

Identity Management: The Creation of Resource Allocative Criteria in Botswana

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Abstract: Botswana's escape from the "resource curse" is an anomaly in the trend toward low economic growth and political instability in resource-rich developing economies. In literature on the resource curse, distributive injustices of resource wealth have traditionally been understood to occur along ethno-linguistic and sectarian lines and potentially cause weak institutions, social unrest, and, at times, violent conflict. Because of their high levels of ethnic diversity and abundant natural resource wealth, African countries are especially prone to these effects. The present article argues that part of the reason Botswana escaped the resource curse was a bid by Botswana elites to buffer the negative effects of ethnicity on resource distribution through identity management, specifically assimilation, at various points in the country's history. This was mainly achieved through the political entrepreneurship of pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial elites, and through social and colonial discourses predicated upon materialistic production and exchange, that led to the establishment of a new identity category. In doing so, Botswana elites created a new criterion for resource access based on successful assimilation that largely excluded those who failed to assimilate.

Introduction

Botswana's escape from the "resource curse" is an anomaly in the African trend toward low economic growth and political instability in economies heavily skewed toward exports of non-renewable natural resources.¹ This trend is largely explained through analyses of ethnic fault lines. One idea is that in order to maintain power, political incumbents use natural resource wealth to establish patron-client relationships with members of their ethnic groups.² Another is that violent conflicts arise due to grievances about the unequal distribution of resource wealth among ethnic clusters.³ Botswana is widely cited as an anomaly to this "resource curse" and is branded an "African miracle," a designation it has held since its independence in 1966.⁴ Botswana's good institutions, particularly in the private property area, its political leadership's choice of sound policies, and its elite's motivation to reinforce strong institutions have led to its relative economic success in the face of resource abundance.⁵ Many allude that without the discovery of diamonds, it is unlikely that Botswana would have been able to prosper to the extent it did.⁶ One key reason cited for the Botswana miracle is its relatively high level of homogeneity.⁷ The general view is that because more than 80 percent of the population speaks

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Setswana, the country is homogenous.⁸ This view is further compounded by the fact that the country's diamond resources have generally benefitted most Botswana citizens.⁹ This assumption is misguided, however, because the notion of ethnic homogeneity in Botswana is superficial at best.

The present article challenges the basic explanation that views Botswana as primordially homogeneous under the umbrella of "Tswana" and attributes this as a primary reason behind Botswana's escape from the "resource curse." Instead, this article contends that Botswana's purported ethnic homogeneity was the result of a combination of political strategies of the instrumentalist kind on the part of elite political entrepreneurs in the various phases of Botswana's history establishing a social hierarchy of identity that engendered the notion of "Tswanaedom." Tswanaedom here refers to both the product and the process that saw the political, economic, and social ascendancy of the Tswana identity in Botswana. Tswanaedom, the paper argues, became central to the post-colonial assimilationist objective of unifying Botswana into a homogenous political, social, cultural, and geographic national entity.¹⁰ Assimilation here is defined as the process whereby a minority group gradually adapts to the customs and attitudes of the prevailing culture and customs.¹¹

Botswana illustrates a case of identity management. Its systematic assimilation to "Tswanaedom" transformed Tswana identities and activated new norms within society, albeit at the expense of minority cultures. The extent to which the country is today viewed as homogenous, and the extent to which diamond wealth is viewed as not being based on ethnicity, is largely due to identity management and the construction of ethnic categories emerging from both political engineering and socio-cultural discourses built upon historic mercantile relationships. Although a central tenet of Tswanaedom was that resource wealth would not be distributed along ethnic lines, the present paper argues that through its exercise of identity management, Botswana inadvertently established a new mechanism and criterion for resource wealth and allocation of public goods. Today, those whose identities were successfully managed and transformed enjoy the wealth that diamonds have produced, and groups and identities resistant to identity management are largely excluded from the "African miracle."

Ethnic Resource Competition and the Case for Managing Identity

One key reason cited for the relative instability of African countries and their inability to develop economically and politically for the past half century is the colonial legacy that left most states ethnically heterogeneous.¹² It is a well-known story. African political boundaries were determined in a series of tragicomic negotiations in Berlin in 1884 among European powers, following an extensive "scramble for Africa." This resulted in the division of some ethnic groups, the juxtaposition of many others, and the exacerbation of pre-existing levels of ethnolinguistic diversity in Africa. Additionally, colonization formed new ethnic clusters from previously smaller groups. As a result, although African countries were expected to surpass the growth rates of their counterparts in the global south due to natural resource wealth, one key factor impeded this goal: their levels of ethnic heterogeneity and fractionalization. The observed inverse relationship between growth rate of GDP per capita and the degree of ethnic fractionalization within African societies has come to be well known as Africa's growth tragedy.¹³

One consequence of ethnic fragmentation in Africa is the absence of a socially cohesive force, akin to nationalism in Europe, to facilitate social mobilization within post-colonial states. African states have experienced a multitude of violent conflicts based on ethnicity or on grievances about perceived biases of resource allocation along ethnic fault lines.¹⁴ Additionally, authoritarian regimes facilitated by neo-patrimonial networks based on the loyalties of the ethnic or tribal bases of rulers, have become the bane of African politics.¹⁵ Today, ethnic wars make up the majority of the continent's civil wars, with the escalation to violence in these cases being anticipated due to social upheaval, tribalism, resource scarcity, and overpopulation.¹⁶

Ethnic cleavages tend to be more pronounced in cases where non-renewable natural resources constitute a significant portion of a country's national product. The geography of conflict is currently skewed towards countries with large oil and gas reserves.¹⁷ Similarly, natural resources have motivated violent secessionist movements such as those in Cabinda and Biafra.¹⁸ The assumption here is that when a constituent of a specific ethnic group seizes control of the state, essential economic assets are transferred to the members of his or her respective ethnic community.¹⁹ Ethnic conflict is usually accompanied by substantial structural crises, existence of historical memories of inter-ethnic grievances, institutional influences that stimulate ethnic intolerance, and manipulation of historical recollections by political entrepreneurs to evoke sentiments such as fear, resentment and hate toward other groups.²⁰ This is particularly so where competition over resources exists. Here groups have incentives to wrest control from the rest of the population, with the victorious group allocating resources to ensure the exclusion of non-members, because infiltration would result in fewer dividends being shared among the group. When groups form along ethnic lines, ethnic identity becomes a marker for recognizing potential infiltrators. Ethnicity thus provides a means of group membership and exclusion, which is used to avoid indiscriminate access to the economic spoils of conflict.²¹

Three theoretical perspectives have dominated the literature on ethnicity: primordialist, constructivist, and instrumentalist.²² According to the primordialist view of ethnic identity, there is a historical biological link between members of the same ethnic group, which accounts for the emotions and conflict potential of ethnicity.²³ Furthermore, the existence of ancient hatreds among ethnic and cultural groups, and the urge to fear and reject non-co-ethnics is natural and primal, dating back to humankind's remotest ancestors. Accordingly, human beings are conditioned to exhibit xenophobic tendencies and intolerance to an even greater degree than they are influenced by liberal politics of interest.²⁴ The instrumentalist perspective of identity emphasizes the role of ethnic entrepreneurs who heighten the importance of identity in order to claim government resources, gain recruits to a cause, and increase their personal power. This theory describes three approaches as the interfaces of institutional and political factors with ethnic sentiments that result in ethnic intolerance, competition, and ultimately conflict: the "institutional," approach, the "political entrepreneur" approach, and the "competition over resources" approach.²⁵ Using the institutional approach, the theory views states as capable of guiding identity politics into diplomatic political competition, provided that credible assurances are made to shape and uphold agreements made among culturally demarcated actors. Conversely, political mobilization is stimulated when the state's institutions and resource

allocation are based on ethnicity. Under the political entrepreneurial approach, the “perfect” conditions for political entrepreneurs to manipulate ethnic emotions for the purpose of mobilizing groups for their own political purposes occur when instability and uncertainty arise from major structural changes.²⁶ This is because the resulting institutions are inept at regulating inter-ethnic relations. Ethnic differences are exploited by politicians as they draw upon historical memories of grievances and encourage hatred in order to reinforce their legitimacy. The resulting dynamic between political entrepreneurs and their followers creates an inter-ethnic security dilemma. Finally, the “competition over resources” approach emphasizes the role of resource scarcity in allowing the capitalization of the conflict potential of ethnicity by political entrepreneurs.²⁷

The constructivist theory proposes that ethnic identity is socially constructed and fluid, and can be transformed through various means. As a result, constructivist theory perceives ethnic identities as being in a constant process of construction and redefinition, and highly dependent on social interaction.²⁸ Constructivists argue that “structures of human association are determined primarily by shared ideas rather than material forces, and identities and interests of purposive actors are constructed by these shared ideas rather than given by nature.”²⁹ As a result, constructivists examine ethnic identities as fluid and dynamic, changing according to subjective evaluation by individuals and groups of circumstances at various times and points.³⁰ As such, constructivism rests on the intersubjective nature of human action. An identity thus “serves the practical needs and interests of the members of the community. The durability of [an] identity is contingent upon its ability to provide security, social status, and economic benefits for its members more than do other existing alternatives.”³¹

Regardless of which view of ethnicity one might find most convincing, there is a general view that homogenous societies are more efficient resource allocators. In information technology, identity management is a broad administrative area that deals with identifying individuals in a system and controlling systematic resource access by associating user rights and restrictions with an established identity.³² Parallels can be drawn to how identity is a criterion for resource allocation, whether tangible capital intensive resources and public goods, or intangible resources such as language and cultural resources. Homogenous communities usually draw on identity commonalities of culture and language, giving them an advantage in public goods distribution and resource allocation.³³ They have a shared understanding of modes of interaction that facilitate communal cooperation, which in turn advances prospects for effective collective action that heterogeneous groups generally lack. Greater cooperation among co-ethnics is thus observed, since public goods production and resource allocation are reliant on expectations of reciprocal cooperation. In addition, sanctioning produces norms and social institutions of cooperation and defector punishment, creating a cooperative equilibrium among co-ethnics. An underlying assumption is that co-ethnic cooperation re public good provision will be reciprocated under threat of sanctions while cooperation with non-co-ethnics will not. This is because membership in an ethnic group automatically places constraints on individual behavior that do not extend to those outside the group. As a result, the provision of resources is more advanced in homogeneous communities, where the norms and social institutions apply to everyone within the group equally, than in heterogeneous communities, where potential cooperating partners are sometimes excluded.³⁴

This article argues that identity management in Botswana occurred through mechanisms of assimilation to reduce “ethnic distance” and encourage nationalistic feelings, in order to mimic the benefits of homogeneity. The concept of “ethnic distance” describes the degree of understanding between members of different identity groups, manifested in levels of readiness to establish close social relationships with members of the group.³⁵ This article further contends that due to political entrepreneurship, indigenous and colonial discourses as well as material exchanges of the mercantilist kind, Tswanaedom, a socially constructed and politically engineered identity category, not only emerged as the dominant identity in present day Botswana, it also became the basis of resource allocation and distribution. Political elites implemented an assimilationist policy in order to artificially reduce “ethnic distance” in Botswana society, creating peace, albeit artificially, and successfully eliminating discernible ethnic differences, particularly language. The main strategy was to create a cursory social category through linguistic homogeneity, in order to ameliorate the perils of ethnic diversity that would otherwise lead to conflict and undermine resource allocation.

Ethnicity and Identity Management in Botswana

Delineations of the ethnic composition of Botswana are highly subjective and mostly related to who is asked and how they determine what constitutes ethnicity. The nomenclature of identity groups in Botswana is also ambiguous and confusing, particularly the term “Tswana.” It can be used to refer to the Botswana nationality where a single national is called *Motswana* and the plural is *BaTswana*. It could refer to the eight Tswana tribes recognized by the Botswana constitution: BaKgatla, BaKwena, BaLete, BaNgwato, BaNgwaketse, BaRolong, BaTawana, BaTlokwa and BaHurutshe. It could also refer to any person who speaks the language Setswana. This ambiguity has allowed many to characterize Botswana as an ethnically homogenous society when it is not. There are about fifty distinct indigenous groups in Botswana speaking about twenty-six languages.³⁶ These ethno-linguistic groups can be divided into Bantu and non-Bantu groupings. Of the non-Bantu identity groups, the Khoisan are classified into eleven main ethnic groups and speak about twenty-three languages and dialects. The rest of the languages and ethnic groups are Bantu, with eight speaking Setswana as their first language. When grouped together, BaTswana is the largest ethnic group in Botswana and BaKalanga is the largest tribal group. BaKalanga do not form a majority ethnic group, as they only account for 17.9 percent of the total population. The term “tribe” here is used to describe a social group that existed before the development of the post-colonial state and was largely based on kinship and descent. It is also the term used in Botswana’s constitution. Hence, BaTlokwa and BaKwena are described as different tribes, but constitute one ethnic group, BaTswana. The term “ethnic group” is operationalized along ethno-linguistic lines. Therefore, groups that speak the same language as their first language are considered co-ethnics. With this designation, the BaTswana ethnic group would designate “tribes” that speak Setswana as a first language. Since ethnic groups in Botswana are delineated along linguistic fault lines, the rest of the identity groups are interchangeably considered to be both tribes and ethnic groups.

It is important to note that although BaKwena, BaNgwaketse, BaTawana, and other tribal groups that speak Setswana as their primary language are significantly lower in number than

BaKalanga, it is BaKalanga who are considered a minority group in Botswana and not the Tswana tribal groups. This is because in Botswana, the term “minority” has very little numerical value but bears considerable political significance. From an ethnic and linguistic viewpoint, it is inaccurate to speak of majority and minority groups in Botswana; one should speak rather of marginalized versus non-marginalized linguistic and ethnic groups.³⁷ The present study simply distinguishes those who speak Setswana as a first language from those who speak it as a second language. Those who speak it as a first language are henceforth referred to as Tswana groups, and those who do not speak Setswana as a first language are referred to as non-Tswana groups. Each of the eight indigenous groups whose first language is Setswana are thus considered BaTswana, a majority group. Accordingly, BaKalanga, which is numerically the largest single identity group in Botswana, will be considered a “minority group” because of its suboptimal political influence and the fact that its constituents speak Setswana as a second language. This classification has significant implications about how identity is managed in Botswana and how resources are allocated in the country, and it is in accordance with an elaborate identity management system implemented by post-colonial elites in Botswana to counter the effects experienced elsewhere of ethnic fragmentation.

Pre-Colonial Identity Relations and Resource Allocation

Non-Tswana groups predated Tswana settlement in modern day territorial Botswana. BaSarwa, a Khoisan/non-Bantu group, were the first inhabitants of the territory.³⁸ The first and second migratory waves in the area were represented by BaKgalagadi, BaRolong and BaThaping, respectively, and only later did BaTswana arrive. The influx of BaTswana into territorial Botswana initiated a process of disruption of indigenous non-Tswana economic production and resource tenure, specifically land. BaTswana recruited non-Bantu pastro-foragers into becoming commodity producers primarily through ostrich feather and ivory hunting. In addition, indigenous pastoralists were prompted to take on the daily maintenance of Tswana cattle.³⁹ Rarely were coercive means a prerequisite to this recruitment as the Khoisan-speaking peoples were then not subordinates but economic and political equals of their Bantu-speaking neighbors. At this juncture of pre-colonialism, the concept of an overarching Tswana identity category defined in political, social, cultural, and geographic terms did not exist. Instead, there were only several independent polities whose leaders were descendants of eponymous Tswana founders.⁴⁰ Personal and political allegiances were directed by kinship relations to one or another of these local leaders, with the actuality of the kin link more probable among close relations of the *kgosi* (“king,” “chief,” “ruler”) while that of those further removed was often invented.⁴¹

Two main events altered the configuration of power among Tswana and non—Tswana populations: the *Mfecane* and the insertion of European mercantile capital into the region.⁴² The period 1815 to 1840 was a time of widespread chaos and warfare among indigenous ethnic communities in southern Africa historically referred to as the *Mfecane*. Many groups in territorial Botswana were pillaged by a set of large invasionary forces, plundering and killing many people in the way. Both of these invasionary forces continued to travel north from modern day Lesotho, across Botswana territory without establishing any sort of state.⁴³ The Tswana chiefdoms were however quicker to recover and were successful in rapidly assimilating

new groups into their societies, and relegating others, specifically BaSarwa to the periphery.⁴⁴ European mercantile capital saw the consolidation of power into the Tswana groups. This was a consequence of struggles to control commodity production for a newly established market, i.e. to control labor units and to channel access of the resultant product to its market. From the second quarter of the nineteenth century, direct force was increasingly relied upon to extract larger levies of ground rent from non-Tswana groups, in the form of tusks, feathers, hides, livestock, and labor.⁴⁵ This progressively dispossessed non-Tswana Bantu-speaking and Khoisan-speaking peoples.

The resultant political organization was a constellation of Tswana-ruled proto-states called *merafe*.⁴⁶ *Merafe* were multi-ethnic clusters, with the larger Ngwato and Tawana proto-states being more heterogeneous than their counterparts. A complex system of hierarchy emerged, with non-Tswana variably designated. BaKalanga were considered commoners, BaHerero foreigners, and BaSarwa and many BaKgalagadi were considered serfs. In order to exercise rights, one had to be a member of an organized ward as well as a subject of a given *morafe*. This set the stage for some of the identity undercurrents that would later characterize contemporary Botswana. BaSarwa and BaKgalagadi were placed at the periphery of Tswana polities. BaTswana groups established themselves in the 18th century, displacing, absorbing, or subjugating other ethnic groups when they first established themselves in the territory.⁴⁷ As a result, BaSarwa, a largely nomadic, pre-agricultural hunter-gathering group, steadily lost out to more centralized groups.

Kgari, Kgosi of BaNgwato c.1817-28, rationalized the nascent socio-economic stratification in Tswana dominated *merafe* to control both its demographic increase of people subordinate to the chief and their productive potential.⁴⁸ He instituted the *kgamelo* (royal patronage, or lit., “milk jug” system), thus augmenting the class structure in Tswana dominated *merafe*, and increased the power of local Tswana elites by giving them direct economic and administrative control over the lower non-Tswana classes in their respective spheres of influence. The *kgamelo* system bound the commoners of the tribe very closely to the Tswana chief, making them fully dependent upon him for their subsistence.⁴⁹ The system was adopted in BaNgwato, BaKwena and BaTawana polities and was well suited to tributary extraction of capital value when, as in hunting, the means of production remain largely with subordinated ranks. It saw older forms of property relations replaced by the robust suzerainty of Tswana elites. The forces creating this expansion of peoples and production were external, primarily European-driven trade; the motivation behind the creation of *kgamelo* was to strengthen Tswana control of this trade.⁵⁰

By the 1890s, the largest proportion of income of Tswana chiefs was derived from ivory, feathers, and skins collected by BaSarwa and BaKgalagadi. The power held by the BaSarwa and BaKgalagadi as primary producers during the years of mercantile hunting had declined as state capital consolidated its strength and hunting became less remunerative. They were relegated to obligatory herders, completely at the mercy of the Tswana. In this atmosphere, the indigenous category, Sarwa was constructed to acquire negative ethnic denotations and was applied collectively to all Khoisan-speakers without distinguishing the heterogeneity of their languages, economies, and histories. BaSarwa were increasingly consigned to a peripheral, wild, uncontrolled nature in Tswana ideology, while in much, but by no means all, San ideology,

Batswana took on the central attributes of overlordship.⁵¹ Thus both indigenous and Tswana ideology constructed an identity hierarchy based on resource allocation and power dynamics. Other groups were drawn into positions between these polar nodes.⁵²

Colonialism would see the further consolidation of Tswana identity and institutions as dominant. In most other parts of Africa, British colonial administrators employed “divide and conquer” tactics in relation to ethnic groups, a circumstance blamed for contemporary ethnic violence and political unrest. This was not the case in the Bechuanaland Protectorate, where colonialists preferred to maintain the power of the chiefs as the most convenient form of government, maintaining the status quo. Since BaTswana groups were larger, the colonialists opted to engage primarily with them, and colonial efforts and interests were highly skewed in their favor. Attempts by minorities to resist Tswana power were actively swatted, with the colonial government largely backing the Tswana chiefs. Colonialism relied heavily on BaTswana chiefs to administer their colony, resulting in the further marginalization and assimilation of smaller identity groups.

Non-Tswana and weaker Tswana speaking peoples were categorized according to the dictates of hegemonic Tswana *merafe*, and were increasingly subjected to tribute levies, labor extraction, land appropriation, and resettlement.⁵³ This was the case of BaPedi, a weak Tswana group that was dominated by BaNgwato and resettled in the Tswapong Hills. BaPedi, BaKaa, BaHurutshe, and other Tswana-speakers acquired the designation BaTswapong as a mark of their collective subordination. It was only through assimilation to a Tswana social and political organization that many of these groups gained access to resources. When BaTawana, a Tswana group, established themselves in Ngamiland, they quickly subordinated indigenous WaYeyi and other Okavango Delta peoples. While WaYeyi constituted a majority of the population in Ngamiland, there were very few Yeyi wards.⁵⁴ This came about because Tswana policy incorporated the subjugated groups into their regional *merafe* by creating separate wards for them under the administration of a junior elite member of the local Tswana *morafe* appointed by his chief.⁵⁵ Hence, only through absorption into the Tswana polity could these peoples gain access to land and other resources.

The case of Botswana illustrates how a culturally transformed material world led to the construction of newer identities and power dynamics. Tswanadom was constructed through the emergence of an adaptability hierarchy during the Mfecane as well as the European mercantilist modes of production both during pre-colonialism and colonialism, which had the effect of relegating identity groups on the basis of modes of production and their ownership. Two main sources of identity management and construction emerged as a result of the political entrepreneurship of elites like Kgari as well as in Tswana and colonial discourse. However, it would be the postcolonial elites who consolidated ethnic relations and identity management through an assimilationist experiment aimed at mitigating the perceived ills of ethnic diversity and ethnic competition once and for all. These policies would have a drastic impact on identity and resource allocation in contemporary Botswana.

Assimilation as the New Criterion of Resource Allocation in Post-Colonial Botswana

At the time of independence, a significant number of African leaders in various countries began to use rhetoric that rejected the legitimacy of ethnic identities, even while at the same time relying upon them to bolster their power.⁵⁶ Tribalism had become the continent's greatest stereotype and political liability, particularly as viewed in European countries, which viewed African ethnic relations as primitive, rather than accepting them as similar to the nationalism that existed in their own states. The post-colonial African elite differed from the traditional elite in that they were usually western-educated, and they thus were quicker to reject the notion of ethnic differences, not because of their link to conflict, but largely as a reflection of western practice and desire to do so. Botswana had also learned the evils of racialization and tribalism from its neighbors, then Rhodesia (present-day Zimbabwe) and South Africa. As a result, in 1966 the Seretse Khama administration embarked on a series of policy interventions aiming to reduce cleavages in society in order to build a unified society: a modernist assimilationist policy of social development. In the case of Botswana, the desire was to create a culturally homogenous society that also functioned as a political nation-state through a series of assimilation policies highly skewed in favor of the culture and language of the eight Tswana identity groups. The primary feature of Botswana's assimilation policies was the promotion of "Tswanadom," a concept that is both philosophical and territorial, leading many to believe that post-colonial Botswana is a mono-ethnic state. The declaration of Setswana as the national language and the promotion of Tswana culture in all social, political and cultural realms of Botswana were pivotal to the consolidation of Tswanadom. This included education, the media, and activities in all social domains in Botswana, such as the *kgotla*, which can only be conducted in English and Setswana.⁵⁷ Since independence the government of Botswana has worked tirelessly to achieve the ideal goal of a homogenous nation-state in which ethnic identities lose their significance. As a result, there are three social, economic, and political issue areas where the effects of assimilation are most acutely felt by minorities in Botswana: the issue of chieftaincy recognition, the issue of access to land, and the issue of cultural rights and autonomy.

Central to the Botswana assimilation policy is the issue of chieftaincy recognition. Traditionally, chiefs (*dikgosi*) were revered as the custodians of land, cattle, and other resources, and the distribution of these resources was fundamentally their responsibility. Post-colonial Botswana's House of Chiefs (*Ntlo ya Dikgosi*) is part of the legislative branch of government, which has oversight over diamond resource allocations. Although mainly symbolic, the House of Chiefs is highly revered, because chiefs are deemed the custodians of culture and are the pinnacles of cultural expression and recognition. The House currently has thirty-five members; eight are hereditary and referred to as paramount chiefs, and each paramount chief presides over one of the eight Setswana-speaking tribes. Succession to the chieftaincy is via primogeniture, a custom that existed prior to colonial rule. The Chieftaincy Act of 1966 defines "tribes" as "the BaNgwato tribe, the BaTswana tribe, the BaKgatla tribe, the BaKwena tribe, the BaNgwaketse tribe, the BaLete tribe, the BaRolong tribe and the BaTlokwa tribe." All other ethnic groups and subgroups were allocated to one of these eight principal identity groupings. The Tribal Territories Act of 1966 reinforced the identity absorption of the "minority" groups by

defining tribal territory only with respect to Tswana ethnic groups and establishing that land could only be distributed under the jurisdiction of the territories of these groups.

Botswana is divided into eight regions: the Kgalagadi, Ghanzi, Kweneng, Central, Ngwaketse, Kgatleng, Ngamiland (Northwest), and Southeast Districts. In districts in which Tswana tribes are dominant, the district name is directly derived from that tribe. The Kgatleng District has its capital in Mochudi Village, where the BaKgatla reside, and the land governing body is the Kgatleng Land Board. The BaLete and BaTlokwa live in the Southeast District, which is given a geographic rather than tribal name designation. The designation of group rights in Botswana is not sensitive to numerical measures, nor is it on a first-come first-served basis. Instead, the only thing that matters is the primacy of the spoken language. Tribes residing in Ngamiland, including BaHambukushu, OvaHerero, BaSubia, WaYeyi, BaCiriku and BaSarwa, are represented by BaTawana and are officially regarded as and referred to as such. Tribes whose first language is not Setswana are not represented by their hereditary chiefs.

While the Botswana government's official position is that assimilation helps foster peaceful coexistence, Reteng, a minority lobby group, views these policies as tools for marginalization and disenfranchisement. Reteng is a multi-cultural coalition of organizations devoted to the promotion and preservation of the linguistic and cultural diversity of Botswana's heritage, and as a body is one of the most platforms that is most critical of Botswana's assimilation policy. Reteng argues that since Botswana became a republic in 1966, its laws have permitted discrimination based on ethnicity, language, and culture. Making reference to Sections 77 to 79 and Sections 15 (4) m (d) and 15 (9) of the Botswana constitution, Section 2 of the Chieftainship Act, and the Tribal Territories Act, they argue that the following rights are denied to non-Tswana groups:

- The right to recognition as a tribe with a distinct language and culture;
- Group rights to land;
- Representation in the House of Chiefs;
- The right to educate their children in their languages;
- The right to educate their children about their histories, customs, values and cultures;
- The right to access information and enjoy their languages and cultures on national radio and television;
- Access to certain jobs, especially those pertaining to management of land, such as land board secretaries.⁵⁸

In 2005, a constitutional amendment failed to address the issue of exclusion of non-Tswana groups from permanent membership in the House of Chiefs; the three unequal categories of membership remained. No efforts were made to amend legislation that permits non-prohibition of discrimination and gives group rights to land to the Tswana tribes as sovereigns of their districts. As a result, in contemporary Botswana, all non-Tswana children are taught in the Setswana language about Setswana cultures at the expense of their own. As a result they develop low self-esteem and are underachievers in school.⁵⁹ The eight Tswana tribes account for 18 percent of the population, while the non-Tswana make up 60 percent. To date, Botswana's executives have all expressed reluctance to concede to minority group pressures to change assimilationist practices. The first president, Seretse Khama, stated in his campaign that he

stood for the gradual evolution of a nation-state in which tribal groups, while still existing, would be secondary to a national identity. He stated:

When I say the greatest enemy of independent Africa is tribalism....it becomes dangerous when it leads people to think in exclusively tribal terms. It becomes a threat to the stability and security of our state when it is carried out to the point when a man in a responsible position thinks of himself as a tribesman before he thinks of himself as a Motswana.⁶⁰

Similarly, his successor, Quett Masire, reiterated the orientation towards Setswana to the exclusion of other languages by warning Botswana citizens to stop fighting for the right to have ethnic languages taught in school, as this would break up the nation. The third president, Festus Mogae, when asked to mediate a dispute between the BaNgwato and the BaKalanga, urged the BaKalanga to consider themselves BaNgwato, a Tswana tribal grouping. In 1999, Vice President Ian Khama reinforced this statement to BaKalanga in Nkange, justifying Ngwato hegemony over BaSarwa, BaKalanga, BaBirwa, BaTswapong, and others considered to be minority groups. Furthermore, on March 25, 2000 in Etsha, an area dominated by marginalized groups such as BaHambukushu, WaYeyi, and BaSarwa, Khama stressed that as long as they are members of the ruling party, they should not support organizations that are formed along tribal lines, since that would be tribalistic and divisive.⁶¹ This was an attempt to emphasize political loyalty over ethnic loyalty.⁶² At the policy level, there is an illusion of achievement veiling the actualization of Tswanaedom through the assimilationist model. BaTswana have group rights to land and use of language, and the privilege of living their culture. The success of Tswanaedom has led many to believe that Botswana is a mono-ethnic state.⁶³

Another major impact of the assimilation policy in Botswana concerns property rights, particularly land and resource rights. The Tribal Land Act of 1968 established guidelines on the acquisition, transfer, and use of customary land (i.e., land owned by indigenous communities).⁶⁴ Additionally, tribal land boards were created in 1970 to regulate issues pertaining to customary land. Traditionally, such activities were the responsibility of chiefs.⁶⁵ However, since only the chiefs of the eight principle Tswana tribes are recognized by the constitution, non-Tswana individuals can only gain access to land through assimilation; only under this provision is there no discrimination in access to land and resources. Thus while purporting to allocate land resources non-ethnically, assimilation to Tswanaedom established a new criterion for land access. An example is BaTawana who are a numerical minority but a political majority in their district, and hence control the land. All district residents, including WaYeyi, are officially referred to as BaTawana tribesmen, a political rather than cultural categorization. They are expected to sing to BaTawana chiefs in Setswana, not in their language Shiyeyi.

Another example of this phenomenon is illustrated in the 1977 case of a Mosarwa man employed by a Motswana who applied for a field to plough to the Sub-District Land Board for Kgatleng District. As he was not Mokgatla, he could not be allocated land in Kgatleng District and was told to return to the place of his birth—where he had not been since childhood—to obtain a letter of identification. In this case, the Land Board resorted to measures to discourage an application from a person stigmatized by class and ethnicity, in order to safeguard increasingly scarce land in Kgatleng for a more centrally perceived Kgatla constituency.⁶⁶ This

case illustrates that without reference to the Tswana tribal designation of the land, non-Tswana groups had no access to land. Land allocation in contemporary Botswana largely continues to follow this pattern of land control. Thus, socially constructed divisions are reproduced consistently because land allocation is based on them. This process has allowed Tswana populations to retain most of the benefits it consolidated in the pre-colonial and colonial periods at the expense of non-Tswana groups, only extending these benefits to those who assimilate.

In terms of access to diamond mining revenues, during early negotiations, former president Seretse Khama's tribe, the BaNgwato, stood to benefit the most. By making these revenues a tribal right, Khama could have heavily skewed the benefits of diamond mining towards his own tribe, a situation that would probably have resulted in civil conflict. Understanding this tradeoff, Khama and the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) decided to address the revenue issue in the BDP election manifesto of 1965, stating:

Leaving mineral rights vested in tribal authorities and private companies must necessarily result in uneven growth of the country's economy, as well as deprive the Central Government of an important source of revenue for developing the country...It will be the policy of the BDP Government to negotiate with all parties concerning the takeover of the country's mineral rights by the Central Government....⁶⁷

Khama's decision to foster greater centralization of mining activity was instrumental in firmly laying down the political foundations of Botswana's subsequent development by facilitating a justifiable distribution of mineral wealth. His careful political maneuvering and ability to balance different interest group pressures helped Botswana develop economically, a legacy that has been maintained in the more than thirty years since his death. Khama's most important contribution was to coordinate the interests of Botswana's eight major tribes. Immediately following independence, he made the critical decision that diamond revenues were to be placed in a national savings fund, as opposed to being allocated to individual tribes. As a result, diamond revenue would be non-ethnically distributed throughout the state in the form of investment, instead of exclusively privileging specific regions or identity groups. In the short term, his decision was not popular among BaNgwato, Khama's tribe; however, the sustained results of Khama's national savings plan achieved greater legitimacy and resulted in minimal tribal conflict.

Proponents of assimilation emphatically argue that no ethnic discrimination exists in Botswana, but they acknowledge that there are groups such as the BaSarwa and BaKgalagadi who have legitimate concerns. Pertaining to an ongoing conflict between the Botswana government and BaSarwa over land tenure in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve, where the government wants to relocate BaSarwa, the government has sought to defend its position by invoking its responsibility for protecting the viability of wildlife protection in the reserve. Yet another justification is the prohibitive cost of providing BaSarwa with basic goods and services, particularly within the settlements.

The central government has expressed a desire to assimilate BaSarwa into mainstream Botswana society. Beginning in 1977, the Botswana government provided BaSarwa with drinking water, borehole maintenance, rations for registered destitutes and orphans, transportation to and from boarding school, and healthcare through mobile clinics and

ambulance services. However, critics have viewed this as the government's paternalistic urge to "develop" the BaSarwa, not addressing their desire for self-determination.⁶⁸ Traditional Sarwa tradition dictates that when a person gets ill, they do not go to the hospital. Instead they must go to the gravesite of that person's ancestor to seek help. In addition, Sarwa tradition believes that water is provided through prayer to the ancestors in the form of rain, and not from faucets. These cultural practices are at the center of arguments that BaSarwa shun modernity and development. Instead of establishing capitalist property rights regimes, BaSarwa have maintained a spiritual relationship with their ancestral land, opting for a hunter-gatherer lifestyle. Recently, however, large tracts of land once used for hunting and gathering have been allocated by the government for grazing, pushing those who wish to continue traditional lifestyles farther into shrinking veld areas. Declining animal populations caused by habitat degradation and globalized markets for game have induced the government to constrain further San hunting practices culminating in a nationwide hunting ban that the government imposed on all species.⁶⁹ One Sarwa activist, Juamanda Gakelebone, summarized it in his statement: "The government is trying to turn us into pastoralists, which we are not. We are ecological hunter-gatherers which have a lot to teach the world about how to coexist peacefully with Mother Earth."⁷⁰ It is mainly the resistance of BaSarwa to assimilation that have left them out from the "Botswana miracle."

The process of assimilation in Botswana, much like that of minoritization, must be conceptualized as a changeable negotiation of opposition and cooperation, and at times through deliberate co-optation of potential enemies. Minoritization in Botswana has historically not been a uniform process, varying regionally and across minority groups. However, what facilitated assimilation was the fact that many minorities legitimized homogeneity, conforming to majoritarian expectations and were attracted to opportunities for upward mobility by concealing what might be denigrated as their minority origins.⁷¹ This type of minority was the most amenable to assimilation, since it gave them a sense of "belonging" in a larger, more powerful group. Acceptance of the greater Tswana identity and Tswana ideology was thus argued to foster democracy and unity and provide Botswana identity groups an inclusive orientation:

They don't try to discriminate against me because I am a Kalanga. Instead, they try to incorporate me into that larger group. They make you feel at home and are able to relate with you on a positive note. They work under the idea that all small groups should identify with a larger group. You cannot go to war because you are being included in some large group. You go to war because you feel excluded.⁷²

Other groups have however become assertive about their marginality, insisting upon recognition and demanding affirmative action as compensation for historically negative discrimination.⁷³ Minorities in Botswana have not been given the same levels of cultural autonomy and as the dominant Tswana. The introduction of new languages in schools is viewed as an expensive endeavor. The only avenue for minorities to gain air time on TV is through organizations like the Society for the Promotion of the Ikalanga Language (SPIL), but such broadcasts are only slotted after midnight. Resultantly, the pursuit of autonomy by

minorities can be viewed as “democracy being tested,” since the national Tswana culture is being challenged through the expression of people’s tribal identities. Assimilation has had a cultural impact too. The BaTswana are patrilineal while the WaYeyi are matrilineal in inheritance and resource allocation. Through identity management, the WaYeyi have had to abandon their heritage and adopt the patrilineal patterns of ownership and inheritance observed under Tswana custom and marry according to Tswana customary norms. This is one of the group’s major grievances.

The only caveat was that minorities subordinated themselves to the principal Tswana tribes in order to access mineral wealth. This came at the expense of the right to cultural expression. The process of ethnic assimilation, including the sacrifice of the cultural heritages and customs of marginalized groups, is sometimes brutal. Critics of assimilation, like Dr. Nyati-Saleshandoo of the University of Botswana, criticize the assimilationist model and the promotion of Setswana languages.⁷⁴ Prior to independence, languages like Ikalanga were taught, but later the pursuit of a cohesive Tswana identity led to the banning of all minority languages from classroom instruction. Although the people initially accepted the assimilationist model as a way to ensure safety and security, they were unaware of its ramifications. Ultimately, the villages where non-Tswana-speaking people lived became the least developed, particularly those of the BaKgalagadi and BaSarwa. Overwhelmingly, the eight Tswana tribes are centered in large, developed urban centers with access to administrative and social services and healthcare, while minority ethnic groups have access only to poor roads and unmanaged clinics. Marginalized minority groups are the most vulnerable, and in their areas poverty is rampant and they are distant from basic social services.

Group grievances of minority groups receive very little attention. A petition by the Kamanakao Association, a non-governmental organization with the basic objective of maintaining and developing the remnants of the language and culture of the WaYeyi people of northern Botswana, was rejected in 2000. Both the Kamanakao Association and SPIL, which are working on the development and promotion of the Ikalanga and Shiyeyi languages, have met government resistance; sometimes being as tribalistic by government officials, indicating intolerance of minority group grievances.

The plight of minorities in Botswana is characterized by one opposition party leader as the “brutal suppression of the expression of culture” and “suppression of dissent.”⁷⁵ The term “brutal” was employed in the sense of brainwashing and instilling the belief that speaking Setswana would propagate the concept of one united national government in people’s minds. He critiqued the Botswana government’s suppression of the desire of minority groups to express culture and language freely. He argues that “cultural groups are not political in nature, they just want their languages to be taught.”⁷⁶

The assimilationist policy in Botswana has however managed to limit the evils associated with ethnic diversity by creating an inclusive ethnic identity and promoting it as Tswanaedom. Having observed the negative impact of “othering” and tribalism in other African nations, the Botswana elite decided to approach the issue from a pragmatic viewpoint, constructing an inclusive identity that would take priority over individual tribal identities. This national identity, branded Tswanaedom, would mitigate the ills of ethnic diversity by creating a sense of togetherness that does not exist anywhere else on the continent, and it became the basis of

resource allocation. Unfortunately, those like the BaSarwa who failed to assimilate under Tswanadom have largely been excluded from the developmental miracle.

Conclusion

This article challenges the basic view that Botswana is ethnically homogenous, an assumption which has been incorporated in many explanations of Botswana's avoidance of the resource curse phenomenon. Instead, it contends that Botswana's purported ethnic homogeneity was the result of a combination of political strategies of the instrumentalist kind on the part of elite political entrepreneurs in the various phases of Botswana's history establishing a social hierarchy of identity that engendered the notion of Tswanadom. While not an ethnic marker for resource allocation and provision as is otherwise seen worldwide, Tswanadom with its origins during pre-colonialism, its consolidation during the colonial era, and its institutionalism in post-colonialism, became the symbolic delineation of Botswana's have and have nots. As a result, the Botswana case reflects a persuasive approach to fostering simulated ethnic unity and social cohesion, and it demonstrates the state's ability to channel identity politics into peaceful political competition, albeit at the expense of cultural autonomy for minority groups.

The article illustrated the origins and evolution of Tswanadom, as a process and product of the social construction of identity through indigenous and colonial discourse, mercantile exchange, and through the elite's political entrepreneurship across Botswana's history in an attempt to efficiently distribute resources. Tswanadom was however most robustly instituted in the post-colonial era through legal frameworks that recognized the legitimacy of Tswana institutions such as the recognition of Tswana chiefs in the country's legislature, the allocation of land along the lines of membership to various Tswana *merafe*, and the promotion of Tswana culture and custom mainly through language in all facets of Botswana civic life. The government privileged the culture of the eight Tswana tribes, ordaining their hereditary chiefs as paramount and making all other identity groups subservient to their chiefdoms. Resistance to assimilation was rhetorically condemned as tribalistic, in an effort to superimpose Tswana culture with nationalism. Botswana's assimilation policies placed constraints on social behavior and provided tangible incentives only for those who were amenable to absorption, cooperation and compliance with rules and procedures for allocation, participation, representation and accountability. Those who were willing to assimilate into the larger ethno-linguistic clusters of Tswanadom benefitted more than those who rejected assimilation, as was the case with BaSarwa.

Within its context, the phenomenon of Tswanadom created a sense of social cohesion not found in most other African countries and has thus been critical to nation-building. Although gratified by the economic progress, diamond wealth, and general international acclaim that their country has achieved globally, minorities in Botswana continue to share a common belief that the government has failed to acknowledge that it is not just access to economic resources that satisfies identity groups. Rather, these resources also encompass cultural and language resources, which the Botswana government has for the most part taken away from minority ethnic groups through forced assimilation. The government continues to justify the promotion

of Tswanadom as a cultivator of nationhood and unity and credits it for limiting the threats and perils associated with ethnic heterogeneity.

Notes

- 1 Gapa 2013, p. 1.
- 2 Thompson 2010, pp. 109-124.
- 3 Williams 2011, p. 113.
- 4 Iimi 2006. However, for opposite sides of this view see Good (1992, 1993, 1994, and 2002).
- 5 Acemoglu and Robinson 2002.
- 6 Hillbom 2008.
- 7 Du Toit 1995, p. 7.
- 8 Baker and Prys Jones 1998, p. 355.
- 9 Interview with Balefi Tsie, Professor of Political Science, University of Botswana, in Gaborone, September 13, 2011. Also see Werbner 1984.
- 10 Parson 1985, p. 27.
- 11 Chowdhury 2012, p. 71.
- 12 Easterly and Levine 1997, p. 1206.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Collier and Hoeffler 2004, pp. 563-95.
- 15 Thompson 2010, pp. 109-124.
- 16 Fearon and Laitin 2003, pp. 75-90.
- 17 Klare 2001, p. 49.
- 18 Ross 2002, p. 35.
- 19 Esman 1994, p. 229.
- 20 Blagojevic 2009, p.3.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Chandra 2012.
- 23 Blagojevic 2009, p. 5.
- 24 Crawford 1998, p. 11.
- 25 Blagojevic 2009, p. 2.
- 26 Ibid., p. 10.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Williams 2015, p. 149.
- 29 Palan 2000, p. 576.
- 30 Eminov Ali 2007, p. 1.
- 31 Sahliyah Emile1 1993, p. 178.
- 32 John et al. 2013, p. 1132.
- 33 Habyarimana et al. 2007, pp. 709-25.
- 34 Ibid., 2007, p. 711.
- 35 Caselli and Coleman 2011, p. 3.
- 36 Nyati-Ramahobo 2008, pp. 1-16.
- 37 Ibid.

- 38 Schapera 1953, p. 14.
- 39 Wilmsen 2002, p. 826.
- 40 Ibid., p. 827.
- 41 It is important to note here that although there has been a recent upsurge in Africa and beyond of the notion of autochthony, the notion of indigeneity inspiring discourses on the need to safeguard ancestral lands and resources against strangers or allochthons, in Botswana indigeneity is challenged on the basis that all Tswana people are indigenous to Botswana and hence no one should lay claim to resources or land on indigenous lines.
- 42 Wilmsen 2002, p. 828.
- 43 Tlou 1985.
- 44 Morton Ramsay and Mgadla 2008, p. 65.
- 45 Wilmsen 2002, p. 828.
- 46 Singular: *morafe*.
- 47 Bennet in Mazonde 2002.
- 48 Wilmsen 2002, p. 828.
- 49 Schapera 1970, p. 103.
- 50 Wilmsen 2002, p. 828.
- 51 Ibid., p. 829.
- 52 Ibid.
- 53 Ibid., p. 831.
- 54 Ibid., p. 830.
- 55 Ibid.
- 56 Ottaway 1999, p. 303.
- 57 A *kgotla* is a formal public assembly associated with the institution of traditional leadership.
- 58 Reteng 2008, pp. 1-5.
- 59 Ibid.
- 60 Nyati-Ramahobo 1991, p. 201.
- 61 Radio Botswana News Bulletin, 03/25/2000.
- 62 He was a supporter of the Serowe Development Trust, a BaNgwato owned and run NGO.
- 63 Parsons 1985, p. 27.
- 64 Amended in 1993.
- 65 Morton, Ramsay, and Mgadla 2008, p. 169.
- 66 Wilmsen 2002, p. 832.
- 67 Botswana Democratic Party Election Manifesto 1965.
- 68 Woof 2014, p. 19.
- 69 Survival International n.d.
- 70 Tarvainen 2014.
- 71 Werbner 2004, p. 673.
- 72 Interview with Dr. Zibani Maundeni, Professor of Political Science, University of Botswana. Interview conducted at the University of Botswana, September 20, 2011.

73 Werbner 2004, p. 673.

74 Interview with Dr. Lydia Nyati-Saleshando (previously Nyati-Ramahobo), Professor of Education, Dean of the Faculty of Education, University of Botswana, co-founder of the Kamanakao Association, a pressure group for WaYeyi linguistic and cultural rights, and founder of Reteng, a multicultural coalition of Botswana people. Interview conducted at the University of Botswana, October 11, 2011.

75 Name withheld. Interviewed in Gaborone October 5, 2011.

76 Ibid.

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