodi-Marico headwaters of the Limpopo. Over the succeeding two decades, conflict developed between the two groups with both claiming sovereignty over this area, the permanent waters of the Oodi-Marico and the seasonally fluctuating river Notwane which ran through the centre of the territory. Both had spats, too, with the Bangwato to the north over the areas surrounding the Lephophe wells. The conflicts and sporadic raids continued even after the declaration of the British Bechuanaland Protectorate in 1885 and ceased only after the Shippard Commission (1894) sat in arbitration over the boundary dispute between the three chiefdoms (Schapera, 1942). These were officially constituted as Tribal Reserves in 1899. Thus, by the latter quarter of the nineteenth century the Bakgatla controlled a relatively fertile and well-watered area which abutted on the major north-south trade route and on the wealthier Boer areas of the Transvaal, a situation not unconnected with the fact that throughout the colonial era the Bakgatla were considered to be the most 'progressive', enterprising and successful African cattle-keepers and farmers in the Protectorate. This reputation played an important part in their district having the first African borehole drilling scheme to be initiated in the Protectorate, and was, in turn, affirmed by this event and its outcomes.

The establishment of the Protectorate entailed a loss of autonomy for the Tswana chiefdoms and initiated processes which undermined the chieftaincy as an institutional complex of governance, but enabled the incumbent chiefs and the ruling elites to maintain their position of privilege. These elites continued to be highly concerned to have the means to control water and people as sources of labour and support. This need to secure veld goods for trade fell away but was replaced by means of securing cash income from new sources of paid labour

and from an increasingly commercialized cattle economy. But there were now new actors on the scene, namely the colonial officials. Their actions cannot be interpreted in terms of a monolithic colonial state, for the Protectorate policies were forged out of differences in opinion and interests between London and South Africa, among the colonial officials themselves, and from a competitive interaction with the Tswana elite.

The Bechuanaland Protectorate was considered by the colonial administration to be singularly lacking in exploitable resources. Yet the very strict budgetary restraint exercised on the Protectorate Administration by the Colonial Office meant that the major aim was to minimize budgetary demands on the 'home government' by making the Protectorate self-sufficient. In this context, the enormous emphasis on cattle-keeping by the Tswana and the clear centrality of cattle to both their economy and politics led the Administration to consider that livestock represented 'the staple industry' of the Protectorate. As a consequence, the Protectorate Administration directed much of its time and initially limited funds toward livestock development. Indeed, a recent study of the history of the Protectorate's development policy concludes that a much greater level of investment in the livestock sector than in arable agriculture helped relegate the latter to stagnation and pre-empted failure (Roe, 1980: 48).

The initially minimalist approach of the British government to its new Protectorate was significant in the ability of the Tswana chiefly elite to maintain its political dominance. Significant, too, was the coincidence of interest between the Tswana elite and their colonizing 'protectors'. Although there was considerable jockeying between these two groups and periods of tension and disagreement, the Tswana chiefly elites' extensive authority over their people and their control over the only significant resources in the territory at that time (namely, cattle and land) provided the Administration with a structure-in-place that it could build on and, if necessary, attempt to co-opt. Unlike some other colonial territories where chiefs had to be 'created' or where indigenous leaders could not command people or resources with great effect, the highly centralized hierarchical Tswana chiefdoms with their relatively resilient cattle economies constituted an arena where, despite confrontations over relative authority, the Tswana chiefs and the Administration's officials had considerable overlapping interests.

A large proportion of the total revenue of the Bechuanaland Protectorate was devoted to the costs of administration and the maintenance of order. The revenues of the Native Fund, established in 1919 and based on a levy paid by Botswana in addition to the government poll tax (Hailey, 1957: 503), were expended on education and on livestock services. The main emphasis of the latter was on the prevention and eradication of cattle diseases. But over time, greater stress was placed on water development so that by the mid-thirties the dominant government opinion was that the major barrier to expansion in animal husbandry was too few reliable sources of water. As the Annual Report for 1938 explained:

... it will be clear that the livestock industry constitutes the mainstay of the economic life of the country, and at present offers the only reasonable possibility of development ... The provision of further water supplies will remove the main difficulty in the development of the livestock industry of the Bechuanaland Protectorate and to this end drilling machines are now being utilized with successful results in various parts of the Territory to tap underground water supplies. (Bechuanaland Protectorate Annual Report 1938: 10-12 quoted in Roe, 1980: 29.)

This 'evolution' of government opinion that water development was the key to increasing the productivity of cattle raising and the livelihood of the Tswana people must be seen as the outcome of a 'dialogue' on many levels between the Administration and the Tswana elite. Roe has suggested that this stress on water was a new phenomenon of the nineteen-thirties (*ibid.*), and Schapera, too, had concluded in this very period that 'the omission [in the Proclamation establishing the Native Fund] of specific reference to the provision of water supplies indicates the relative unimportance in which they were held at the time.' (1943: 242) But a crucial question here is: held by whom? While the funds set aside initially by the Administration for the development of water supplies were small, African members of the Native Advisory Council (NAC) were quite clear about their own priorities from its very first sessions. Thus, the statement by the Ngwaketse representative in 1920 that 'our complaint is about water' was endlessly reiterated by NAC members over the following years.

The desire to secure a reliable water supply for cattle was perennial among Batswana, and within the memory of their living old men had been a major cause of conflict between neighbouring groups as well as with white farmers along the Marico. But by the 1920s and 1930s, the kinds of water sources and the means for attaining them had changed. The boreholes that were proving so essential to successful ranching in the neighbouring areas of South Africa, were envied by the Tswana cattlemen. Boreholes not only provided a reliable water supply once a good bore was achieved, but they drastically cut the labour needs in comparison with the hard work of raising water by hand. For both these reasons, boreholes would allow more cattle to be watered at one point year round by fewer herders.

On the Administration's side, the wish to promote the livestock sector was tempered by its restricted budget and by competing demands on these funds by the relatively few white ranchers in the Protectorate and by the African chiefly elite who provided the members of the NAC. The direction of limited funds to disease control in the Tribal Reserves which held the vast majority of the Protectorate's cattle was of benefit to the white ranchers within the territory and to neighbouring South Africa, whereas water development in the Reserves would directly benefit only the African cattle-holders. This is not to suggest that the desire, expressed in official documents, to improve 'Native stock' was an empty one but rather, that in a situation of limited funds, priorities were established at least in part by the competition between claims, and the voices of the white settlers tended, at this period, to overpower those of the Africans. Where such interests coincided, as in the case of disease control, so much the better for the High Commission and the Protectorate Administration, as well as for the Batswana. Also, of course, anything which helped the Tswana cattle economy helped the Tswana people to pay their taxes.

Perhaps as much as a dialogue, the process of pressing the wishes of the tribal representatives for improvements in livestock water supplies on to the Protectorate Administration and through them on to the British government appears through the minutes of the Native Advisory Council meetings to have been one of attrition. While never questioning the established priority of the allocation of funds to education and to livestock disease control, the Tswana representatives constantly brought up the urgent need for water. Yet the government policy which ultimately resulted in major programmes of borehole drilling throughout the

country and which essentially set significant trends for the post-colonial government involved more than two actors – the colonial ‘state’ and the Tswana elite. The particular form that the water development policy took – the means of financing, the areas selected, the type of management organization – may be seen as the outcome of interaction not only between the Protectorate Administration and the Tswana elite but also, on the one hand, between the Administration, in the person of its Resident Commissioner, and the Colonial Office, and on the other, between the Tswana chiefly elite and the rest of the Batswana. In these exchanges one can discern the play of ‘interests’ in terms both of economic gain and political goals. But equally, the ideologies of economic and political action and the socio-cultural constructions of resource control are central to understanding why the borehole schemes were formulated and implemented in quite the way they were, as well as for the particular effects these schemes have had in the intervening fifty years.

The development of government policy, like any other social activity, is the outcome not only of competing interests or negotiations among conflicting political agendas but also of competing interpretations. Struggle over resources, over wealth or power is also engaged via a struggle over meaning. This is perhaps most evident in legal and legislative contexts: that a category of person or act becomes defined in one way rather than in another is clearly the victory of one meaning over another. Rights are set in order and in hierarchies of priority (Thompson, 1976). But the process takes place in many arenas and has to be investigated in any attempts to understand social outcomes and patterns.

The introduction of boreholes to the Kgatleng district

The main outlines of this period are the following.⁷ After the dual disappointment of the breakdown of the second-hand drilling machine procured by the Administration from the Native Fund and the failure of a white trader to drill successful boreholes in his district, Isang Pilane, the regent of the Bakgatla, inaugurated a drilling scheme in 1927. This was financed by a levy imposed on Kgatla taxpayers which raised £4000 and a grant of £500 from the Native Fund.⁸ The seven successful boreholes, five of which were in the grazing areas, were placed under the management of small groups of cattle-owners, referred to as ‘tribal committees’ by Schapera (1943), which collected fees from users and maintained the borehole pumps.

In the early 1930s, Colonel Rey, then Resident Commissioner of the Protectorate, petitioned for a large grant from the Colonial Development and Welfare Fund to develop water supplies in the African areas of the territory. By dint of considerable lobbying, he first succeeded in extracting an advance from the British government to fund the newly established borehole syndicates in the Kgatleng, and subsequently received the grant which initiated widespread drilling. The syndicates, small groups of cattlemen who would own the new boreholes, replaced the former ‘tribal committees’, which within their first few years of operating had come to be considered poor managers of the first seven boreholes drilled with Bakgatla resources.

When one seeks to reconstruct these events through the recorded exchanges between Rey and the High Commission in South Africa and the Colonial Office in London, the minutes of the Native (later African) Advisory Council, and the

oral accounts of this period collected from informants during 1979–80, one is struck by two things. The first is that while there is a major dialogue between the Protectorate officials and the Tswana elite (as represented in the Advisory Council and the more day-to-day encounters of the District Commissioners with the chiefs and their councillors), this has to be interpreted within a larger set of exchanges. Each of these interlocutors was also engaged in a parallel dialogue with their respective constituencies, namely, the representatives of the British Colonial Office, and the Tswana common people – ‘the tribesmen’. Secondly, the salience of ideological and cultural construction is demonstrated most forcibly in two sets of manoeuvres over meaning. These are the strategic learning by the Tswana elite of the Administration’s ideological proclivities, and the different and competing interpretations placed on the syndicate form of borehole ownership.

The final decision on the Colonial Development Fund grant was delayed toward the end of 1935 by a proposal that the Union of South Africa be involved in various projects including water development in the Protectorate. The Union, of course, wished to incorporate the High Commission Territories while British opinion vacillated on the issue. The rationale for the Union’s specific involvement in Bechuanaland’s water development is expressed in an *ad-hoc* *memoire* submitted to the British government by the Dominions Office which contained suggestions for improved cooperation between the Union and the High Commission Territories. It stated: ‘... the native population should feel that the Union Government is working in concert with the local administrations with a real and generous desire to develop and improve conditions in the Territories’. Rey’s response was strongly negative. His objections were based on two grounds: first, there was ‘the question of principle raised, namely that the Union Government should take charge of all water development in the Territory’, since ‘the natives would think the Union is taking over ...’. Secondly, on more pragmatic grounds he rejected the specific projections of the Union plan as ‘ludicrous’ contending that they underestimated expected costs by at least half, and foresaw ‘confusion’ and ‘tragic ... delays’ following on such a major shift in policy at that late juncture. He opposed even a ‘compromise’ put forward by the High Commissioner that the Union furnish staff and drilling plant costs until the Colonial Development Fund grant took effect. Apart from any political motivation on the part of the High Commissioner to sweeten the Union’s reputation in the Protectorate, doubtless the opportunity to obtain development funds from other pockets than the British taxpayers’ was attractive to British officials. After a meeting between the High Commissioner, the Union Minister for Native Affairs and Rey, Rey appears to have won the day since a telegram sent on 30 November 1935 by the High Commissioner to the Secretary of State in London stated that the scheme was to go ahead as previously planned and that any involvement by the Union in the form of technical assistance, would be after the project had been initiated and ‘on the basis of cooperation and not of control’.

This incident does not merely illustrate the complex sources of decisions in policy formation and implementation under the Protectorate government. This and other incidents to be described in a moment also illustrate the manner in which the dynamics of political action make a particular meaning or interpretation more or less plausible; and, in turn, how a particular construction of meaning renders political actions more or less effective.

The colonial usage of ‘natives’ to refer to the inhabitants of colonial territories

is now either so well known that it is ignored or, in reaction to its pejorative implications, it is erased from text and from consideration. In the present argument, however, I suggest its use is not without significance to the political dynamics I am seeking to elucidate. The Protectorate officers were certainly not unaware of the differences of rank and wealth amongst Tswana, as we shall see below, but often reference to the whole population as an undifferentiated mass – ‘the natives’ – was more appropriate for their purpose. Rey’s antagonism to the South African attempt to act as patron to Bechuanaland derived much more from his own career ambitions being vested in putting the Protectorate, as an individual territory, on the map, rather than from any general antipathy toward South Africa. Indeed, he spent much time corresponding with and visiting prominent South African legislators, civil servants and businessmen. Most of this energy was directed in pursuit of Protectorate interests, such as his attempts to improve the processing and marketing arrangements of Bechuanaland’s cattle, although like many officers he also spent ‘off duty’ time in the Union.⁷ In these lobbying ventures he was forced to treat the Union as patron. This opposition to the Union’s ‘taking over’ the Protectorate, however, led him to stress the parity of the two political units, despite the otherwise clear disparity in resources and economic influence. Similarly, the constant references to the territory’s ‘natives’ stressed their collective identity and collective interests, and thereby implicitly claimed this separate identity should not be merged in a larger, Union-dominated polity.

Within the Protectorate, a similar dynamic may be seen in the interchange taking place over the development of boreholes in the Reserves between the Administration and the Tswana elite and between the latter and the mass of the Tswana people. The Tswana elite had to demonstrate both to the Administration and to their own people that the interests of ‘the natives’ could be interpreted as a collective identity and that they could be collectively represented by the chiefs. The members of the Tswana elite were engaged throughout this period in devising ways to convince both the Protectorate Administration of their need for water and their capacity to manage new and expensive resources, and the mass of the Tswana that such innovations were in the interests of the many. The advantages to the bigger cattle-owners of the new boreholes were clear. The secure water supply promised to open up under-utilized pastures to year-round use, thus allowing owners to move their herds away from overgrazed areas, to increase the distance from any outbreak of cattle disease and to reduce the demands on their breeding bulls from the many small herders holding only cows and oxen.

Boreholes would also reduce the heavy labour demands of watering and herding cattle. A shortage in the supply of male labour for these tasks was a consequence of the high rates of out-migration by younger men, rates which were increased by the many disasters of this period – economic depression, droughts, locusts, reduced harvests, outbreaks of lung sickness and other stock diseases, falling beef prices and the weight restrictions imposed on cattle imports by South Africa to its markets. Since cattle ownership was as highly skewed then in the Protectorate as it had been in the pre-colonial period and is in present-day Botswana, the consequences of these difficult years varied according to the level of resources owned. The bigger cattle owners were more able to ride the various ecological and climatic disasters, and the South African restrictions provided them with yet another reason to belabour the Administration for water sources to fatten their cattle for export. But those whose small herds were lost and those

who owned none and whose crops failed were driven increasingly into taking jobs as migrant labourers to the farms and mines of South Africa.

The consequences of this increased outflow were felt throughout the system but the most public response was that by the Tswana chiefs. Thus, in 1923, Isang argued in the NAC that chiefs should have the authority to prevent unmarried men from going to South Africa without their parents' consent for 'we do not wish boys who don't pay tax to be allowed to go. They are our herds[men]'.

For all these reasons, then, the larger cattle-owners were clearly going to benefit from the new boreholes and it was the chiefs and their close associates who owned the biggest herds.¹⁰ There were also reasons for the far more numerous small herd-owners and those who owned no cattle at all to support their chiefs' attempts to promote borehole schemes. First, the vicissitudes of cattle-keeping in the semi-arid, risk-prone conditions of the Protectorate did not eliminate the hope for most men that eventually they too would own cattle. The boom-bust cycles typical of cattle-keeping in such conditions and the many stories of dramatic losses and painstaking effort to rebuild depleted herds supported rather than reduced that aspiration. Nor did the recognition that certain families retained their fortunes and that 'there are always poor' gainsay an ethic of 'achievement' (see Comaroff and Roberts, 1981).

Secondly, there were many ties of clientage, more diffuse dependency and reciprocal obligation which crosscut the differences in wealth and rank. Many among the relatively poor were dependent on those with bigger herds for access to plough oxen or to milk cows in exchange for which they gave their labour and services. These dependants were as likely to recognize the benefits of the boreholes' promise for a more secure supply of water for cattle as the richer herd-owners. For, if boreholes increased herd sizes by providing better conditions for the animals, or decreased the hard labour in raising water and watering animals, then these poorer individuals would seem only to benefit. And thirdly, syndicate ownership of boreholes in the Kgatlang appeared to guarantee an incorporative rather than exclusionary mode of access.

From 'tribal' boreholes to syndicates

The negotiations and manoeuvres taking place among the competing interests and agendas in deciding what form legitimate control of boreholes should take are most graphically caught in what I call 'strategic learning' by the Tswana elite and in the manoeuvres over the meanings to be assigned to the 'syndicate'.

The boreholes drilled in the late 1920s in the Kgatlang under the initiative of Isang and the Kgatla people had been placed under the management of groups of cattle-owners acting for the tribe. However, within a few years of use, numerous failures by these groups to maintain the pumping equipment in working condition, and depleted pastures due to large concentrations of cattle around the boreholes led the Protectorate Administration and the chiefs to express great dissatisfaction with their poor record of management. This was attributed by speakers in the NAC to the boreholes being 'tribal': it was argued that since the boreholes were 'publicly' owned, no individual or group felt obliged to maintain the requisite level of care. The outcome was that the boreholes in the Administration-sponsored scheme of 1933, as in later schemes, were to be groups of cattle-owners – the syndicates. Clearly, one advantage to the Administration of instituting private ownership of the new boreholes and so shifting some of

the costs from government to groups of cattle-owners was seen as a way to keep its expenditures down. But this strategic consideration was embedded in an ideology that set private ownership in opposition to and superior to corporate and 'communal' forms of holding. In the previous century, the missionary John Mackenzie had railed against 'the communistic relations of the members of a tribe among one another' and wished to introduce 'the fresh stimulating breath of healthy individualistic competition' (cited in Dachs, 1972: 652). Now, in the 1930s and throughout the Protectorate era, the attempts to introduce 'progressive' methods in cattle-keeping or, later, farming and to ensure responsible and efficient management of new technologies such as the borehole were cast in terms of private, exclusive forms of ownership.

In their lobbying in the Native Advisory Council for water development the Tswana elite showed themselves adept at taking on the mode of discourse of the Administration. Isang, for example, in explaining the Kgatleng's shift away from 'tribal' to syndicate ownership of grazing boreholes, stated that failures in their proper management were because 'all these boreholes are tribal holes, and we are always in trouble with these boreholes because no one is actually responsible for them and the people who have made them old have fled' (*sic*) (NAC, 1937: 252). Other representatives stressed that they were quite unable to follow such government advice as upgrading their stock by buying 'improved bulls', preventing their cows being serviced by scrub bulls, or taking up various other 'improved' practices until they had sufficient water and some means of restricting the benefits of any improvements to their initiators. Thus, one speaker pointed out that as long as they depended on watering their cattle at rain-fed sources, they could not 'stop a man with bad bulls from spoiling our cows, because he will tell us that the pool was not made by us' (NAC Minutes, 1930: 16). The appeal is not merely to the need for a more secure water source in the form of man-made wells, but also to the capacity for these, in being man-made, to be claimed as exclusive property. For, according to the statement of Tswana 'law and custom' compiled by Schapera from 'senior men of the tribes' at this same period, man-made water sources could be owned whereas surface waters were regarded 'as common property' (Schapera, 1943: 249). The rationale was most clearly expressed by another member of the Advisory Council in 1943 where he explained the advantages of the syndicates:

Where anything is used tribally no proper care is taken of that thing because any man can come along and use it, well knowing that any expenditure attaching to it he has not to bear alone. But where the plant belongs to a syndicate the members . . . have to take it upon themselves to see if any damage has been done . . . and find out who is responsible . . .

The desire for more exclusive control extended, albeit less explicitly, toward land as well as to the boreholes. The Administration was concerned to find means of encouraging 'progressive' farmers and techniques and of freeing the former from the direct claims or indirect drag of the 'unprogressive' sectors of the population. Isang Pilane quite clearly reiterates this view when, in response to complaints by the Veterinary Officer that bulls newly introduced into the Reserves were not being treated well, he responded: 'our Reserves are communal property and nobody who is willing to progress can have freedom to use his progressive ideas' (NAC, 1930: 13). This statement indicates that while the more explicit rationales

for private control were put forward in respect to boreholes, the logic of these rationales – the wish to protect one's investment, the requirement that the major beneficiaries of an investment also be responsible for some of the costs – could clearly be extended to grazing land.

Through these dialogues we also see the selected appeal being made to 'tradition' by members of the Tswana chiefly elite. On the one hand, they were redefining prior or traditional forms of resource control as unprogressive and a hindrance to proper management, a redefinition that was part of a strategy of private appropriation. On the other hand, this same strategy could claim support of tradition in that there existed customary practices whereby improvements to existing resources justified more exclusionary forms of use. This 'customary logic' was demonstrated where effort invested in bush land, which was thereby transformed into a field or plot, was recognised as supporting a degree of exclusive use.¹¹ A similar logic was applied to man-made wells. These had become more and more expensive through the early years of the twentieth century as new forms of shoring walls and dynamite became available. By the 1930s, some wells were recognized as being privately owned to the point of being locked against unauthorized use (Schapera, 1943).

Both the 'strategic learning' and the selective use of tradition¹² by Tswana leaders that emerge from the Advisory Council minutes were part of the dialogue with the Administration over the direction of state action in the Protectorate. The centrality of manoeuvres over meaning in this dialogue is also seen clearly in the interpretations accorded to syndicate ownership.

The syndicate as a type of partnership was well-known in southern Africa. During the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries many of the mining concessions and rights of exploiting land or water resources were held by syndicates.¹³ The adoption of this term for the new form of group ownership of boreholes in the Kgatleng is interesting for the light it sheds on the political manoeuvring taking place. Although the English word 'syndicate' was and is used by the Tswana (the Afrikaans word is almost identical), the Setswana term *kgotla*, group or association, is also used, as well as *sediba* or well, and less often, the English word 'company'. Noticeable here is the way words with quite different connotations are used to refer to one organization. *Kgotla*, as noted earlier, usually refers to a group with responsibility over and for a corporate set of resources. The person exercising this responsibility and its attendant privilege is designated a head (*tlhogo*) or steward (*modisa*). The leading member of a borehole syndicate is similarly called a head (*tlhogo*) or, using the English word, chairman. The syndicate, then, in also being called *kgotla*, continued to connote a collective endeavour, and a stewardship. This sense was reinforced by the public presentation of the syndicate as an exemplar of the *Kgotla* capacity for self-help or *ipelegeng*, a claim that continues to be significant today.

It is important here to recognize that different meanings were being extended to the syndicate by the various groups and in different contexts. The Tswana elite were concerned in their exchanges with the Administration to distinguish the earlier groups of cattle-owners who had managed the 'tribal' boreholes and who, as we saw, were considered to have been poor managers, from the new syndicates which, as private owners, were considered to guarantee more efficient and effective management. In the NAC, the Tswana elite opposed these earlier 'tribal committees' to the new syndicates: the latter were different and superior.

But in their dialogue with the rest of their people, one carried out in the public assembly place (*kgotla*) in the Setswana language and in the idioms of tribal identity and collective endeavour, the word syndicate was interchanged with *kgotla*, a word thus used to refer to both the earlier and the new forms of borehole management. Yet the fact that the syndicates were owners of the boreholes rather than trustees for a larger corporate unit (the tribe) gave very different significance to this new *kgotla*.

As far as the Protectorate officials were concerned, the syndicate symbolized at one and the same time a new enterprise and private effort counterposed against the irresponsible, retrogressive aspects of 'communal' organization, and yet also evoked hardy traditions of collective, even democratic effort. In this, the syndicate appeared to provide a neat resolution of a deeply embedded conflict in their opinions. Their preference for private forms of resource ownership sometimes sat uneasily with their role as 'protectors' of the people under the colonial charge. The Protectorate officials were not unaware of the wide disparity in wealth and privilege between the Tswana elite, with whom they mostly dealt, and the mass of the population. They also disliked too blatant an exercise of chiefly autocracy. Thus, they considered that the removal of direct ownership from the Tribal Authorities in favour of private ownership would forestall 'opportunities for chiefly nepotism'. Yet the group form promised to distribute the benefits more widely than would individual ownership of the new boreholes. It is thus not surprising that Rey should tout the first borehole scheme in 1934 as an example of a 'native cooperative scheme', yet also stress the fact that the syndicates were putting up capital from their individual resources in partial repayment of the costs.

For the Administration, the new syndicate had a ring of modernism that was attractive, while for the Tswana elite its connotation of continuity with past tradition helped sell a quite radical idea to their supporters. Yet the provision of a means of privately owning such critical resources as grazing boreholes promised to be a significant element in individual strategies of accumulation. The subsequent history of borehole development in a growing cattle economy has more than delivered on this promise.

At its inception, the borehole syndicate appears to have represented the best of all solutions to all involved. Even so, there are a few indications of conflicts in interest over the new boreholes at that period which by the late 1970s had become decisively more overt and pervasive. In 1938, the District Commissioner of Mochudi speculated in his annual report that the sabotage of one of the Regent's boreholes had been perpetrated by 'a native who objected to Isang sinking a borehole in an area in which he was accustomed to graze his cattle during a certain time of the year'. Here we see the resentment of the excluded, of those who 'were chased away', as they were described by old men recalling those days for me in 1979-80. But the increasing sense of exclusion and the conflicts emerging today over rights to land and water have to be understood within the context of a mix of privileged appropriation and of incorporative association.

Information based on the very few available records of the first syndicates' membership and on oral historical accounts recorded in 1979-80 indicate that both the 'tribal committees' and the first syndicates were dominated by senior men of the tribe. These were senior 'royals', that is men of the ruling family and of collateral lines, ward headmen who were big cattle-owners and/or who held cattle from the chiefs, and other wealthy commoners. Moreover, since the

selection of borehole sites in the early period lay with the Tribal Authority, namely the chief and his councillors, the areas for the new boreholes tended to be those where leading men already had cattle-posts and wells. On the other hand, these core members also drew in their own dependants and clients so that a much wider range of persons, including quite poor men, gained access to the new boreholes. The subsequent history of the borehole syndicates demonstrates both remarkable continuity for a large section of their memberships so that today's leading members are in many cases the sons or grandsons of the founders, and mobility for a few like the man whose father was a low ranking client of a royal founding member in the late 1920s but who is today a syndicate member and quite wealthy cattle-owner in his own right.

Over the past decade or so, a number of significant processes have been shifting the emphasis from the incorporative aspects of syndicate organization to the exclusionary.

CATTLE, WATER AND THE STATE POST INDEPENDENCE

Between the early 1930s and the late 1970s, there was an enormous increase in the number of boreholes throughout the country. A large government-sponsored programme in the 1950s, the flurry of drilling in the severe drought years of the mid-sixties, the sharp increase in individually owned boreholes from the late 'fifties through the seventies and the continuing government sponsored drilling in the post-independence years have all contributed to a situation of near saturation in the smaller districts.¹¹ In the Kgatleng,¹² the realization that there are now few 'spaces' left for grazing boreholes, given the present calculations of requisite distance between them and of the carrying capacity of the range, is an important component of the sharpening conflict over water rights.

Another paper would be required for a full investigation of the present conflicts and their dynamics. However, the interpretive method used above to elucidate the years of the introduction of boreholes in one district could help clarify some of the opaque and contradictory quality of the current situation that has led to quite opposing interpretations. Thus, the Tribal Grazing Land Policy of Botswana, initiated in 1975, has been hailed on the one hand as 'the most open and comprehensive land reform programme being undertaken anywhere in the world at this time' (Von Kaufmann, 1978: 225, cited by Hitchcock, 1980: 1). On the other, it is accused of being the final and legal imprimatur given to a 'land grab' by the wealthier categories of cattle-owners (Cliffe, 1976).

While the former opinion fails both to explore the ambiguous and diverse senses of 'reform' and to consider the differential structural effects of such a programme, the latter's reference to a land 'grab' misrepresents the nature of privatization and, in its general statement, over-simplifies the relation between the rich and the poor.

The dynamic of an increasing privatization of grazing land that remains, formally, under 'communal' tenure is a complex process but may be briefly sketched here (see Peters, 1983). The permanent water source secured by a borehole greatly reduces the need for herding and mobility compared with cattle-keeping based on seasonal water sources. In consequence, particular herds and their owners become more permanently associated with the specific pastures around a borehole. As the number of boreholes and grazing syndicates has

increased so has the concern with determining the boundaries of the pastures surrounding the borehole that 'belong' to the borehole. This deepening sense that borehole owners have identifiable claims to the land around the boreholes and not merely to the boreholes themselves has been reinforced by the continuous need for money to meet maintenance and running costs. Recent price increases due to oil-led inflation have added to this burden of responsibility and to a growing exclusivity of syndicates.

The growing *de facto* control of grazing land has been a focus of attention for both researchers and policy-makers and an explicit rationale for the Grazing Land Policy. But the opposition between *de jure* and *de facto*, or between legal statement and actual practice, still less between right and wrong is misleading. First, at least among Bakgatla,¹⁶ rights to pastures are premised on conceptions that include *both* a right to mobility across pastures, that is required by frequent outbreaks of drought, fire and disease, *and* a right of allocation, as in pre colonial and early colonial eras whereby certain individuals or groups were established as stewards over areas which centred on particular water sources. Secondly, the colonial administrative requirement of at least five miles' distance between boreholes has been continued in post-independence practice and by the late 1970s had become a designated area of approximately 6000 acres assigned to the borehole-owning group. In the context of the development of private ownership of permanent waterpoints in the grazing areas, the changes in herding practices noted, and the designation of an area of land to a borehole, the shift from the concept of 'allocation' to one of 'ownership' of lands is facilitated.

In the history of borehole syndicates, we can also observe the playing out of converging and competing interests in the shifts in emphasis given to the incorporative and exclusionary aspects of syndicate organization. Most syndicates over the past fifty years have extended access to their borehole water to a larger network of people than the core of full members, the *de jure* owners. Each member usually has one or more dependants (mainly kin) whose cattle are said to be 'in the same kraal' and thus are watered without extra charge. There are also *bahiri*, literally those who hire, who pay user fees for the borehole water. In recent years, both forms of extending access beyond syndicate members have been reduced.

Current perceptions that the grazing areas are being rapidly filled up with boreholes, that the number of new borehole syndicates being formed is thus diminishing, and that existing syndicates are under pressure from expanding memberships as sons mature and wish to become full members, have been leading to a feeling of frustration among those without secure access to borehole water and a sense of protectionism among syndicates and individual owners. The public debates on the Grazing Land Policy have also encouraged discussion of the pressures on available resources, the increasing disparity in access to these, and the growing exclusionary practices by existing syndicates. Trends toward greater exclusiveness are seen in more stringent definitions of rightful access such as who can claim to be a legitimate dependant or 'child' of a full member and who is the rightful successor of a deceased member, as well as a reduction in the numbers of *bahiri*, persons allowed to buy water from the syndicates for their herds. The grazing syndicates' boundaries are thus becoming far less 'permeable' and there is a shift from a more incorporative to a more exclusionary mode of organization (Peters, 1983; Werbner, 1980).

Numerous disputes have emerged in recent years as a consequence of these

trends. In cases before the Land Board and the chief's court and in other arenas such as the meetings of individual syndicates, definitions of rightful access and priorities of claims are being thrashed out that have meanings and effects as potent as those discussed above for the earlier period. Any attempt to analyze these disputes and the processes of which they form a part will have to recognize that, in the complex and shifting patterns of coalition and conflict, alliance and struggle emerging within the district and between it and the national level, the struggles over meaning are critical signposts as well as active elements in these patterns.

In the Kgatleng district, for example, large public meetings held in *kgotla* throughout the late 1970s to discuss the Grazing Policy's proposals to demarcate leased areas, demonstrated a popular resistance to 'ranches', and a deep emotional and political rejection of 'fencing' which was taken as the arch symbol of a divided range. In one meeting in 1979, a representative of the central government impatiently argued that leasing was not equivalent to creating ranches. But he was answered with a stubborn refusal to accept that 'white men's metal kraals', one derisive description for ranches, did not entail a herd being locked into one area and thus made vulnerable to veld fires and other inevitable disasters.

The rejection of 'ranches' and 'fences' reflects not only a well founded recognition of the constraints and risk in current modes of cattle-keeping by small herders. These smaller cattle-holders are indeed among the most antagonistic to the proposed leases. Not only have some of them as former *bahiri* already been squeezed out by syndicates' increasing exclusiveness, but they also recognize that the new leases would further jeopardize their access to pastures and seasonal water sources. However, the new plans were not embraced with great enthusiasm by the bigger cattle-owners either. While a very small number do wish to take up the opportunity to create commercial ranches, most of even the bigger cattlemen in the Kgatleng have publicly opposed fences and ranches. This partly reflects their perceptions of economic costs: the present system of modified open range, in which cattle range freely over quite large areas but where 'the borehole is the herder', allows even quite large herd-owners to keep down their labour costs and keep other costs for veterinary inputs, fodder, etc. to a minimum. But their response also indicates the social and political implications of a divided range. All but a tiny minority are engaged in complex networks of ties, often based on cattle exchanges, with a range of other Kgatla families. It is through such ties that they acquire labour for herding and for crop production, services, political support, favours, help and so forth. Such dense networks of dependence and interdependence represent social relations of production that effectively inhibit, for now, the thrust toward the type of exclusionary ranching practices envisaged by the new policy. Much of the open, democratic or overtly non-directive quality of Tswana political life (Picard, 1979) derives as much from this still pervasive interdependence (which does *not* mean balanced reciprocity) as from a cultural history of consensual politics (which has never excluded domination by a privileged elite). Furthermore, the open range system itself acts to inhibit such a shift, since it facilitates acts of sabotage against those seeking to separate themselves from the claims of others. It is not insignificant that the largest category of cases brought before the local courts is that of accusations of cattle theft, or that one of the most heated topics of conversation among cattle owners is the high incidence of cattle theft and 'missing' beasts.

The fact that the present direction of state power in Botswana is under a group

of men drawn from the wealthy cattle elite has been often mentioned in discussion of the Grazing Land Policy. Certainly, in this as in issues of the present taxation system or the subsidized borehole maintenance services, there is a clear coincidence of interests and policy. Yet the perception of common interests by different categories of the population in these matters extends much further down the economic and political hierarchies than some commentators suggest. Policies favouring the livestock sector continue to receive the support of both richer and poorer Batswana, just as in the earlier periods. Contradictions become apparent and conflicts arise when perceptions of common interests come up against divergent interests, such as those revealed in the reaction to the new land policy.

Increasing numbers of herds and herd-owners can only exacerbate current conflicts, although drastic reduction in the national herd-size caused by severe drought or outbreaks of disease could change this.¹⁷ At present the very wealthiest and politically powerful are able to take up the option of buying ranches in the few freehold, formerly settler, areas. These are also the main takers of the new commercial leases within the districts. Once either option becomes less feasible, the present strategy of overflow of excess herds into technically 'communal' areas may be translated more forcefully into an enclosure movement (see Gulbrandsen, 1980). However, the cattle elite is still far from being an undivided whole, still less the instrument of 'the state'. Just as the introduction of boreholes and private ownership into the former Tribal Reserves had to be seen as an outcome of political interaction among different actors, some with partially overlapping interests, some with antagonistic ones, so must the present Grazing Land Policy and its effects.

The processes of accumulation and a gradual privatization of technically communal lands over the fifty years following on the first establishment of boreholes have not totally eclipsed the incorporative aspects of resource control in favour of the exclusionary. The need for political support, for herding labour and other services still binds the richer cattle owners to the poorer. While interdependence is not the same as reciprocity, while many of the myriad exchanges in the rural economy of Batswana are far from equal and while there is very real cause for concern in the erosion of customary rights to resources, the contradictory pulls toward incorporation and exclusion continue to generate not only social tension but manoeuvres over meaning that echo those of the earlier periods.

NOTES

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² By 'ideology' I mean sets of 'public ideas and attitudes' (Geertz, 1965: 8) as opposed to the notion of ideology as 'a form of higher cunning' or false consciousness (Geertz, 1973: 202; cf. Kahn, 1978: 107).

³ Syndicates are groups of cattle-owners who jointly own and manage a borehole. The particular origin and use of the term are discussed below.

⁴ *Morafe* means nation or chiefdom but has usually been translated as tribe. This latter term continues to be used by the Tswana themselves as in 'tribal administration' or when one group wishes to distinguish itself in English from another group (e.g. Bakgatla from Bangwato) or from the central

government. I use 'polity' as the most general term for this formerly independent political unit, as well as chiefdom. I refer to tribe, tribal, etc., only when such a term is used by the people discussed. Major sources for this section are Schapera (1938; 1943; 1956) and nineteenth-century accounts by Burchell, Lichtenstein and Smith.

The terms used in the nineteenth-century accounts are *balala*, 'servants', 'serfs', 'poor', and 'Bushmen'. Often used interchangeably, they make assessment of *who* precisely these servant categories were very difficult. These appear to have included groups not organized into large, centralized polities, such as San (Bushmen) and Bakgalagadi, as well as groups who left or were expelled from chiefdoms and who thus became vulnerable to domination by other, more powerful polities.

The ensuing 'negotiation of rank' has been examined in an elaborate presentation of the dialectical co-existence of 'the cultural logic of ascription' with 'an ideology of achievement' among Tswana (Comaroff and Roberts, 1981).

⁷ More detail is found in Peters (1983).

⁸ Letter from High Commission to Secretary of State, 21.7.1933. BNA file S311/1.

⁹ Sources are documents held in the Botswana National Archives (BNA) as well as Colonel Rey's diaries. These are to be published by the Museum of Botswana and were kindly lent to the author by the Museum authorities.

¹⁰ For example, in 1932, Schapera found 'that nearly one-quarter of all the cattle in the tribe were then owned by five men: the Chief had about 5,500 head, his uncle Tsang (the Regent) 2,500 head, two other uncles 500 head each, and a prominent commener 600 head' (1943: 219).

¹¹ There is a large anthropological literature on the interplay between 'communal' or corporate landholding and forms of exclusive use and the resulting pattern of reciprocally modifying rights. See, for example, Gluckman (1965) and Bohannan and Bohannan (1968).

¹² The protean quality of 'tradition' which may be interpreted as 'a series of fixed normative rules' or as 'a stock of pragmatic strategies' by different actors (Ranger, 1982: 24) or by the same actors at different times is displayed here. I read Ranger's later essay in the book edited by Hobshawm and Ranger (1983) after I had finished this paper but it seems to me to provide an excellent foundation for the work that needed to unravel in greater detail for Botswana the interplay between 'tradition' and 'custom' in their various guises and constructions.

¹³ One reference to an early use is to the Mafeking Water Syndicate which was formed in 1892 by a group of white men to lease and develop a spring on Chief Montshwa's Reserve just outside the town of Mafeking (BNA: HC 138/2). African groups who bought land in the emerging land market of the nineteenth century in the Transvaal were also often constituted as land syndicates.

¹⁴ In the larger districts which include large areas of Kalahari sand veld, borehole-drilling has allowed cattle-raising to expand into areas that were claimed to be 'empty'. In recent years, there have developed conflicts over respective claims to these areas between cattle-keepers and primarily San groups whose livelihood has included foraging and hunting (Hutchings, 1980; Wily, 1982).

¹⁵ By the outbreak of the Second World War, during which all drilling was suspended, between twenty and twenty-five successful boreholes had been drilled in the Kgatleng (the figure varies between sources). During the 1950s both new syndicates and individuals had boreholes drilled. Between 1955 and 1960, forty-one successful boreholes were drilled under government auspices in the Kgatleng, half of these being in the grazing areas. Sources for boreholes drilled by private firms are extremely scarce. In 1979-80 there were some fifty grazing borehole syndicates in operation, nine syndicates operating boreholes in the arable areas, and twenty-four individually-owned boreholes. In addition were the government-owned boreholes designed mainly, though not exclusively, for domestic or human consumption.

¹⁶ Uri Almogor (1978) discusses similar conceptions of rights to pasture land among Herero which he glosses as 'flexibility' (i.e., mobility) and 'locality' (allocation).

¹⁷ The situation is further complicated by the needs associated with crop-production and with changing patterns in the distribution and use of crop lands. This cannot be analyzed here.

APPENDIX

Borehole Syndicate Membership

The first grazing boreholes were drilled in the Kgatleng during the end of the 1920s and placed under the care of 'borehole committees'. One of these, Mfetlhedi, was intended for the heir to the chieftaincy. The other four (Moologe, Monametsana, Matlhage and Lekwatse) had committees composed of senior members of the royal lines (*dikgosi*), promi-

ment headmen and other wealthy or client commoners. The 'heads' or chairmen of these groups were: one headman of a senior ward; one headman of a lower-ranked ward who had married a woman from the ruling family; one wealthy commoner who was a big cattleman and reportedly clever and reliable; and one commoner who was not wealthy but who held cattle from the regent.

The average number of members in Kgatla grazing syndicates was fourteen in 1979-80 with a range of four to over forty. (Note that memberships in borehole syndicates in the arable areas are much larger, averaging around 50.) This figure for full membership has to be multiplied by three to five to take account of 'dependants' who also have access to the boreholes.

In the examples of syndicate memberships which follow, numbers (1) and (2) are fairly typical, (3) and (4) illustrate the extremes of the range. The individuals listed in parenthesis are dependants.

1. Syndicate TS; founded in the late 1930s

- (1) K, a founding member (plus two adult sons of a married daughter)
 - (2) S, only son of K (1)
 - (3) B, eldest son of SP, a founding member, now deceased (plus brothers T and Bin)
 - (4) R, eldest son in the first house of MK, a founding member now deceased (plus two brothers and two sisters)
 - (5) L, eldest son in the second house of MK, and half-brother to R (4) (plus two brothers)
 - (6) N, eldest son of NM, a founding member now deceased (plus two younger brothers)
 - (7) B, eldest son of EG, a founding member still alive but who has quarreled with his son and other leading members and has left, (plus three young brothers)
 - (8) M, eldest son of M, a founding member, deceased (plus one brother)
- (1) and (2) are a senior royal family; EG (7), the son of a commoner ward headman married a younger sister of K (1), but subsequently divorced. Family (3) are close agnatic collaterals of family (1) and (2). Family (8) are distant relatives of (1) and (3). Family (4) and (5) are unrelated to (1) and (3) but MK [see 4] was a close friend and ally of (1). NM (6) was also a friend of (1) and other core members, but today there are rifts between the sons.

2. Syndicate MK: founded 1960

- (1) K, a founding member (plus three sons, two daughters)
 - (2) R, younger brother of K
 - (3) S, son of founding member (plus one sister and nine sons)
 - (4) B, founding member (plus two sons, one daughter)
 - (5) M, son of founding member ST who was brother of B (4) (plus young family)
 - (6) T, brother of B (plus young children of his second house)
 - (7) ML, son of B's (4) sister
 - (8) D, younger brother of ML (6)
 - (9) KS, founding member
 - (10) P, eldest son of BP, deceased, a close agnate of the chief (plus four younger brothers)
 - (11) PH, eldest son of TH, deceased, a close agnate of BP (9)
- (1) and (2) are brothers. They are unrelated to other members but K (1) is a big herd owner, a local politician and a friend of (3) and (4). B (4) is the paternal uncle of M (5) and brother of T (6). The mother of ML (7) and D (8) and the mother of S (3) were the sisters of B (4) and T (6). KS (9) is a member of K (1)'s ward and related distantly to the wife of S (3), who was also born into K (1)'s ward. (10) and (11) are cousins but their families are divided by rifts within the chiefly families. The families of (1) and (4) and (6) were clients of (10) and (11).

3. Syndicate MY: founded in the late 1930s

There were 3 founding members: BP, MM and NM. BP was a close agnate of the chief, MM and NM were commoner wealthy cattle-owners. There were no kinship ties among

- them, but today a marriage links the families of MM and NM. The current members are:
- (1) M, eldest son of BP (plus 2 younger brothers)
 - (2) T, eldest son of MM
 - (3) J, younger son of MM
 - (4) Z, sister of T and J
 - (5) S, eldest son of NM's first house (plus younger siblings and own children)

This is one of the smallest syndicates in the district. The children of NM's second house are not members of this syndicate and S (5)'s own younger full brother was expelled because he insisted on claiming membership rights.

4. Syndicate SK: founded 1965-66

This borehole was drilled by the Protectorate Administration in the drought years and was intended for crisis use only. Today it is used largely when the river waters dry up. The secretary stated that there are technically forty-four members but only twenty pay regularly. The books in 1978 showed twenty-three had paid their annual membership fees; in late 1979 the figure was eleven but more were expected to pay over the course of the season. While a core of members comes from one ward, many others belong to different wards but are accustomed to water their herds in the area where the borehole was drilled (the NE corner of the district).

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Résumé

Conflits sur la signification, conflits sur le pouvoir: bétail, eau et l'état du Botswana

Alors qu'il est important d'analyser la domination politique et économique des états, il est également important de reconnaître que le pouvoir de l'état implique des contradictions qui reflètent les conflits entre les différents groupes sociaux cherchant à contrôler les institutions et les idéologies qui arbitrent entre les dominateurs et les dominés.

Le but central de cet article est de démontrer que le contrôle politique sur les ressources vitales telles que l'eau et les pâturages, qui est l'objet de l'action de l'état tout au long de l'histoire du Botswana, peut être élucidé en conceptualisant les procédés impliqués en tant que conflits sur la signification en même temps que conflits sur les ressources, et comme une oscillation entre les besoins contradictoires nécessaires à l'incorporation et à l'exclusion. Après avoir brièvement introduit les caractères significatifs de l'économie politique du Botswana pré-colonial, l'article se concentre sur l'époque coloniale. L'approche 'minimaliste' de l'autorité coloniale à l'égard du Protectorat appauvri s'allia aux intérêts de l'élite cheffaine Tswana et accorda des allocations gouvernementales à l'économie de