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Economic and social background of the Tswana

Summary

Studies of various economies have identified three component processes involved in production: the acquisition of natural resources, labour and tools; the organisation of work tasks, and the distribution of produce. In most cases, however, analyses of production have neglected to examine all forces with a bearing upon production. This does not mean, however, that production forces are the determining base of an economy. Rather such an approach provides a clearer understanding of the total organisation of production. The purpose of this article, therefore, is to consider the following: characteristic branches of production within Tswana society in South Africa, the social relations of production and surplus extraction among *masika* (lineages), and the organisation of *bogwera* (initiation schools) as political/military institutions associated with productive strategies and defence of the lineage territory.

Ekonomiese en sosiale agtergrond van die Tswana

Studies van verskillende ekonomiesoorte identifiseer drie integrerende prosesse wat betrokke is by produksie, naamlik die verkryging van natuurlike bronne, arbeid en gereedskap; die organisasie van werkstake, en die verspreiding van produkte. Die ondersoek van alle magte wat op produksie inwerk is egter seldsaam. Dit beteken nie dat alle magte wat op produksie inwerk die bepalende basis van ekonomie uitmaak nie. Sodanige benadering voorsien eerder die agtergrond om die totale organisasie van produksie te verstaan. Die doel van hierdie artikel is dus om die volgende te oorweeg: kenmerkende vertakkings van produksie onder die Tswana-gemeenskap in Suid-Afrika, sosiale produksieverhoudings en surplusonttrekkings onder *masika* (afkoms), en die organisasie van *bogwera* (inisiasieskole) as politieke/militêre instelling wat met produktiewe strategieë en die verdediging van die afkomsgebied geassosieer word.

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Although "kinship" as the basis of life among the Tswana is fairly well documented (Schapera 1935, 1943 & 1963), recent developments in the human sciences have given the study of kinship a more realistic and convincing meaning than that with which traditional anthropologists and other human scientists invested it. Thus, instead of taking kinship as a form of social organisation whose principles govern social action, kinship in the form of lineages will be emphasised as a 'totality' of social relations of production.

In this view, lineage functions as a system of relations of production regulating both the rights of groups and individuals to the means of production and their access to the products of their labour. In other words, it is assumed that lineages control access to the conditions of production, resources, etc and provide the social framework of politico-ritual activities.

1. Characteristic branches of production among the Tswana

When Tswana societies in South Africa were still autonomous, they were characterised by their involvement in a mixed economy structured by a combination of major branches of production with slight variations due to environmental conditions which differed from area to area in a geographically complex region. An analysis of the material resources supporting each branch of production is essential and will lead to an understanding of the social relations involved in production within the Tswana *motse* and *metsana* (capital town and villages) as well as of the economic exchange system of the region based on *masika* (lineages) (Rey 1975: 153).

Among the Batswana cattle were a major source of production and supply. However, cattle were also a means of accumulating wealth as well as a disposable asset. Economic activity among the Tswana was a combination of pastoralism with other branches of production such as agriculture and game hunting. There is sufficient evidence that cattle farming was practised extensively in various areas of the Tswana region, hence the distribution of cattle as the major economic resource.

The management of cattle was closely linked with agriculture as well as hunting, although the nature of the combination differed in the various parts of the Batswana region. Optimum production could be achieved within dispersed micro-environments, with extensively worked lowland agriculture separated from the more scattered upland fields; pastoralism and cattle herding practised in 'villages' was distinct from that practised in *meraka* (cattle outposts).

The cattle outposts were located several miles away from the villages. Hunting carried out in close proximity to villages was distinct from that undertaken at considerable distances from residential neighbourhood centres, beyond the cattle outposts.

As Forde (1970: 24) has stated, such a well-organised practices essential given the prominence of livestock in social relations, because the product of stock-raising provides uniquely durable and transferable units of wealth which have a scarcity value as well as constituting capital for further production.

Thus, Batswana communities set goals defined by strategic objectives for the Batswana as a whole. Four distinct residential homes with different functions were organised per family:

- the *lapeng* where the nuclear family resided,
- the *morakeng* where cattle herding predominated,
- the *masimong* where agricultural pursuits were carried out, and
- the *letsomong,* which were hunting areas exclusively for males.

Each of the functions was designed to achieve the Tswana's overall objectives. This type of intra-functional organisation was aimed at improving and eliminating social imbalances, and it also helped to strengthen control over organisations through improved and concentrated effort and performance.

Spring and summer grazing was well organised. In autumn and winter, cattle were moved to the lower areas to graze in the cereal 'stubbles' and in other parts not required for winter crops. This procedute, together with milking, producing other dairy products and the need to protect domestic stock from both animal and human marauders, necessitated close control over both the day-to-day and the seasonal movements of people as well as cattle. This was made

possible by the erection of extensive enclosures at the outskirts of *meraka*. In the case of local pastoralism the enclosures were located at the centres of the settlements. The separation of crop land from pasture land was effected by lengthy fences and the practice of *go disa* (animal herding) the whole year round.

Fishing had been part of the economy since time immemorial; indeed, the Batlhaping, a Tswana ethnic group, relied heavily on fishing and trading in dried fish as part of a mixed economy alongside agriculture and stock raising. Oral tradition confirms that fish was consumed by this Tswana group and large quantities of it were exchanged for produce such as cereals, vegetables, fruits and handicrafts.

Hunting, in addition to providing food, apparel, and decoration, was essential to the protection of *metse*, crops and safe grazing. Indeed, hunting was closely linked to the other branches of production. Although large animals such as elephant and rhinoceros could destroy land and crops, they were a source of ivory which came to be valued in the external and internal trade of the region. In all Tswana areas, hunting was the specialisation of men whose families were mixed agriculturists and pastoralists.

2. Social relations, lineages, and modes of production

A common error made by many human scientists dealing with Tswana kinship is to confuse the levels at which kinship operates visibly. Kinship operates at two levels: that involving the hierarchy of institutions of descent and inheritance; and that maintaining the hierarchy between the dominant and the dominated in the social formation. Researchers' failure to explore the real meaning of the distinction between the two levels, and their persistence in studying only the form of kinship relating to descent and inheritance, has succinctly been described by Rey (1975: 35-6) as a "mystification" of the ethnological approach.

The following analysis will consider the kinship level which maintains the relationship between the dominant and the dominated and will therefore deal with *masika* (lineages) in terms of the

organisation of social relations of production.[1] However, the relations of production cannot be considered from the viewpoint of a single lineage, ignoring the collectivity of lineages and their geographical and ecological penetration and hierarchisation, because the latter define the role and indeed the form of the former.

The paucity of written evidence makes it difficult to explore the social relations of production before the disruption of African socio-economic systems. But this problem will be solved by using an alternative approach based on personal knowledge and experience as well as on the oral tradition[2] regarding known events.

The social formation of Tswana lineage and economic management enables its productive elements and their hierarchical arrangement and articulation to function in a Tswana mode of production. The *motse* and *metsana* (capital town and villages, respectively) where some of the production took place were closely involved in the reciprocity between lineages which governed exchange and reproduction and were linked at the ideological and political levels with the *kgosi*[3] (chief) and *dikgosana* (headmen). Neither the *motse* nor the *metsana,* nor even both, constituted the totality of social relations of production; some labour processes such as *godisa* (herding) and hunting which involved extensive and elaborate organisation were performed outside the *metsana* and *motse* and also outside the lineage.

The *kgosi* has always been the head of a lineage which dominated a number of others. The most elaborate instrument of this domination was the ideological penetration of "economic infrastructure" (Bloch 1975: 14), that is, the totality of the productive forces and of the social relations of human beings with each other and with nature

1 The phrase "relations of production" is utilised in the same sense as that applied by John Taylor (1975), namely to define a set of positions assigned to the agents of production in relation to the principal means of production.

2 Information transmitted to me by Tswana people was cross-checked with Breutz (1953a, 1953b, 1956).

3 The author prefers the term *kgosi* (for chief). The hierarchy of power rested with the *kgosi* at the apex of the pyramid. Below him according to Tswana tradition are the *dikgosana* (headmen). The terms *kgosi* and chief will be used interchangeably.

that depend on the level of development of those forces, and that programme and control the social process of production of material conditions of existence based on lineage relationship. The economic and social links between the *kgosi* (chief) and *dikgosana* (headmen) reinforced the domination of the royal lineage within each locality, and therefore controlled the totality of social relations of production consisting of *motse*, *metsana*, *meraka*, *masimo* and *letsomo* (hunting) areas with a total extent of several hundreds in some instances.

Each *motse* was confined within a territory marked by natural boundaries such as rivers, mountains, valleys, or waterfalls, and the areas came to be known by the names identifying such boundaries. Patrilineage membership, however, was based on *masika* who believed they shared descent from the same patrilineal ancestor since *tlholego* (creation) or time immemorial. Relations of genealogical seniority existed between the *dikgosana* of the various *masika*. The chief was the most senior and most direct descendent of the royal ancestors.

The cohesion of the *masika* and the authority of *kgosi* and *dikgosana* was derived from the presence of forces which depended wholly on the collectivity of lineages in their respective *metse*. The internal structure of the lineage must be described in order that the relationship between production and reproduction and their importance in the achievement of lineage domination may be understood.

3. Marriage and lineage

Tswana lineages were exogamous and the marriage of a wife required the transfer of cattle to the wife's lineage, followed after a year by a further transfer from the wife's lineage to the newlyweds who at this point would move to their new abode.

The Tswana *morafe* lived in sovereign states, that is, a group of people under a *kgosi* with a number of *dikgosana* in charge of *makgotla* (districts). The *morafe* was built up not only by military force exercised through the *bagwera*, but also to a large extent by marriage.

In the Tlokwa state, for example, which consisted of several related *maloko* (clans), each subordinate *leloko* or clan in the outlying villages whose *dikgosana* married a daughter from the royal

household of the *kgosi* enjoyed certain privileges and established an alliance with the central government of the *kgosi* (Pitje 1950: 53).

The children of the *morwadi-wa-kgosi* (daughter of the chief) enjoyed special status and her son became the future *kgosana* of the *leloko*. Such *maloko* were then given the right to *otla* (maintain) the sons of the royal lineage. This brought about changes in the contribution of *lekgetho* (tribute) from the members of the subordinate *leloko* in the form of cattle, the number of which was determined by the *kgosi*. This tribute could under these conditions be brought to the new *kgosi* and not to the central government as had been the case. However, at the end of every *kotulo* (harvest) the *kgosi* had to bring some *madume* (salutation) cattle. The number of cattle brought in this case was left to the discretion of the new *kgosana* by virtue of his being a *setlogolo* (nephew) of the royal lineage. The presentation of *madume* by the *kgosana* to the *kgosi* was designed to re-establish existing alliances and to affirm the *kgosi*'s supremacy, even though the royal nephew and his *leloko* were allowed an independent government (Monnig 1967: 287).

The *dikgosana* and the *kgosi* maintained their authority by adhering to a rigid process of production and reproduction in the economic sector. *Dikgosana* supervised a strict division of labour between pastoralism and cultivation in the *masimo* fields. For example, grazing livestock in the outposts far away from home was assigned to young adults of the same *mophato* (age groups) under the direction of a son of royal lineage who belonged to an older *mephato*. Although there were no legal prohibitions preventing women from grazing livestock it was regarded as improper to have women defending cattle against human and animal marauders at the cattle outpost; those women who owned cattle therefore relied on the authority of the *dikgosana* who assigned the *badisa* (shepherds or herdboys).

The initial clearing of the field and burning of trees and bush followed by the tilling of the soil using 'ploughs'[4] dragged by *dipholo* (oxen) has always been the responsibility of men.[5]

4 See Colin Bundy (1979: 46): "The missionaries indicated in 1848 that plough cultivation beyond the mission was 'rare indeed' but that it did occur and that draught cattle were reared for the express purpose of tillage and transport".

Reports by Europeans concerning the progress, prosperity and economic advancement of Africans in the nineteenth century and the precolonial era provide the following evidence:

> It has been seldom that the Natives here have been at all dependent on wages earned by entering the service of European [*sic*]. Nay! All, or nearly so, have ploughs [...] enabling them to dispose of produce on a much larger scale [...][6]

Cultivation was carried out by male children under the age at which they could register for *bogwera* (initiation school). Since the *masimo* were very large, the common practice was the use of *letsema* (organisations) composed of lineage based relationship groups. The community relied on reciprocal aid between *matsema* in various productive tasks such as planting, weeding, harvesting, threshing, winnowing, bagging produce, and so on. When all the work in the fields was completed, the men had to transport the produce to the villages on sledges and wagons. Thus the mode of production was based on the co-operation of the direct producers in the form of *letsema*, *mophato*, kinsmen and neighbours. Above all, a reciprocal obligation existed among them as a result of lineage and neighbourhood relations.

Control over cattle derermined the circulation of other products in the village, especially foodstuffs. Married female members produced food in the harvesting season for the use of their homes, the surplus going to the *kgosi*, who in turn supplied non-productive members of the community. Short-term storage of cereals was controlled by married females for the immediate needs of their households, but long-term storage was under the supervision of the *kgosi* and *dikgosana* who filled *difalana* (grain bins) with produce from the community surplus and distributed it in winter and at other times of

5 According to Keegan (1987) two-share ploughs (known as *mmadiketane*) were fairly common among the sharecroppers. Large spans of fourteen or sixteen oxen were commonly used in the fields.

6 See W A Illing, *Natal Blue Book, Native Affairs* (NBBNA) 1879, D. JJ 18. See also *Cape Parliamentary Papers*, G 21-75, G 16-76, G 12-177, G 17-178; Noble 1975: 230-34; *British Parliamentary Papers*, C2000, Frere to Carnavon.

scarcity. Indeed, storage in huge grain bins in the royal court yard symbolised the transfer of resources from female production units to the village royalty and lineage in the interests of its long- term security[7] and the improvement of the quality of life for all Batswana.

Although much of the neef for a surplus of crops and cattle was obvious in the sense that a considerable proportion was required for subsistence during the dry season and possible droughts, production of these major commodities was also influenced by participation in exchange. The surplus realised from such exchange was expressed in terms of cattle which the *kgosi* and *dikgosana* accumulated. Thus surplus was extracted from the direct producers, the married women, and also from the males who herded the cattle. *Dikgomo tsa mafisa* (cattle clientage) was also a means of extracting surplus from the labour of the villages which had insufficient stock, since it resulted in reproduction and increase in the donor's herd.[8]

The patrilineage and the villages which participated in the system of clientage could not be maintained in isolation: the capacity of the *dikgosana* to promote the lineage and their own authority depended on their ability to operate exchange relations with other lineages. Cattle payments between lineages in order to maintain their demographic structures reveal the existence of reciprocity between lineages which had identical interests in maintaining the system of cattle exchange. The reciprocity between *dikgosana* enabled cattle to be employed in the lineage system so as to perpetuate their power, and also to ensure the reproduction of the social formation as a whole.

The reciprocity which prevailed among the lineages of a chiefdom was established and maintained by the combination of one lineage

7 According to Kay (1834: 131), the "Boochuana [Tswana] are decidedly more provident and economical [...] They lay up their winter provisions in [...] subterranean granaries [...] [B]efore the corn is poured in[,] the interior is thoroughly plastered [...] with marerials which become so hard and imporous as to be proof against both air and water [...] Wheat thus preserved will keep for fifty years, and miller for more than a hundred".

8 This form of cattle clienrage, by which the wealrhy man placed his surplus cattle in rhe care of another who was rewarded with heifers is still pracrised occasionally to this day among the Batswana.

over all the others because the dominant lineage reproduced its own domination by its control over reproduction and hence over the production of other lineages, and also by its control of the power of the elders and of the subordinated lineages. The nature of the domination exercised by the dominant lineage can be seen in relation to the control of work processes which were not centred on the village and in the possibility of lineage expansion.[9]

A certain amount of cultivation and cattle raising could be carried out in the village for immediate consumption and the daily supply of milk and dairy products such as *madila* (curd and buttermilk). However, other labour process, closely related to the continuity of the lineage, were organised to a great extent outside the village and were more directly under the control of the collectivity of *dikgosana*.

The royal lineage, by maintaining a system of cattle exchange in which it set rates which were tied to the reproduction of the authority of the non-royal *dikgosana*, supported a system which gave its demographic reproduction expansive characteristics and gave it, in addition, cattle for social investment. Due to the imbalance in the exchange of cattle, a royal lineage could expand and establish villages with a substantial complement of cattle outside its own locality. These then became involved in the reproduction and production of the ordinary lineages.

As long as cattle played a very significant role in the economy of the Tswana royal lineage, its ability to extract surplus from non-royal lineages gave the royal lineage the power to control their production. For example, the royal lineage could employ its cattle surplus by granting *dikgomo tsa mafisa* (Monnig 1967: 165 & Ashton 1967: 181) to *dikgosana*. These patrilineages and their reproduction were then directly tied to the royal lineage and *dikgosana* were obligated to the *kgosi*, while the royal lineage secured the ecologically desirable dispersal of its cattle stock and its reproduction in the villages. The

9 In this manner the Tswana 'chiefdom' was created and maintained not so much by might but largely by diplomacy in economic relationships. Although I understand and appreciate the use of standardised terminology, the study of Tswana indicates a clear preference to the usage of *morafe* to mean 'chiefdom'.

cattle eventually had to be repaid with a proportion of the interest, namely heifers. It goes without saying, therefore, that cattle were not just valued as a visible sign of an individual's wealth in economic management.

The organisation of hunting and defence had a high priority in Tswana areas. Hunting the larger animals (elephant, hippo, buffalo, etc) was extremely dangerous and dreaded. Yet the elimination of these dangerous animals was essential to the cultivation and pastoralism which was undertaken outside the villages. Combined effort by *mephato* was required in hunting big game and this was done by a large number of men over a wide geographical area. Only such organised effort could fulfil the aims of the hunters and their role in the economic management.

Within the area of a particular lineage, the *tsomo* (hunt) was called by the *dikgosana* who appointed a hunt-leader. The latter controlled the manoeuvres, the hunting itself, intelligence gathering, chasing, harassing, killing, and stripping of animals.

Responsibility for the distribution of the product lay with the *dikgosana*. Some products were distributed to the participants on their dispersal at the end of the hunt, but products of exchange value were appropriated by the *kgosi*.

Fishing also involved collaborative organisation: here exploitation of the seasonally flooded rivers and lakes by means of nets covering a large surface area was managed by *mephato*.

The ideology of production centred on the powers which the *kgosi* and the *dikgosana* held by virtue of their relationship to the ancestors. They were the living representatives of the ancestors whose disposition concerning the favourable reproduction of the lineage continued even long after they were dead. Thus in strictly material terms, the network of cattle loans and land allocation requiring adjustment or litigation by the living necessitated reference to decision-making by the dead through the chief and *dikgosana*. But the influence of the ancestors was more generalised: the actual circumstances of a wealthy ancestor's descendants were seen to be dependent on the goodwill of the ancestors — a force mediated by

the *kgosi* and *dikgosana* in so far as they were responsible for conducting the lineage's affairs (Baines 1894: 271).

Both *kgosi* and *dikgosana* were held responsible for intercession for the general progress of the productive season — especially rain. If the rain failed in a particular locality, the *dikgosana* bore the responsibility of communicating with the *modirapula* (rainmaker) who had to relay prayers to the ancestors. When drought was more widespread all the *badirapula* in the country were assembled together to intercede with the ancestors of all the Tswana people, including those of the royal lineage. Indeed, the relative importance of the ancestors was the same as that of their most senior living representatives. Since each lineage's ancestors perpetuated its interests, the arrangement of ancestral spirits was the ideological expression of the reproductive structure.

Moreover, ancestral cults provided the legitimising equipment required to complete the ideological pre-eminence of the *kgosi*. By reference to the myth that the royal ancestors were those of the whole chiefdom, the actual ranking of the exogamous lineages in the chiefdom was explicable in terms of their descent from their royal lineage. This also extended to the king's economic power which was buttressed by the *mephato*:

> [P]art of the revenue came from the king's lands, the *masotla*. These were tilled, weeded, and harvested by the *morafe* collectively or by the regiments immediately after the *letsema* ceremony. The grain from these lands not only fed the king's family, but also the orphans and other needy people. Some was brewed into beer, *boyalwa*, drunk at national festivals (Mackenzie 1883: 125).

The ideological importance of the *kgosi* and the ideological structure of the chiefdom were demonstrated and renewed through the penetration of ideology in the annual sequence of agricultural production. While the allocation of resources and their exploitation through the lineage mode of production depended on the decisions of the senior *dikgosana* of the lineage, the general progress of production was conceived as resulting from the successful management of the agricultural cycle by the *kgosi*.

Complex ceremonials linked the *kgosi* and the *marema* to the agricultural cycle. There were *moletlo* (ceremonials) which generally

took place at each of the major stages of crop production and showed the decisive influence of the *kgosi* in the planting, harvesting, and consumption of the crop:

> The unique authority and prestige of the *kgosi* also derived from his ability to control the wealth of the realm by exercising general control over production. The land and its use were under his sole authority [...] The *kgosi* saw to it that every family had land. Immigrants had to obtain his permission to settle in the srate. He could banish undesirables from the land or merely expropriate their lands. His permission was sought whenever individuals wanted to loan land to friends (Vansina 1966: 327).

Planting began in late *Phupu* (September) or early *Phato* (October), depending on the rains and only after a forecast of climate had been undertaken by royal messengers in the warmest and most luxuriant part of the Tswana territory. It was also preceded by a male initiation ceremony referred to as *latswa-petlwana* (literally meaning lick the hoe). Royal messengers again inspected the most favourable areas at the end of November or early December, looking particularly at the early vegetables: the maturity of these indicated when the full cereal harvest, which would herald the ceremonial season, might be expected. Thus the history of Christmas is the history of the Tswana society of South Africa.

The origins of Tswana Christmas festivities are to be found in the Tswana ceremonials of *seloma ngwaga* (first fruit harvest) which was until recently held in several stages spanning much of December and January. During the course of this period ceremonies involving first the *kgosi* and the *dikgosana*, and subsequently a much wider attendance at the *moletlo* initiated the consumption of the new harvest. The *kgosi* was the first to partake ritually of the first fruits — pumpkins, melons, and cereals grown in the riverside beds which were more suitable for consumption at the opening of the *moletlo*. The cattle had to be safeguarded to ritually appease the ancestral lineages, after which the 'royal' cattle were taken to the harvested fields for grazing.

The ritual surrounding the *kgosi* during this period served to buttress and display supremacy in relation to his own lineage and chiefdom and also to the collective enemies. Indeed it was from this transition from apparent dearth to full harvest that the definitive

qualities of kingship, collectively known as *bogosi* (royalty) were developed.

The celebrations required the annual blessing of the royal ancestors, a feat achieved by the gathering of the 'spirit of the land' (namely the spirits of the royal ancestors) by members of the royal lineage. Thus

> the central role of this institution is reflected in the way he (the king) was addressed: *motho wa batho* (man of the people), rradikgutsana (father of the orphans). The country was often called after him: and people often proudly identified themselves as belonging to the king. Proverbs also pointed to the importance of kingship: *Le huko la kgosi lo agelwa mosako* (the king's word should be obeyed), and *kgosi ke modisa wa batho* (the king is the people's shepherd). Songs of the regiments also extolled *bogosi* (Schapera 1956: 28).

With the chief's position thus fortified, similar but simpler ceremonies could proceed in the villages of the royal notables, followed by those of *magosi* and finally the ordinary villages. The hierarchy of authority in relation to the chief was thus widely demonstrated; in the ordinary village the consumption of the new crops was prohibited until the ceremonials of the hierarchy had been completed. Any breach of the order of planting, harvesting and consumption was regarded as a breach of the hierarchy and thus as a threat to royal authority. It was met with heavy fines payable only in cattle.

The period of fortification of the *kgosi* and his hierarchy was also an occasion for some of the most intense political activity, concerning for example the allocation of land and the organisation of *bogwera* and hunting which usually took place after the fields had been harvested. The chief, who had up till then been in seclusion for a period of two weeks, emerged to become involved in political action which freshly demonstrated his authority. He could proceed to utilise this, whether in royal tours or in leadership during hunting or in warfare.

The involvement of the *kgosi* and the political hierarchy in the agricultural cycle demonstrated the strength of the links between the *kgosi* and the actual work processes of agricultural production. Since the *kgosi* interceded between the *morafe* and the royal *badimo* (ancestors), who were responsible for the well-being of the society, he was also involved in the 'rain-making' rituals:

> Rain-making was important among pastoral-agriculturists like the

> Tswana. The king, assisted by the *baroka* (poets), participated in rain-making ceremonies held annually. Only the king could send envoys to the [...] other chiefs for rain if Tswana *baroka* were unsuccessful. After the rains fell, the king inaugurated the ploughing season by [distributing the first] seed at the ceremony of *letsema* (Baines 1864: 272).
>
> No one could plough before then. *Letsema* continued to be observed (Price 1879: 36).

The *kgosi*'s involvement was also the vehicle for establishing the social acceptance of his ideological supremacy; this was essential to sustaining the organisation of the economy to the advantage of the ruling lineage, without needing to have recourse to physical coercion within the chiefdom. Hierarchical authority was sustained at the village level through the performance of labour by juniors from the earliest age, involving the acceptance of the authority of the societies' *dikgosana* and the *kgosi*. This was the ideological equivalent of the economic pressures used in the system of reproduction, such as the need for cattle in marriage.

The circulation of goods within the Tswana region was thus determined by a combination of forces deriving from the structure of lineage domination. Defence of the lineage territory was a collective task in which the authority of the chief was dominant. There was a close connection between hunting and defence. The dangers were similar and the means of confronting them the same — collaboration by a large group of the physically active male population was required. The defence of the lineage territory involved protracted training of the male youth which will now be described.

4. *Bogwera*: its productive strategies and defence of lineage territory

The *bogwera*, which has been mistakenly described as a secret society, was not secret in the strict sense of the word. Not only was its existence and general purpose known to every adult man, but in many cases a wide range of *bogwera* activities were known, for *bogwera* was the dominant social force among the Tswana (Monnig 1967: 118).

Bogwera is important not only because it is a man's association *par excellence* — but particularly because of the part it has played in

community affairs from time immemorial. Initiation into *bogwera* was virtually compulsory, partly because of its implication of adulthood and partly because non-initiates were not allowed to marry or hold positions of importance or participate in processes of decision-making, irrespective of their actual age. This explains the social control of the *bogwera* over the male population as well as its political power.

Bagwera were individuals grouped according to the society-wide initiation of *magwane* (adolescents) who after initiation into *bogwera* remained in the same *mophato* for life. Age-groups of varying seniority represented ranks with specific obligations to society. It was these societal obligations of the *mophato* principle that gave *bagwera* an advantage over the lineage principle in the distribution of power. *Bagwera* were viewed as *dikonatla* (people of power).[10] In short, what were originally *mafitlhelana-kgotla* (young fraternities) of children, united by common age and activities such as herding cattle, sheep and other domestic animals, became *dikwatla* (armies).

The Tswana *bogwera*[11] had to be highly professional and nationalised, since the political authority needed for a state as large as that of the Tswana could only be effectively developed and maintained by protracted and continuous political and military training of the young males. The political organisation demanded the mobilisation and training of the entire Tswana society. It was this atmosphere of perpetual training of the society and particularly the mobilisation and training of the *bagwera* that intensified the concentration of power and authority in the hands of *kgosi* and the military men and emphasised the predominance of the male *mophato* over the civilian sector, essentially women and the young.

10 *Mephato* (singular *mophato*) played an important role in the social and political life of the Tswana. They offered a type of relationship different from to that and complementary of 'blood' — thus further strengthening unity among the various social units.

11 Because of the bureaucratic apparatus of Tswana society, which was well organised and thus easier to centralise and control, *bogwera* is viewed here as an institution (including militarism) rather than just an 'initiation school'. Power and authority depended on this institution and the organisation was therefore more stable.

The traditional authoritarian strategy of *bogwera* as a political/military institution permeated all levels of civilian life so that the social, economic, political, and religious affairs of society were inseparable and interdependent. Thus *bogwera* was the basis for group solidarity and patriotism which were transmitted from generation to generation.

The use of leaders who were not necessarily members of the royal lineage and yet appointed by the *kgosi* to command *bogwera* activities created new opportunities for seniority and upward mobility within Tswana society. *Bogwera* was not governed by kinship restrictions or by royal power.

The initiation procedure was partly ceremonial and symbolic and partly instructional but it was designed first and foremost to turn the initiates into real *dikwatla*. In addition to various practical skills, Tswana history was taught, and training was also given for the position that an individual would hold in Tswana life, particularly to those of royal lineage in the case of. However, all this was secondary to the main function of *bogwera*, which was to impress upon the new members the sacredness of their duty to *femela morafe* (defend the nation).

Military education of the youth

> was taken so seriously that every adult male including the king was expected to participate in the teaching. Tswana songs stress the need to preserve their traditions by inculcating them in the minds of the young (Tlou 1972: 112).

A good deal of practical training was also inculcated to produce among the initiates a sense of *esprit de corps* and solidarity as members of one institution. The significance of the *bogwera* indoctrination for political/military roles becomes even more apparent if it is appreciated that the great majority never advanced beyond the *dikwatla* stage, and that the apex of the pyramid was occupied by *bagolo* (seniors) who were under the direct command of the *dikgosana* of behalf of the *kgosi*.

Through the *seloma-ngwaga* (first-fruit) ceremony an ideological identity was established between the *kgosi* and the *dikgosana* on the one hand and the *bagwera* on the other. The latter were initiated at the great

seloma-ngwaga ceremony and the initiation took place at the same time as the *tiisanyo* (mutual strengthening) of the *kgosi* and the *dikgosana*. Thus the physical and spiritual welfare of the *magwane* (adolescents) was associated with that of the *kgosi* and the royal lineage. The loyalty of the *bagwera* to the chief stemmed from this strengthening which seems to originate from the same source which formed and bound them together as a military-political-economic unit.

Some of the material and ceremonial objects used in the ritual during the 'strengthening' ceremony and brought to this occasion by parents of the initiates were added to the *kgosi*'s *thebe ya kagiso* (shield of peace). The shield physically symbolised defence and the binding together of the Tswana land and society. The need to produce a close association between the mystical appeal of the *kgosi* and the loyalty of the *bagwera* underlies the need for perpetual military training. As Tlou (1972: 113) has indicated, the importance of *bogwera* in Tswana life is:

> shown by the fact that despite demands by missionaries and [immigrant] government officials for their abolition, no king complied. Even when later, the ritual associated with regiment formation was abandoned, regiments (*bagwera*) continued to be created. This is because they were functional units whose abandonment might undermine the political and economic basis of kingship.

Nevertheless, all bureaucrats, subjects, *bagwera*, and *morafe* were wholly dependent on the *kgosi* and his government for remuneration, gifts and favours in the form of cattle, and consequently the *kgosi* enjoyed loyalty and obedience from his subjects. The entire military machinery was also under the effective control of the *kgosi* and this further enhanced his position. He alone could authorise the creation of *bogwera*, the assignment of a name to each *mophato*, its commander, its colours, the minting of its identification discs and its weapons. Exploitation of the mineral resources and the mining of gold, copper, and silver, was undertaken by *mephato* under the *kgosi*'s command and he maintained the sole possession of the products made from these minerals and control over their economic exchange for cattle. This stemmed from the need to control the *bagwera* as a military force.

It was from among the *bagwera* that professional smiths were trained and they alone could manufacture weapons of war, spears,

large axes and other weaponry. Only the *kgosi* could distribute these products to their respective *mephato*. The manufacture of military apparel from hide and skins also came under the control of the *kgosi*.

During their initiation males were prepared for defence. They were also obliged to go into battle for their nation. As an army the *bagwera* were also immunised to ensure their invincibility and safety from enemy weapons. The elaborate safeguarding of the *bogwera* lodge by the chief and his assistants was the first stage of the immunisation process. Thereafter, all the *mephato* were specially instructed whenever they went on dangerous missions, or before an expedition such as hunting or war. It is this which inspired the army to fight bravely.

Although the most senior leaders were not necessarily members of the royal lineage, different grades of *bagwera* were organised around the leadership of a son or other close relative of the *kgosi*.

As an institution of learning *bogwera* discouraged self-centred individualism among the young leaders and members of the military. Regardless of lineage the soldiers absorbed the myth of the unified nation and the official ideology of militancy, co-operation, obedience, bravery, and patriotism; thus they acquired a sense of history and responsibility, as well as feelings of belonging and fulfilment. In the course of their education they learned *maboko* (poems) as well as the dominant aristocratic attitudes, habits, and mannerisms of the Tswana. They also learned to be self-confident. The *bagwera* were graded in seniority according to their order of enrolment, and respectful behaviour was demanded (and could be enforced) from people belonging to a junior regiment, ie a regiment formed at a later date. The strong feeling of solidarity and mutual obligation among members of the same regiment was life-long; the attachment to their commander often extended even to partisanship in political strife.

Seniority in the *morafe*'s army could also be acquired through honours and cattle rewards. By performing bravely and brilliantly in the military sphere, a soldier was sure to win special favours and cattle rewards from the *kgosi* and *dikgosana*. Compared to the conservatively oriented Tswana lineage and bureaucracy, the *bogwera* was liberal and progressive. It possessed 'democratic' features because military careers were accorded only to the most able, vigorous, and

loyal citizens. The life of the *bagwera* was less bound by the traditional discriminatory conventions that prevailed among the Tswana *morafe*. The *bogwera* enabled anyone to elevate himself, subject only to military competence. Hence a competition for military excellence existed among the *bagwera*. As a direct result of this the *bagwera* were engaged in a continuous process of self-analysis and improvement, which was a powerful factor in increasing the 'cultural dynamism' of the whole society. The numerical strength of the *bagwera* depended on the military co-operation and success of its individual soldiers. When not on military service, *mephato* spent most of their time either in agricultural pursuits or on hunting expeditions; that is, in *matsema* organisations participating in the agricultural production sector. Thus, regardless of their lineage differences, the soldiers were bound together by strong feelings of comradeship and communalism, as by well as the awareness of cattle accumulation, honour, prestige, and status of being Tswana soldiers.

Bagwera built and extended the existing *magora* (fortifications) in the mountains behind their *metse* against onslaughts. These fortifications were kept in constant repair, and whenever there was any danger of attack, women, children and livestock were moved into these fortifications, where they could be more easily defended. Naturally, this also greatly diminished the dangers of cattle looting by invading armies.

The relationship between *bogwera* as an institution and *selomangwaga* as an annual ceremonial was the most unique Tswana feature, and it expressed a creativity which responded positively to their perennial problems of defence, social control and solidarity. The *bogwera* was a critical vehicle for state defence and the metamorphosis of the Tswana male personality. It was the academy of military defence and patriotism, with an emphasis on high standards of performance and on quality — all inspired by a strong sense of history and destiny.

So as to organise their mode of production the Tswana had to have a stable administrative machinery to incorporate the entire male population. Thus a multifunctional institution in the form of *mephato* had to maintain the cultural equilibrium between the ideology, authority and influence of the *bogwera* on the one hand, and the

ideology, authority and influence of the civilian sector and its economy on the other. The social relations and organization of the *mephato* played a very significant role in both the economic and the military sectors.

The Tswana mode of production was based on the social relations of lineages, thus this study of the political / economy and its strategies conceives of the Tswana lineage mode of production involving *mephato* not as external, but rather as an efficient mode of production, thus offering a positive understanding of Tswana economic management.

5. Conclusion

For the Tswana mode of production, the free association of *bogwera*, *mephato*, *matsema* and their joint labour in the production units represented advanced economic progress. With the destruction of the African political-economic systems and the conversion of African labour into a commodity, a social stratification emerged. A new path opened up which was linked to completely new forms of relations of production and was increasingly detaching the Tswana from the former communal relations of production. The 'forces' contributing to the destruction of the African political/economic system deprived the Africans of their social hierarchies and productive strategies and also contributed to the destruction of the African political/economic systems.

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