

TOWN-STATE FORMATIONS ON THE EDGE OF THE KALAHARI

Social-Cultural Dynamics of Centralization
in Northern Tswana Kingdoms

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Abstract: While the people of pre-colonial and colonial societies in Africa often lived in scattered, sparse settlements, the people of the Northern Tswana kingdoms (present-day Botswana) were found in large towns with thousands of residents. This is puzzling in view of their location on the edge of the Kalahari, where such concentrations would normally be least expected. Moreover, while pastoralism is generally considered antithetical to the formation of densely settled populations, cattle have featured centrally in these kingdoms' political economy. Breaking away from ecological determinism, the author argues that the role played by cattle in these societies was mediated through social and political processes that favor both state formation and large, compact settlements. The article is particularly concerned with the centripetal forces vested in the cultural and symbolic wealth of Tswana royal towns.

Keywords: Botswana, cattle clientship, centralization, kingship, pastoralism, state formation, symbolic wealth, Tswana

During the late eighteenth century, some small states—currently known as the Northern Tswana *merafe*¹—took shape at the eastern fringe of the Kalahari Desert. An evangelizing missionary, Robert Moffat, who was stationed among the Southern Tswana, visited one of these *merafe*, the Bangwaketse, and reported as follows: “On reaching the summit of the hill, at the foot of which lay the metropolis of the Bauangketsi [Bangwaketse], turning our eyes northward, we were greatly surprised on beholding the number of towns² ... Our guide conducted us through a widening street to the habitation of Makaba [the king, or *kgosi*, pl. *dikgosi*] who stood at the door of one of his houses, and welcomed us to the



town” (Moffat 1842: 394). At this time, the Bangwaketse army was reputedly the most powerful force in the region. Kgosi Makaba and his people, widely feared as dangerous and destructive, were known to carry out raids on the neighboring peoples (see, e.g., J. Campbell 1822: 1:314–317). Moffat relates, however, that although Makaba looked like a forceful warrior (“tall, strong, and healthy”), he appeared friendly and intelligent: “[His] countenance displays a good deal of cunning; and from his conversation one may easily discern that he is pretty well versed in African politics” (Schapera 1951: 137–138). He conducted governmental affairs in a “circle ... formed with round posts of eight feet high ... Behind lay the proper cattle fold, capable of holding many thousand oxen” (Moffat 1842: 399). Moffat conveys an atmosphere of societal harmony in which the ruler enjoyed popular support. This observer had been struck not by the presence of barracks and military exercises but by civic order: women were working in the fields, and men, cutting skins, were found in the king’s council (*kgotla*). Moffat recounts that “the houses, though not larger than those of the Batlapis [Southern Tswana], were built with greater regard to taste and comfort” and “their outer yards and house-floors were very clean, and smooth as paper” (ibid.). Most importantly in relation to the arguments that I aim to substantiate in the present article, the size and concentration of the population in a large, compact town, reportedly with tens of thousands of residents, impressed the missionary immensely: “[T]he town itself appears to cover at least eight times more ground than any town I have yet seen among the Bechuanas [BaTswana].”³

Moffat’s observations pose a problem for anthropologists. On one hand, the settlement pattern of the Tswana is described as concentrated and densely populated, approaching a size that is exceptional in Central or Southern Africa. Yet on the other hand, the Tswana, with their huge dependence on cattle, are clearly pastoralists, and pastoralism normally proves antithetical to the high population density described by Moffat, as concentrated populations are associated above all with intensive agriculture.

The conundrum thus presented by the Tswana can nevertheless be resolved, provided we do not seek the answer in the determinist or evolutionist arguments of ecology. Instead, I shall demonstrate that the role played by cattle and cattle-based trade in Northern Tswana settlements is mediated through social and political processes that favor not only state formation but a concentrated population as well. I also argue that there is no necessary connection between these processes and the environment; they may well operate quite independently of ecological conditions. The importance of this point is substantiated in the second part of this article, where I explain the significance of the cultural and symbolic wealth vested in Tswana royal centers as a centripetal force.

Theories of Large, Compact Settlements in Tswana Kingdoms

There are different explanations for the compact nature of the Northern Tswana settlements. Thomas Huffman (1986: 292; italics added) argues that “the aggregation of separate settlements *for purposes of defence* may explain the origin of

the entire pattern.” The defense thesis certainly appears in numerous studies of state evolution (see, e.g., Cohen 1985: 276). As we shall see below, raiding and warfare have historically contributed to the process of political centralization among the Northern Tswana. However, defense strategies do not explain the formation of large, compact settlements, because (as Monica Wilson has argued) cattle, the most important source of capital, were extremely widely scattered. Wilson (1969: 155) suggests that population concentration among the Northern Tswana “is explicitly linked with the authority of chiefs.” John Comaroff (1982: 156), addressing the Southern Tswana *morafe* of Tshidi (located in South Africa and the border area of Botswana), pursues a similar argument: “[R]esidential arrangements on the ground reflect ... fluctuations in chiefly control.” He argues that a dense population was important in order to retain “chiefly control.” In this particular case, however, enforcement measures became necessary because a concentrated population conflicted with “the ecology of household production” (ibid.: 157). It is thus being asserted that for the Southern Tswana, “cultivation involved dispersal and, therefore, was the very antithesis of centralization. Many Tswana showed their *antipathy* to centralized control by leaving the town to set up permanent rural homes” (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991: 147; italics added). It should be remarked here that Comaroff’s thesis seems to contradict that of Sansom, who makes a major distinction between the eastern and western “Southern Bantu polities,” characterized by scattered and compact settlements, respectively. He claims that the compact nature of the western settlements (which include all Tswana “tribes”) is determined by the ruler’s control of a “Tribal Estate,” which—most importantly—includes land for cultivation (Sansom 1974b: 251–252). In other words, while the Comaroffs identify cultivation as antithetical to a centralized population, Sansom holds that people’s need of arable land worked in favor of compact settlements.

Unlike the Comaroffs, in their study of the Southern Tswana, I have found no significant indication of antipathy to centralized control among the residents of Northern Tswana royal towns and outlying villages.⁴ Schapera (1943) explains in an extensive study of land tenure among the Northern Tswana (of the then Bechuanaland Protectorate) that any British interference in the practice whereby Tswana rulers determined exactly when people were allowed to leave the royal town for plowing “would probably not be welcomed by all the Tswana, nor is it by any means certain that they would plough sooner if [this practice] was abolished” (ibid.: 186).⁵ This prediction has been amply confirmed since Botswana’s independence, when the *dikgosi*’s power to fix the date for the start of plowing was curtailed (see Gulbrandsen 1996a: 66–67).⁶ Moreover, none of my interlocutors was able to recall any instance in which people tried to escape the *dikgosi*’s control by deserting the village. As the Tswana dictum *kgosi ke kgosi ka morafe* (*kgosi* is *kgosi* by the grace of the people) has it, the rulers depended on popular consent when deciding such major issues. It is quite unlikely that *dikgosi* would have been able to enforce regulations that adversely affected most people’s subsistence requirements.⁷

Adam Kuper’s (1975: 145) claim regarding the Northern Tswana that “when the chief [*kgosi*] ceases to be the apex of the tribal government, then not only the

ward, but the whole system of household clusters and alignments falls away” cannot therefore be upheld. Significantly, since Botswana’s independence, when the *dikgosi* lost the formal authority to regulate the movement of local populations, the villages have continued to grow according to the customary pattern. Instances of permanent settlements on arable lands and grazing areas have been few and exceptional.⁸ There has thus been no strong drive among the Northern Tswana to escape *kgosi* domination and the hierarchical order of the *merafe*. To be sure, there is a degree of ambivalence toward domination. Yet in the present context, I have always been struck by the Northern Tswana people’s acceptance of the hierarchical socio-political order and the great value they place upon belonging to a community that is located in densely populated settlements. People everywhere are probably more or less ambivalent to persons in position of authority; in the present case, they are less so. In particular, as I shall explain, their appreciation of the hierarchical order is basically a matter of existential concern.

Let me add here that despite the evidence above, there have in fact been some occasions of popular dispersal since the large Northern Tswana towns emerged in the late eighteenth century, notably, the massive Matebele raids of the 1820s, which forced the Bangwaketse and other Northern Tswana to flee far into the Kalahari. There were also instances of dynastic conflict leading to temporal, spatial separation (see, e.g., Schapera 1952: 12ff.). Furthermore, in some rare instances weak rule brought about such confusion in the royal center that people began to move out, as in the case of the Bangwaketse during the years after the 1916 assassination of Kgosi Seepapitso III. Another example is that of the Batawana, where the ruling group of Tswana (Batwana) was particularly small and the other groups under their domination were relatively weakly integrated into the polity. When, in addition, the *morafe* was badly governed for some decades, “people gradually drifted out” (Schapera 1943: 25; cf. Tlou 1985: 130f.). Viewed in the long term, however, these occurrences of disintegration are rare exceptions that do not affect the main points raised in this article.

Like the scholars quoted above, I believe that the formation of town-states among the Northern Tswana depended on a ruler’s control over his subjects. Most scholars go on to argue that this control had a coercive element. I do not deny that this has sometimes been the case. Nevertheless, I shall argue that these exceptionally large, compact settlements—in a part of Africa where they might have been least expected—owe their existence to the perceived attraction of the material, as well as the cultural and symbolic wealth of the kingship (*bogosi*). In this respect, the prominence that Sansom gives to the idea of a Tribal Estate seems justified. However, while Sansom places particular emphasis on land, I shall argue that the authority of the Northern Tswana *dikgosi* and their control over subjects depended, to a great extent, upon their vast herds of cattle.

This raises first of all the problem of explaining how pastoralism, which is widely associated with non-centralized political systems, could possibly be compatible not only with centralization but also with large, compact settlements. More specifically, how could cattle have helped the Northern Tswana rulers to attract subjects to such densely populated areas when these same subjects depended for their subsistence on huge areas marked by scarce and erratic

rainfall? I shall argue, in brief, that the *dikgosi* were the main source of cattle, which were then passed on down the ladder by means of political clientship.

This claim, however, raises a second major question. Since the *dikgosi* accumulated cattle wealth by controlling the extremely profitable trade in fur, ivory, and ostrich feathers, how could it be that the prospect of residence in compact settlements under the rule of *dikgosi* remained an attractive one even after the *dikgosi*'s resources had been overexploited and subsequently almost exhausted by the end of the nineteenth century? As I shall explain in the second part of this article, the answer lies in the centripetal force exerted by the perceived cultural and symbolic wealth of the royal center that underpins the attraction of Tswana royal towns and villages as 'civilized' spaces.

On the Formation of the Northern Tswana States

The development of large settlements went hand in hand with population growth and the growing centralization of the Northern Tswana *merafe* throughout the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. I have argued elsewhere that during successive periods of history, these *merafe* gained strength by continuously incorporating external forces into the framework of a central authority (Gulbrandsen 1993b). Entering their *merafe*'s present territory as an outer component of the so-called Bantu expansion (ca. 1700), they seem to have begun by conquering the largely agriculturalist local groups, gaining demographic strength in the process. Bringing in cattle, they benefited from enormous virgin pastures, and, owing to the vast amount of game in the region, there was also the satisfaction of meat gained by hunting—an activity that reduced dependence on livestock for subsistence. Both conditions were favorable to the growth of the cattle holdings. The Tswana also produced copper, which could be traded for more livestock.⁹

Moreover, their location at the fringe of the Kalahari enabled the Northern Tswana to satisfy the escalating demand for fur, ivory, and ostrich feathers during the nineteenth century. This trade was monopolized by the *dikgosi*, who managed to exchange these luxury items—obtained from hunting activities and trade—for the archetypal emblems of Tswana wealth, namely, cattle. In turn, the aggregation of cattle in the royal kraal enabled extensive networks of political clientships to form the royal center.

Cattle clientship, known as *mafisa* and *kgamelo* (see Schapera [1938] 1984: 246ff.), was an efficient way for the *dikgosi* to increase the power of the royal office (*bogosi*). As I have explained in more detail elsewhere (Gulbrandsen 1993b), it allowed a *kgosi* to win the political support of non-royal headmen, who exercised authority over large numbers of subjects but had no claims to royal office. Above all, the *kgosi* had leverage over the headmen by virtue of threatening to withdraw the *mafisa* or *kgamelo* cattle at any time. This formation of personal support contributed significantly to amalgamate the power structures surrounding the ruler, constituting a major obstacle to agnates who might challenge the *kgosi*. In fact, cattle were also instrumental in bringing potential rivals in the royal family into a position of dependency. Furthermore,

cattle clientship not only played an important part in strengthening the position of the ruler and subjecting the existing population to the royal center but also increased the wealth and strength of the *merafe*. As a result, they proved attractive to foreign groups (from the relatively crowded and conflict-ridden eastern regions of what is today the Transvaal),¹⁰ whom they incorporated through client relationships. The extent to which alien groups were subsumed by the *merafe* is shown by a demographic comparison with the 'original' core groups of these states: after the period of expansion, the core groups were in the minority (see Schapera [1938] 1984: 4–5; cf. Schapera 1952: 19ff.). Moreover, cattle clientship not only operated at the level of the *kgosi* but was replicated on lower rungs of the hierarchy. In this way it acted as a pervasive force of integration.

The interactions between the Northern Tswana *merafe* and external forces led to increased political centralization, demographic growth, and the formation of large, compact settlements. The organization of the ever-growing towns and villages was unique to Sotho-speaking peoples (of which Tswana speakers are a subsection) and most clearly developed among the Tswana (Kuper 1975). These towns and villages were—and still are—divided into so-called wards (*kgotla*, pl. *lekgotla*) under the authority of headmen and consisting of agnatically structured descent groups. The wards were organized from above. By the *kgosi*'s decree, descent groups could be divided and moved to another ward, or the *kgosi* could use such subdivisions as building blocks in the creation of new wards. Immigrants and other alien peoples were either assigned to one of the existing wards as a subordinate group or divided between different wards. Occasionally, they were allowed to form a new ward, the leader of which would be recognized as a headman (see Schapera [1938] 1984: 91ff.).

A system that allowed the ruler to incorporate vast numbers of alien peoples in such ways dictated against the formation of large, powerful descent groups with their greater potential for political mobilization, such as one finds in other centralized political systems further east in South Africa (cf. Sansom 1974b). Instead, the formation of wards served to incorporate people into the existing power structures radiating from the royal office. The politico-administrative hierarchy that emerged was increasingly based on the principle of delegation rather than decentralization. The heads of wards, subwards, and descent groups were authorized by the ruler to make decisions, although of course they also relied on the recognition of their respective subjects (see Gulbrandsen 1993b). The system does not entirely prevent fissions within these polities, yet it is striking that there has been no major split among the Northern Tswana *merafe* since the Batawana broke away from the Bangwato more than two centuries ago (see Schapera 1952: 9).

Since cattle clientship was an inherent aspect of the social hierarchy, the size of most families' herds depended as much on active engagement in the socio-political relationships of the town as it did on good animal husbandry. Under these conditions, attachment to the royal center was thus not so much a matter of compulsion. In view of the fact that cattle clientship is generally unstable (since cattle can be so easily removed), confirmation of loyalty required continuous and visible presence in the town. Moreover, people had

a vested interest in allying themselves with a strong central power that could protect them and their assets as well as organize raids and mount attacks on other tribes in order to increase its cattle wealth.

Residence in a town was conducive to enhancing family assets and thus increased the means of subsistence. But how did such a concentrated population manage to exploit the potential of an environment covering a huge geographical area? The brief answer to this is that while the socially and politically significant men—the (male) family heads—were required to fulfill almost continuous engagements in towns and villages, their male offspring were left behind at the family's 'cattle posts' (*moraka*) to take care of the livestock. Among wealthy families, the cattle herders consisted partly or entirely of servants.¹¹ In addition, the cultivation of fields was left to women, who, like young men and boys, were not attached to the town to the same degree as the mature men. After the plow came into common use in the early twentieth century, the male labor required for cultivation was provided mainly by young men and boys. However, most families relied on remittances from labor migration as the chief means of subsistence. Agriculture was a supplementary source only (see Gulbrandsen 1996a: 184f.). This is probably the main reason why there was, as already indicated, no apparent popular objection to the *kgosi's* regulation of his subjects' annual agricultural cycle.

However, toward the end of the colonial era, there was in fact one small segment of the population that objected to the *kgosi* determining the time for plowing: an emerging category of commercial farmers who wanted to adopt improved farming practices, including winter plowing, and to be maximally flexible in order to exploit the low and erratic rainfall. This category of farmers was much larger among the Southern Tswana, who were (and have continued to be) more engaged in arable farming than their Northern Tswana neighbors. It follows therefore that the Southern Tswana economy was less dependent on cattle, and there are several reasons for this. First and foremost, their rulers did not have similar access to the wealth of the Kalahari. Second, the Southern Tswana were much more seriously affected by warfare, raids, and the expanding communities of white settlers than were the Northern Tswana (see, e.g., Shillington 1985: 99). Third, the Southern Tswana found themselves in an environment relatively better suited to crop cultivation. Lastly, these farmers were located closer to commercial centers and thus had greater incentive to engage in commercial types of farming.

Such a comparison within the limited context of Northern and Southern Tswana helps to explain why I did not find such a contradiction between centralized residence and household economic interests as the Comaroffs found among the Southern Tswana. My observations are borne out when one views the Tswana in the wider context of the Sotho group to which they belong. A pattern emerges whereby the degree of population density clearly depends on the importance of pastoralism (see Sansom 1974a: 142; cf. van Warmelo 1935: 103). Further support is lent by archaeological investigations in eastern Botswana and the Transvaal that reveal considerable fluctuations in settlement density over a long period of time, corresponding to the shifting balance between pastoralism and agriculture. On the basis of archaeological findings,

Denbow (1981) has identified two large, compact settlements—Broadhurst (in southeastern Botswana) and Toutse (in northeastern Botswana)—that date back to times long before the Tswana moved into this region. He argues convincingly that “[t]he late continuation of Early Iron Age traditions in both the Broadhurst and Toutse areas contrasts with what has been found in surrounding regions, and it suggested that the possession of *relatively greater level of wealth in cattle* was an important factor influencing the maintenance of these traditions [including large-scale political centralization and large, compact settlements] along the fringes of the Kalahari” (ibid.: 66; italics added; see also Denbow 1984; Hall 1987: 74ff.). These conclusions clearly support my own argument. Moreover, other archaeological discoveries indicate a low population density among those earlier groups whose members relied primarily, or largely, on agriculture (see Huffman 1986: 284; cf. Caister 1982).¹² In other words—and apparently paradoxically—pastoralism, which requires extensive exploitation of the environment, has proved particularly conducive to the formation of large, compact settlements.

In short, it is evident that the development of the Northern Tswana states is largely attributable to the rulers’ exceptional cattle wealth during the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. Of course, access to such wealth does not automatically generate hierarchies, political centralization, and powerful rulers. As I have explained, the creation of such conditions depends also on the cultural construction of particular political practices and institutions. The fact that the process of centralization also involved the formation of large, compact settlements is explicable only by the dominance of cattle in the political economy of these *merafe*. I propose, therefore, that it is these combined factors that have made the Northern Tswana towns such an extraordinary phenomenon in the context of Central and Southern African societies.

Let me remark at this point that the formation of the Northern Tswana *merafe* did not involve moving the entire population to the large royal towns. For various reasons, a significant proportion lived in outlying villages. Yet even these were compact settlements ranging from a few hundred to several thousand residents. They were integrated with the royal center in a state complex that Werbner (1993) has analyzed interestingly in terms of Tambiah’s notion of ‘galactic polity’. My present concern, however, is with the royal towns, especially in view of their exceptional size, both in the Southern African context and in the larger context of Africa.

The Centripetal Force of the Royal Center’s Cultural and Symbolic Wealth

So far, I have emphasized how cattle wealth increased the power of the royal centers of the Northern Tswana. The vast royal herds not only helped to consolidate the various power structures surrounding the ruler and the ruling group but also were instrumental in attracting the population to compact settlements. These settlements were among the hierarchical structures that the royal center

managed to put in place largely without resorting to coercion. However, toward the end of the nineteenth century, the fur and ivory trade declined substantially, owing to overexploitation. Consequently, the *dikgosi* could afford fewer cattle to disperse among clientships. Moreover, at this time the *dikgosi* and other wealthy people started to engage in commercial cattle trading (see Parsons 1977: 119).¹³ Both of these factors seem to have contributed substantially to the decline of cattle clientship. Although such *mafisa* relations remained integral to the hierarchical order, the significant decline of this material source, underpinning processes of integration of the socio-political hierarchies radiating from the royal office, requires us to look for other conditions for the reproduction of large, compact settlements.

Let me address this issue with reference to another rare case of large, compact settlements in Africa—that of the Yoruba of Nigeria. The Yoruba ruler (*oba*) certainly enjoyed a material base for his power by levying taxes on trade. Nonetheless, Robert Smith (1988: 87) ascribes the Yoruba's strong attachment to the royal town to the *oba*'s symbolic capital rather than to his material sources of wealth: "The settlement of the *oba* provides the most probable explanation of this Yoruba propensity for town dwelling and the willingness of many of them to live at a distance from their farms. The *oba*'s office and person were sacred; he was the priest and protector of his people, and they naturally wished to live in his shadow." Although the *dikgosi*, as principal mediators between the people and the supreme force of the royal ancestry, are located at the core of Tswana cosmology, their role as key ritual figures is not as evident as that of the *oba*. This is particularly true of their respective attitudes toward Christianity. Quite exceptionally in the context of Africa, many Northern Tswana *dikgosi* not only facilitated Christian expansion but were baptized at a very early stage (during the middle or late nineteenth century) and transformed or abandoned several important national rituals in which they had previously played the principal part (Gulbrandsen 1993a).

In examining the reception of Christianity by the Northern Tswana, I focus on the male-dominated 'court' of the *kgotla*, which is at the core of Tswana life—so much so that one may well speak of the Tswana as 'living their lives in courts' (Gulbrandsen 1996b). In a Christian context, and at a superficial level, the *kgotla* appears to be a distinctively secular field, pursuing political and judicial activities. Such a missionary notion of secularism, however, is entirely misleading (cf. Gulbrandsen 2001). Before I explain why, I need to describe some features of the *kgotla* that are relevant to its popular attraction.¹⁴

While the *kgotla* is popular in the sense of being the most prominent socio-political arena for all adult males, it is intrinsically hierarchical, being chaired by the genealogically most senior man surrounded by a group of elders called *bagakolodi*, or 'remembrancers' (indicating their experience and their capacity as conveyors of customs), who serve as the senior man's counselors. Hierarchy is symbolized in various ways, most conspicuously in the spatial organization of the *kgotla*, with the elder next in rank to the headman located at his right hand, and the others in successive order, left and right, according to their seniority. After the *kgotla* has debated an issue or examined a case, and before

the headman makes his decision, each of the elders expresses his view in an inverse order of ranking, with the most senior elder speaking last. Only then does the head of the *kgotla* finally make his concluding statement.

The hierarchical character of the *kgotla* can be elucidated by means of a structuralist paradigm. Its cultural construction is based on notions of agnatic seniority; its hierarchical organization in space is ordered by age and gender. As Jean Comaroff (1985: 54ff.; cf. J. Comaroff 1980) has pointed out, the *segotlo*, the backyard of the *lolwapa* (the domestic compound), is the creative focus of life, of procreation, and thus of biological reproduction. The social creation of male personhood is epitomized by various 'transformations' that begin at birth in the *segotlo*. From the *segotlo*, the male person is brought out toward the front yard of the *lolwapa* as a youth and then wholly out of his confines at marriage. Once married, the male person is assigned a lower-order position in the *kgotla*. Male adulthood involves the gradual achievement of seniority, which is determined by genealogical position, age, and personal capacity, such as oratorical skills and the ability to accumulate and recall knowledge. A male person's life cycle is concluded at his death, when the community sends his remains to join his ancestors (*badimo*). This passage or transformation is customarily signified by his burial in the cattle kraal (*moraka*) adjacent to the council area of the *kgotla*. These interments also signify the close attachment of cattle to the symbolic center of Tswana space.

These transformations of male persons along the *segotlo-moraka* axis are supported by the concept of a hot-cold dimension. The distinction is pervasive throughout the region (see, e.g., Kuper 1982) and, as indicated here, uniquely inscribed in space. The complex as a whole constitutes a metaphor of fertility and biological reproduction based on the complementarity of female and male and their respective activities—food preparation for women and political and ritual action for men. This complementarity is, however, hierarchical—something that is apparent in Tswana notions of procreation. All of my inquiries among different Tswana peoples point to a general understanding that, as Schapera (1971: 193) has reported in the case of the Bakgatla, "a child is formed in the womb by a mixture of the man's semen and the menstrual blood of the woman." In Tswana society, semen is considered to be the source of coolness and fertility par excellence, associated symbolically with the power of male ancestors (*badimo*) and spatially with the cattle kraal (*moraka*) adjacent to the *kgotla*. Diametrically opposite is the *segotlo*, the place of confinement for menstruating women. Just as the *kgotla* and the *moraka* are cool, so the *segotlo* is hot. The view of male force as superior in the act of procreation follows from the logic that "'cool' things heal and fertilize the 'hot', while the 'hot' endangers the 'cool'" (Kuper 1982: 19–20).¹⁵

Analyzing the *kgotla* in terms of a structuralist paradigm of binary oppositions casts light on the cultural construction of gender, hierarchy, and space among the Southern Bantu in general. Within the narrower context of the *kgotla* itself, such an analysis helps to explain the cognitive process behind the valuation of hierarchical order as the major source of health, welfare, and prosperity and the reification of that order as the central space occupied

by the *kgotla* at any level of the polity. Yet it fails to account for the fact that some members of the order harbor ambitions potentially detrimental to its *kagiso* (harmony, peace). In fact, my observations of court proceedings and the discussions and gossip surrounding them clearly indicate that the essentially agnatic field of the *kgotla* itself leads to conflict, as individuals joust over positions within the hierarchy.

To be sure, the Tswana genuinely idealize the quality of *kagiso*, especially in the context of the *kgotla*. They strongly appreciate a person who has a good character (*botho*), who obeys the orders of his seniors, who is easy to discipline, and who does not behave in a defiant or challenging way. The domestic sphere constitutes the primary context for such behavior, as in “the body schema and the schemes of thought” (Bourdieu 1977: 15), which is needed to cope with all the intricacies of Tswana etiquette in their hierarchical social relations. The *kgotla* represents the major field of discourse in which patriarchal ideals of discipline are connected to ancestral morality and thus to the idealized state of social harmony (*kagiso*).

Nevertheless, a person may still act in ways that cause tension and conflict. The motivation to do so springs from the esteem of seniority and is most conspicuously expressed by agnatic rank. Indeed, virtually all the relationships of a Tswana community express the values of seniority and *tshisimogo* (social respect). The latter involves elements of reverence and even fear. While these values pervade Tswana social relations in general, the *kgotla* is the principal forum for their expression. Above all, the *kgotla* is essential to Tswana male identity: it is where seniority is established, where lack of respect for seniors is punished, and where disputes over rank are settled. In this sense, the discourses of the *kgotla* concern control over the symbolic capital vested in the hierarchical order, while the discourses of the royal *kgotla* in particular play an important role in identity formation. This is where the etiquette that governs senior-junior relations is at its most elaborate; where a person’s performance is most carefully watched, commented upon, and sanctioned; and where a person’s social identity is established and acknowledged in a manner that is important for his standing in all other contexts.

Kgotla proceedings are also central to the Tswana because they deal with more personal issues. Disputes over family property, adultery, seduction, marital problems, and other conflicts attract much interest, sometimes owing to their dramatic qualities—or even their entertainment value.

While senior-junior relations are proscribed to a considerable extent because of the respect for seniority described above, there is still considerable scope for elevating one’s position through certain achievements. This is most apparent, of course, in disputes over succession to the royal office (*bogosi*). Here I want to emphasize the more subtle ways in which a male might advance his standing in the *kgotla* and thus in the wider societal context. For example, there are culturally recognized paths that lead to a higher position. The ambitious man must acquire efficiency in cross-examination, wisdom in judgment, and, in particular, knowledge of Tswana customs and law. Above all, the Tswana admire the ability to demonstrate such skills by means of oratory (cf. J. L. Comaroff 1975).

The aesthetics of speech, as well as the lucidity of the argument, are carefully observed, assessed, and commented upon. A reputation for oratory may be boosted if, for example, the head of the *kgotla* includes a performer in the inner circle of confidential advisers or invites him to act as his mouthpiece during *kgotla* proceedings.

Within the *kgotla*, oratory is considered to have connections with cattle. The Tswana believe that ‘a man who has got cattle is a man who can talk’. A wealthy person (*mohumi*, pl. *bahumi*) might be of modest rank, but he has the opportunity to elevate his position in the *kgotla* precisely because wealth makes him feel free to demonstrate his rhetorical accomplishments. In turn, his words carry more authority and elicit more respect because he has created a network of people dependent on him (*bakopi*, sing., *mokopi*). Within the *kgotla*, tokens of respect are offered and consumed. Respect is normally accorded to cattle-wealthy people. Only those who appear to have gained wealth in morally reprehensible ways, such as ‘eating’ their brothers by appropriating a lion’s share of the inheritance (*boswa*), merit none. As the above account demonstrates, cattle constitute the link between the spatial periphery of material (re)production and the symbolic fabric of the center.

However much the Tswana idealized social harmony and peace (*kagiso*), the elementary units that made up the *merafe* were, after all, agnatic descent groups. It has been reported of the descent groups of the Southern Tswana that “agnation was associated with rivalry, intrigue and hostility: all agnatic relations were ranked and since such calculations of rank ordered the distribution of property and position, agnates were assumed to have inimical interests and to engage constantly in efforts to ‘eat’ each other” (J. L. Comaroff 1982: 151, cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 1991: 131). For this reason, they preferred to locate themselves and their productive activities according to matrilineal and affinal ties, which involved movement away from the agnatic context of town wards. Such arrangements “rarely involved agnates, since it was regarded as dangerous to allow rivals to one’s fields” (J. L. Comaroff 1982: 156).

Among the Northern Tswana of the Bangwaketse, I certainly came across the notion of agnates ‘eating each other’. Yet, as already noted, only rarely did such conflicts lead to members departing from the *kgotla*. One explanation is that here conflict and rivalry are ‘a part of the game’, the stuff that has long fueled the much-appreciated discursive activity of the *kgotla* (see Gulbrandsen 1996b). According to my informants’ deepest memories (some of which stretched back at least to the 1930s), people were moved—by *kgosi* decision—to a different ward only in serious cases of alleged sorcery. In the post-colonial context, I found that in acute conflicts where people felt severely threatened by members of their own *kgotla*, they were sheltered in another *kgotla* at their own initiative, without the *kgosi*’s intervention.

Movement to another *kgotla*, however, is rarely unambiguously attractive, because it always means being assigned a very junior position within the hierarchy of the new *kgotla*. In particular, it means having to opt out of the identity-ascribing discourse of the agnatic field, the significance of which, as I have explained, is pervasive. Owing to the recurrent division of family property

(of which cattle are usually the most important part), one cannot in fact readily escape the agnatic field in which such matters are decided. One is always dependent on cultivating alliances and support within its context. And if a property dispute is taken to higher courts within the hierarchy of the *morafe*, support is needed from eloquent, knowledgeable speakers, whether they be agnates, matrilineal kin, affines, or just friends.

In conclusion, the discursive field of the *kgotla* gives rise to a centripetal force traveling through the trajectory of the hierarchical order toward the royal center. First, this discursive field is pervasive in the sense that its symbolic aspects can be perceived by all adult men on an everyday basis. It is the field in which all kinds of mundane, material interests encounter the cultural order of deeply held values and spiritual forces. Second, the discursive field of the lower *kgotla* basically replicates that of the royal center. It is in the royal center that this field enjoys its most prominent and elaborate expression. As well as maintaining order and *kagiso*, it is paradigmatic to male identity and existential concerns. Above all, the royal *kgotla* constitutes the supreme source of conflict resolution—and hence *kagiso*—because it is the principal agency of *mekgwa le melao ya Setswana* (Setswana custom and law) as descended from royal ancestry.

Towns and Villages in the Larger Space: A Matter of Civic Order

I have explained how the discursive field of the *kgotla* is spatially inscribed in the village in ways that reify the connection between space and hierarchy. The structuralist paradigm used earlier can be extended to the larger Tswana landscape in order to cast more light on the symbolic value of village or town habitation. Jean Comaroff's (1980: 640) structuralist analysis of "the Tshidi cosmos" perfectly illuminates the existence of basic cultural distinctions that privilege town and village within the larger Tswana landscape. The Tshidi, located as they are in the Republic of South Africa, have been subject to far more radical changes than the Northern Tswana. Despite this, Comaroff asserts that "the locus of Tshidi identity remains in the traditional capital, whose structure still expresses symbolic oppositions between public and private and male and female domains. The church has been incorporated into the capital and has, to a large degree, been appropriated to this indigenous order" (ibid.: 642).

The distinction made between the idealized order of the town (domestication, civilization, protection) and the uncultivated wilderness of the encompassing bush finds one of its expressions in ethnic stratification. For example, ethnic minorities labeled as inferior—in particular, those classified as Bakgaladi and Basarwa (San)—were denied the right to settle in the royal town, except as servants of Tswana households. Such a practice reflects a notion of citizenship that discriminates in two directions: against 'inferior' minorities and in favor of those deemed culturally competent to be admitted to the discursive field of the *kgotla*.

As hunter-gatherers, the San-speaking peoples have been associated with the 'bush', one of the expressions used to categorize people and activities in binary terms, such as culture versus nature, civilized versus uncivilized,

people versus animals, etc. The continuing significance of this distinction was brought home to me in the late 1980s when I attended a number of meetings about Botswana's national development program for those living outside towns and villages (classified by the state as "remote area dwellers").¹⁶ During these meetings, agents of the state (all Tswana) expressed the view that it was especially "progressive" to encourage San to move into established towns and villages "so that we can domesticate them ... You know, previously they were not allowed to enjoy the benefit of living a civilized life in the villages. Today they are recognized as full citizens of Botswana, and we should get them to mix with other people who have been to school and [are] enlightened. The thing is that these people who are living in the bush need to be domesticated, and we cannot domesticate them when they remain living among wild animals." The negative—even stigmatizing—evaluation of social space beyond the towns and villages is also apparent in cases in which a Tswana family has become so impoverished that it has had to work for a well-established family, living as servants in their fields or at their cattle post. This misfortune represents such a serious stigma for the family's kin that the latter will try everything to help their feckless relatives remain in the village or town.¹⁷

The use of words such as 'domesticate' and 'civilize' signifies the discursive field of the *kgotla*, which is strongly associated with the cultivation of knowledge and morality. This point suggests the naturalization of this kind of settlement pattern. Other local transformations, propelled by interactions with the wider world, reinforced the notion of towns and villages as the indisputably proper settlements for human beings. In particular, the missionaries readily recognized the morality of the indigenous order: "[T]hey have a code of ethics, an idea of right and wrong, a sense of responsibility to the unseen; that ancestral law has kept the tribesman's conscience alive till it could be educated to a Christian level" (Willoughby 1923: 101).¹⁸ The compatibility between Setswana and Christian morality encouraged many missionaries to support the *dikgosi* as custodians of (ancestral) order in the *kgotla*. As a result, the missionaries became caught up in the indigenous socio-political order. Indeed, they probably contributed to an inherent part of it, namely, the idea of a hierarchy of forces extending into the superhuman realm (Gulbrandsen 1993a: 70). At the same time, the engagement of missionaries in the context of the *kgotla*—often as esteemed advisers to the rulers—generally established a positive interaction between the Northern Tswana and the Western (hegemonic) colonial culture that tended to reinforce the cultural valuation of compact town and village settlements. The homologous nature of the concepts of morality in these two cultures and societies was no mere coincidence. The Tswana notion of knowledge and wisdom is of a highly pragmatic kind, and as such it corresponds significantly with Western notions of enlightenment. The *kgotla* was thus able to mediate in its discourses between ancestral wisdom and the cultural impact of an increasingly present outside world. These discourses reinforced the spatial separation of domesticity from wilderness, especially when they emphasized a civic order with significant spatial dimensions.

While missionaries encountered men predominantly in the context of the *kgotla*, they exercised an influence on women in the context of the church,

since it was the Tswana women, rather than the men, who were attracted by the Christian congregations. First, and most importantly, the church brought women beyond the confines of the domestic unit and established womanhood in the public, civilized zone of the town or village. Once they had occupied this space, women engaged with the symbolic wealth of the church, even acting as deaconesses, who appear to have been “often nearly equivalent to *baruti* [priests] in function” (Landau 1995: 95). Second, the missionaries were instrumental in establishing schools, not only in the royal towns, but also in provincial villages. From an early stage, a substantial proportion of the pupils were girls, a fact that strengthened female attachment to the church and hence to the towns and villages as ‘civilized’ localities in the larger Tswana landscape.

Ritual practices conducted in the context of family and descent group also served to reinforce the appreciation of town or village residence. Family rituals of burial and marriage always involved large numbers of people, and many took part in them regularly. Such ritual activity increasingly involved the church, giving rise to new ritual practices that, for many Tswana, extended their repertoire of behaviors marking the civilized person. The performance of these new rituals strengthened the notion of towns and villages as the appropriate space for civilized people, in stark contrast to the ‘people of the bush’, who allegedly just buried their dead in the wilderness and were entirely ignorant of the civilizing effect of matrimony.

Throughout the colonial era, the *kgotla* remained the stronghold of social and cultural discourse, its symbolic wealth and authority now reinforced by an upsurge in litigation and legislation. This was largely a response to the impact of European legal practices on the Tswana, who perceived these practices as instances of irrational Western modernity. Litigation—which, by virtue of being conducted in the Dutch-Roman courtroom, is totally exclusive—stands in direct contradiction to the inclusive proceedings conducted in the *kgotla*. Hence, under colonial conditions the Tswana continued bringing their cases to the *kgotla* rather than to the magistrates’ court (Gulbrandsen 1996b: 140f., cf. Roberts 1979: 20–21) Similarly, Western-style, hidden political proceedings were seen as breaking radically with the highly regarded political discourse open to all in the *kgotla*—an issue that is still seen as contentious in the post-colonial state (see Gulbrandsen 2003).

When I first came to Botswana in 1975, almost 10 years after independence, people’s attachment to the *kgotla*, as expressed by the prevailing practice of patri-virilocal residence, was very evident. As I have already suggested in discussing Kuper’s view of the Northern Tswana, there was no sign that the loss of the *dikgosi*’s executive power had led to any great dispersal of the population to arable lands and cattle posts, and at the present time this is still the case. Rather, the major demographic change during post-colonial times, especially since the late 1980s, has been one of massive urbanization. Nevertheless, the Tswana royal towns have continued to grow in spite of the almost explosive expansion of the capital city, Gaborone.¹⁹ One major reason is that most of the royal towns are located in the southeastern part of the country, no more than a two-hour drive from Gaborone. As a result, many of those who live and work

in Gaborone remain so closely connected to their natal *kgotla* that they have a second home there—still according to patri-virilocal principles—in which they plan to spend their retirement.²⁰

While many of the younger generations now growing up in modern urban centers have not developed any close attachment to rural areas, including the royal towns, post-colonial residential patterns as a whole still confirm the tremendous attraction of the *kgotla* and the persistence of its cultural and symbolic wealth. It is true that since independence, the royal towns and major villages in particular have benefited from the state's extensive welfare programs (particularly in education and health) as well as a number of new government administrative institutions. Also, since the late 1980s, retail trade has expanded tremendously. These factors may well explain why many families make their home in the royal towns and other large settlements where such facilities are concentrated. But they cannot account for the fact that these families continue to settle according to patri-virilocal principles, thus reproducing the 'ancient' social structure and cultural meaning of the *kgotla*. The attraction of this residential practice is, in particular, underscored by the fact that when wards become overcrowded and there is no immediate space for expansion, they are allotted special 'extension areas' at the periphery of royal towns or other large settlements in order to accommodate all the people who want to be attached to their ward according to 'customary' residential practices. This means that the need to belong to a *kgotla*-centered community is still so strong that few family heads apply for an independent residential site, although post-colonial land legislation allows them to do so.²¹ In other words, the continued attraction of this settlement pattern is, as I have argued, comprehensible in view of the existential importance of the cultural and symbolic wealth associated with it.

Conclusion

I started out by claiming that there is generally no necessary connection between environment, population concentration in large settlements, and state formation. In my efforts to explain the presence of large, compact settlements in an environment where they might be least expected, I have identified and examined the forces of centralization at work in the state-centered hierarchies of the Northern Tswana *merafe*. I have argued that cattle, an essential resource of the state-centered political economy, have been highly instrumental in bringing about centralized power and densely populated settlements. This may seem a surprising conclusion. For instance, Goody (1974: 33) claims that livestock are ill-suited as a source of material support for centralized power in "the state in Africa," arguing that "support by livestock is the formula for a very much looser polity ... it is difficult to centralize cows." This claim is, to be sure, consistent with the common notion that pastoralism is associated with acephalous systems and scattered, even mobile, settlements. The development of the Northern Tswana during the nineteenth century, however, gives no support to this notion. Here, state-centered dynamics have endowed the ruler

and the ruling groups with tremendous strength because of—and not in spite of—cattle’s vital importance to a political economy focused on the royal kraal. Above all, as I have explained, the role played by cattle and cattle-based trade in Northern Tswana *merafe* is mediated through social and political processes that favor not only state formation but also the growth and reproduction of very large settlements.

This case also challenges Robert Carneiro’s circumscription thesis. Carneiro (1970: 738) argues that increasing population density, coupled with increasing scarcity of fertile land, “provokes fighting over land which constitutes the initial impetus for the formation of a state.” In attacking the prevailing theses of warfare as crucial to state formation (see, e.g., Cohen 1985), Carneiro (1970: 734) notes that those areas in which states arose indigenously²² differ in many respects but “have one thing in common: they are all areas of circumscribed agricultural land.” Comparing the coastal valley of Peru and the Amazon basin, he builds a convincing case for this assertion. However, what is known about the Northern Tswana *merafe* undermines the validity of this thesis since, as we have seen, the kind of circumscription that Carneiro speaks of simply did not exist there. On the contrary, the Northern Tswana were blessed with abundant open space and did not need to compete over land. Let me also note that Carneiro’s circumscription thesis does not take into account external factors. In the case of the Northern Tswana *merafe*, as we have seen, their internal, centralizing dynamics gained particular influence as a result of external forces.

However crucial cattle were to politico-spatial centralization in Northern Tswana *merafe*, it must finally be stressed how the dynamics of these *merafe*, having anchored the population in compact settlements, underwent transformations that, in due course, substantially reduced the importance of cattle as a driving force of centralization. While cattle clientships radiating from the royal kraal were particularly important during the formative stages of these *merafe*, I have argued that the cultural and symbolic wealth vested in the all-embracing discursive field of the *kgotla* progressively gained such a momentum that it worked as a centripetal force with sufficient strength to ensure popular attraction to the royal towns and other, outlying settlements. The significance of this force was apparent when the major sources of royal cattle declined substantially toward the end of the nineteenth century. Under the historical conditions of cultural and political imperialism, the dynamics of the discursive field of the *kgotla* were nourished substantially, adding strength to the notion of the *kgotla* and the compact settlements of large villages and royal towns as distinctively civilized spaces.

In post-colonial times, the value attached by most people to the cultural and symbolic wealth inscribed in these spaces has remained very much apparent. Most people have continued to live in large, compact settlements, according to the customary principles of residence, despite the lapse of the *kgosi*’s formal authority to enforce such principles. This strong indication of popular appreciation of compact settlement residence is consistent with the observation that there are very few accounts indicating that the *dikgosi* coerced people,

during colonial times, into the customary residential pattern. This way of living remains highly attractive because it is an expression of being a morally respectable, civilized human being. Above all, this way of living reflects important existential concerns, anchored in Tswana cosmology, that attach people strongly to the cultural and symbolic wealth vested in the *kgotla*.

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Notes

1. The Tswana notion of *merafe* (sing. *morafe*) is often translated as ‘polity’, ‘kingdom’, or ‘state’, Western concepts that I find to be too narrow because they do not make it evident that in these state formations, there is no clear distinction between political institutions and ‘society’. This is apparent from the fact that the Tswana are virtually living their lives in courts (see Gulbrandsen 1996b). The significance of this will be apparent in the second part of this article. The major Northern Tswana *merafe* include the Bakwena, the Bangwaketse, and the Bangwato, all of which are located in present-day eastern Botswana. In this region there are two minor *merafe*, Batlokwa and the Bamalete, which also follow the pattern of large royal towns. In addition, there is the Batawana, which is located in the northwestern part of Botswana. It should be stressed that within the territorial confines of the larger *merafe*, there are many different groups of diverse ‘ethnic’

- origin. However, as I explain in this article, they are all subjects of the Tswana ruling groups in the respective *merafe*. Tswana sovereignty at this level of administration was firmly supported by the British from the outset of colonization in 1885 and has been inscribed in Botswana's constitution. For a comprehensive account of the Tswana *merafe* and their 'ethnic' composition, see Schapera (1952).
2. This notion of 'towns' obviously refers to what the Tswana speak of as *motse* (pl. *metse*), commonly translated as 'village'. In this context, it refers to a particular socio-political formation, a *kgotla* (ward), which I shall explain subsequently. These entities are both socio-territorial sections of the larger settlement—in this case, the royal town of the Bangwaketse—and socio-administrative units of the *morafe*.
 3. The Bangwaketse was the first Northern Tswana *morafe* Moffat visited. At the time he was working among the Southern Tswana people of Tlaping, located south of the Molopo River. The significance of this statement will be evident in due course. Moffat estimated the population in the royal town of the Bangwaketse to be "at the lowest computation, seventy thousands" (1842: 406). Certainly an overestimate, this nonetheless indicates that the settlements were already extraordinarily large in the nineteenth century. The high numbers are confirmed by another important missionary source of the 1800s. Mackenzie ([1871] 1971: 365) reports that "Shoshong, the [royal] town of the Bangwato, contains a population of some 30,000." Okihiro (1976: 24) states that the Bakwena royal town of Molopolole had some 20,000 residents in 1857.
 4. Another consideration is, of course, that subject peoples—mainly, those classified, degradingly, as Makgalagadi—who were brought in as domestic servants by wealthy Tswana might have wanted to move away from towns and villages (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991: 147; Gulbrandsen 1996a: 66ff.; Moffat 1842: 8). It is an intriguing point, moreover, that several such groups, whose members had been able to accumulate cattle sufficient to be independent of a Tswana master, were forming outlying villages according to Tswana politico-spatial principles.
 5. Representatives of the colonial administration viewed the *kgosi* regulation of the annual cycle as an obstacle to the development of agricultural productivity (Schapera 1943: 186).
 6. It is significant that, according to my own fieldwork experience since 1975, agricultural extension workers have always complained that people remain in the villages too long in the spring and are therefore unable to plow early enough to ensure optimal conditions for agricultural productivity (Gulbrandsen 1996a: 184ff.).
 7. This follows from the notion of *kgosi ke kgosi ka morafe* (the *kgosi* is king by virtue of the *morafe*), which conveys the limits of a ruler's power (Gulbrandsen 1995). The existence of limits has been frequently attested (see, e.g., Schapera [1938] 1984: 84). Roberts (1985: 77), for one, explains that any *kgosi* who repeatedly made decisions detrimental to the interests of the people would not last for very long. The long-term significance of this balance of power is asserted by the missionary Mackenzie on the basis of contemporary observations among the Bamangwato. Mackenzie ([1871] 1971: 371) states that the *kgosi* "knows how far he can go ... and so do his opponents." In some very rare instances, the *kgosi* exploited his power in such despotic ways that the people joined forces to have him assassinated, as happened with Kgosi Motswasele of the Bakwena (r. 1807–1822) (Schapera 1965: 127; see also Gulbrandsen 1995: 432).
 8. On the basis of field research in Kweneng District in 1976, Robson Silitshena (1983: 193) has suggested that "[s]ome people are now settling permanently at their lands, producing a dispersed pattern of settlement." However, he offers no indication of frequency. My own extensive survey of one large ward in Kanye and several subwards in Mmathethe (both in Southern District), conducted in 1976–1977 (Gulbrandsen 1996a: 52), revealed that only 5 (7.4 percent) of a total of 148 households had moved out of these wards and taken up permanent residence in agricultural areas.
 9. Wilson (1971: 71) argues that this trade explains why "among the Sotho a chief controlled relatively more stock than among the Nguni."

10. The influx of alien groups culminated in the wake of the *difaqane*—often referred to as the holocaust of Southern Africa—which put vast groups, who had been living in the high veld area between the Drakensberg Mountains and the Limpopo River, on the move.
11. It is true that after the turn of the nineteenth century, young men increasingly participated in labor migration to South Africa. The remaining youngsters, however, were usually sufficient for pastoral needs, owing to labor-minimizing herding practices (Gulbrandsen 1996a: 165ff.).
12. The question that can be raised in response to this kind of argument is whether the trend prevailing here grows stronger when we move even farther west. It does not. The explanation for this is that past the boundary of the Kalahari, it is ecological conditions that impose severe physical limitations. Before boreholes were drilled, this meant that the population in the west was considerably more widespread than in the east. By implication, it is not necessarily that the process of tying people to a town in the west has proved difficult, but rather that the ecological base for political centralization has been considerably weaker. The traditional political-administrative units in these western regions are therefore smaller.
13. Significantly, precisely at this time, three of the Northern Tswana rulers (of the three largest *merafe*—Bakwena, Bangwaketse, and Bangwato) accepted, hesitantly, British supremacy and agreed to the establishment of the Bechuanaland Protectorate in 1885. As a result, the Northern Tswana rulers could generally rely on the support of the colonial power and were less dependent on reinforcing the power structures surrounding the royal center by means of cattle clientship.
14. For a comprehensive account of Northern Tswana politics, see Schapera ([1938] 1984; cf. Schapera 1940). For early accounts, see Moffat (1842: 248–249) and Mackenzie ([1871] 1971: 371ff.).
15. The close semantic association of these concepts is shown by the fact that the same word means ‘to heal’ and ‘to cool’ (*hola* in Tswana, *phola* in Zulu, etc.). Similarly, ‘to be hot’ and ‘to be unhealthy’ are conveyed by the same word (e.g., *shisa* in Zulu), as are ‘heat’ and ‘fever’ (e.g., *mogote* in Tswana) (Kuper 1982: 20).
16. The Botswana government’s Remote Area Development Programme (e.g., see Gulbrandsen et al. 1986).
17. This association of a more advanced culture with central spaces is not exclusively applied to peoples whom the Tswana generally recognize as inferior. I have also recorded it in relation to the Kalanga of northwestern Botswana, who, in a post-colonial context, have appeared particularly well-educated and staff many senior offices in central government. For example, one cabinet minister of Kalanga origin was once taken seriously to task by an elder in the Bangwaketse royal *kgotla* because he had suspended the *kgosi* (Seepapitso IV) in 1994: “This Kalanga who is not even a MoTswana is coming all the way from the north to unseat our *kgosi* ... There is no proper chieftaincy in Bukalanga ... Is he a Kwena or Ngwato? Those are the only two peoples who can have a say in our royal matters. Not just someone from the bush.”
18. A scholarly assessment of this relationship states that “most of what we consider to be evil is forbidden also in Bantu society, and what we hold to be good is also recommended among them. The Bantu would, in fact, have no difficulty in accepting most of the Biblical commandments” (Eiselen and Schapera 1937: 270; cf. Willoughby 1928: 382–383).
19. See Eugene Campbell (1998), who also explains the curious fact that the tremendous urbanization rate in Botswana since the 1970s is due chiefly to the reclassification of the large royal towns as urban centers.
20. A large number of those living elsewhere because of their work often build large, costly houses in these natal *kgotla* locations.
21. Let me note here that there are families whose heads, mostly for reasons of conflict within the agnatic group, choose not to establish a residence according to patri-virilocal principles. However, they rarely seek a totally independent site. They apply for a residential plot either in the *kgotla* of the wife or in the *kgotla* of some close friends.

22. Carneiro (1970: 734) is referring here to “the Nile, Tigris-Euphrates, and the Indus valleys in the Old World and the Valley of Mexico and the mountain and coastal valleys of Peru in the New World.”

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