The Politics of Space and Place in the Tswapong Region, Central Botswana

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Résumé
Cet article retrace les changements observés ces deux dernières décennies dans le mode de création des établissements humains dans le Botswana central de l'Est. Il s'intéresse à la manière dont l'espace social a été redéfini quand de nouvelles communautés villageoises ont émergé dans des régions auparavant identifiées comme zones agricoles. Dans leur effort visant à redéfinir leurs droits respectifs à la terre, les divers groupes de la région n'ont pas seulement altéré l'organisation spatiale visible, mais aussi les divisions sociopolitiques et économiques essentielles à l'intérieur de la population régionale. Cet article, s'inspirant de Foucault, examine la manière dont le changement apparent dans les relations spatiales a été structuré, et dont il a affecté la redistribution des richesses et du pouvoir dans cette région.

Introduction
This study of the changes in the settlement pattern in East-Central Botswana over the last two decades is concerned with the way in which social space was redefined when new village communities emerged in areas which had formerly been known as open agricultural zones. In tracing the struggles of people in four cases of village emergence to redefine their rights over land, collective identities, and social histories, the article not only explores a critical phase in the social history of group relationships in Botswana but also raises for discussion larger questions.

The first fieldwork from 1982 to 1984 was supported by a grant from the NSF and Sigma Xi and a Sachar Fellowship. I also wish to thank the anthropology department at Holy Cross College for granting me time off from teaching to carry on the second field research and the organizers of the International Conference on Ethnicity and Nationalism held in Grahamstown, South Africa for funding my return to this part of the world in 1993. Finally, I wish to thank the anonymous reviewers of this article whose excellent comments have helped me clarify several points in my presentation.
about the relationships between spatial organization on the one hand and political and cultural systems on the other.

The organization of space, according to Daniel Bell (1978, quoted in Harvey 1992, 201), has become "the primary aesthetic problem of mid-twentieth century," replacing the notion of time, which preoccupied people during first decades of this century. The most important and theoretically significant discussions on space and social order have been published since the early 1970s by key social theorists such as J.P. Bourdieu (1971, 1977), A. Giddens (1979, 1984), and, most critically, M. Foucault (1970, 1975, 1984). To be sure, the concern with spatial order in social theory and ethnography is not new and can be traced back to the early evolutionary and functional theories of Morgan, Durkheim, and Mauss (Lawrence and Low 1990, 456).1 Discussions of social spaces were also prominent among British structural-functionalists, who have always included a description of house forms and settlement plans in introductory chapters to their books. Yet both British functionalists and Boasian "salvage ethnographers" — who were similarly obsessed with recording every detail of the construction and techniques of building and settlement forms — offered little theoretical exploration. They accorded spatial organization only a passive, reflective role in social life. Foucault wondered why "space was treated as the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile" in these grand theories (1984, 70). In a series of critical works published from 1970 to the mid-1980s, Foucault focussed his attention on the relationship between power and space. In theorizing about the links among space, power, and knowledge, Foucault not only explored the evolution and "production" of social spaces (such as military hospitals, factories, and planned towns), but also examined the impact of such spaces on both individual behavior and the mechanisms of political and social control.

Drawing on Foucault, this article explores the ways in which space was produced and transformed in rural Botswana. The main question posed is, "how space itself functions as an object of social struggle" (Amsden 1979, quoted in Lawrence and Low 1990, 484). For if space, as Foucault has argued, is always a container of social power, then the reorganization of space documented in this article must indicate a transformation in social relationships and in the distribution of social power. The article examines how the
apparent change in spatial relationships has been structured and how it has affected the redistribution of wealth and power in this region. In addressing this question, I take my cues from the practice-centered theories of Giddens (1979, 1984) and Bourdieu (1977). Space, in this view, is not the external environment, but the very expression of social action. People as active agents redefine and compete over the definition and use of social space. This article examines how individuals and groups in the region manipulate and, in some instances, even invent local historical charters that will legitimate their collective claims to land. The main point is that historical narratives of community and entitlement become central in the new discourse of rights to spaces in the region.

In the process of struggling to redefine their respective rights to land, various groups in the region alter not only visible spatial arrangements, but also key sociopolitical and economic divisions within the regional population. The spatial arrangement that has emerged is thus a product of, and a site for, a wider set of understandings of community, self, and modernity.

Social Space as a Container of Social Power — Tswana Scenes

The relatively fertile eastern part of Botswana, which stretches along the catchment basin of the Limpopo River, exhibits a largely uniform settlement and land use pattern. Ideally, this pattern consists of three concentric zones: a clustered village settlement in the center surrounded by arable field plots, beyond which lie open grazing areas. This pattern of land use generates a seasonal migration of people between their permanent residence in the village settlement and a second dwelling erected next to the fields in the agricultural zone, often called “the lands.” Ideally, residence in the agricultural zone (“the lands”) lasts only as long as necessary to complete all production work in the fields. At the end of the agricultural season, most people return to the village center to socialize, celebrate, and resolve their disputes in the central court arena or kgotla. Unlike the clustered residence in the village, dwellings in the lands area, situated next to individual fields, are often dispersed, made of less durable materials, and associated with social isolation. Cattle, which provide draft power, are driven at the end of the ploughing operation away from
the unfenced cultivated fields to the more distant open grazing zone. In this third zone, herders live in makeshift temporary dwellings next to water sources. For most people, herding the family's cattle and living in the cattle-post is a phase of life. Young males about eight to seventeen years old do the herding. People who own large herds hire adult herders, often of Basarwa origin, who live permanently in such distant grazing areas.

Dwelling in the clustered village is strongly associated with full citizenship and membership in the social entity. People who do not keep their house in the village are called "bush people" (Motzafi-Haller 1988). The idiom of the "bush" (naga) as the uncontrolled, dangerous, and unbounded zone is contrasted with the public social domain of the village (motse). While the clustered village is the hub of social life and the center of political law and order, the open outer bush zone is the residence only for politically inactive males, including adolescent herders, impoverished clients, and serfs. People who do not settle down, like the nomadic Basarwa (Bushmen), are said to be like wild animals (diphologolo fela) who "move around the forest."

This ideological distinction between clustered villages and the uncontrolled "bush" has its spatial representation in the structure of each Tswana residential center. Even the smallest Tswana village has at its center a kgotla, a crescent-shaped wall of thick poles facing towards an open cleared arena. The kgotla is the nexus of public life and the site of the local court presided over by the village headman. Visitors are led to the kgotla arena, and its size and state of repair are often cited as an indication of the "proper order" of the village. One of the first collective actions of residents who wish their settlement to become a village is the building of this central arena. The kgotla provides the most visible expression of aspirations of status.

The roots of this settlement and land use arrangement can be traced back to the sociopolitical structure of the nineteenth century Tswana polities (merafe) in the area. At the top of the political hierarchy of each Tswana polity stood a king, or kgosi, who resided with his followers in a large, central clustered town. People walked from the town to their fields and to the grazing areas beyond. Early eyewitness accounts (Burchell 1853; Campbell 1815; Mackenzie 1871) and analysis based on more recent archaeological findings suggest that during the eighteenth and early
nineteenth centuries, only hunters and the king's serfs resided outside the capital town, while all other citizens of the polity were clustered around their ruler in a single central settlement. Further elaboration into this concentric political and spatial arrangement occurred towards the second half of the nineteenth century, when several Tswana kingdoms expanded and incorporated local groups into their sociopolitical structures. The indigenous population, made to pay tribute to the Tswana ruler, resided in its original settlement outside the large, clustered capital town (Schapera 1938, 1970; Tlou 1977; Parsons 1977). Most of the local headmen of these subjugated people retained the right to own arable land in the vicinity of their village settlements and to control the allocation of that land to their followers (Schapera 1938, 7-11, 94-95). Smaller village communities spread around the region outside the large precolonial capital town were often the home for groups classified as inferior to the core group clustered around their king. Social and political hierarchies have been directly represented in the spatial organization of the Tswana world.

More Recent Transformations in Spatial Arrangements

Many aspects of the socioeconomic and political organization of the precolonial Tswana polities were transformed towards the latter part of the nineteenth century, first by encapsulation into the market economy, and then by the declaration of a British Protectorate over the area (Motzafi-Haller 1988, 21-23, 60-72). A predominantly independent and self-sufficient local economy became a dependent periphery that supplied cheap labor to the expanding industrial South African center. Despite these dramatic changes, large clustered towns and the three-tiered concentric land-use system associated with them continued to be basic features of human settlement in contemporary Botswana. The National Migration Study concluded: "there is evidence that this precolonial settlement pattern is remarkably well-conserved even up to the present" (1982-83, 3: 826).

Significantly, the pattern of a permanent residence in a clustered village and a temporary one in its surrounding agricultural zone (in agricultural land areas and cattle-posts) continues to serve as the basic model for recording the residence of the population to
this day. The most recent 1991 census, as did previous ones, recorded the population of each village as being composed of two groups: (1) the resident population in the village and (2) people in “localities associated with” that named village settlement. This official classification became the subject for competitive contrivance and redefinition in the rural areas (Botswana 1992).

However, significant variations from this ideal settlement pattern were becoming more evident by the early 1980s. The National Migration Study recorded that some forty-six percent of the rural population of Botswana resided “more or less permanently” outside the clustered villages in what was described, for lack of better terms, as “non-village locations” (1982-83, 1: 26). The record could not be ignored. “Despite this relative freezing of the precolonial ecological-cum-ethnic settlement patterns into reserves and later Districts,” the government-commissioned study noted, “it must be admitted that the combined effects of the recent urbanization patterns, some permanent settlement at the lands/cattle posts, and the new Tribal Land Laws, have begun to erode the settlement patterns at least within each District” (National Migration Study 1982-83, 2: 836).

The new Tribal Land Laws were part of a larger agrarian reform known as the Tribal Grazing Land Policy (TGLP). Promulgated in 1974, the TGLP proposed a redefinition of the existing “traditional” land use pattern, in an effort to rectify what planners saw as an alarming process of overgrazing and deterioration of the veld. Under the “traditional” land use system, every tribesman had the right to graze his cattle in open communally-held “tribal lands” (as distinct from “state land” and privately held land). The policy proposed the division of the tribal lands into three zones — communal, commercial, and reserve (Motzafi-Haller 1988, 82-85). The TGLP followed two earlier legislative reforms, The Chiefs’ Bill of 1965 and the Land Act of 1968. The first bill established a network of local customary courts presided over by salaried headmen, who were to follow a written code provided by the District Tribal Authority. The Land Act granted to the newly elected Land Boards the right, hitherto held by local “traditional” headmen, to allocate land for residential and agricultural use.

The national study confirmed similar findings reported in several micro-studies carried out around the country (Syson 1972; Kooijman 1978; Hitchcock 1984; Comaroff 1982). Taken together,
these studies documented a general trend of territorial transformation throughout the country. The main parameters of this territorial change were the dispersal of population out from the clustered village centers, as well as a concurrent emergence of permanent communities in areas which were within the agricultural zone.

What is the meaning of this evident spatial transformation, and to what extent is it indicative of a more profound shift in the social and political fabric of life in various districts around the country? In developing the analysis of the Tswapong case, I draw on analyses that have explored the unfolding struggles over the use and definition of space in Botswana as part of a wider process of class emergence within specific regional populations (Comaroff 1982; Gulbrandsen 1984; Peters 1983, 1994; Werbner 1971). The broad theoretical aim of such work, as R. Werbner put it, is “to link the study of state intervention to what are problems of ethnicity, class conflict, and center-periphery relationships in a new nation” (1982, i). Particularly useful is Pauline Peters’ work, which emphasizes that struggles among different groups and categories are “struggles over meaning as much as struggles over resources” (1994, i). As does Peters, I argue that the struggle is not only over who is to control particular parcels of land and to secure services provided by the new state, but also over the very definition of community, leadership, and social hierarchy.

The Tswapong Region — Boundaries, Population, and Settlement Pattern

For the purposes of this study, the Tswapong region is defined as the area within the following boundaries: to the south, the Palapye-Martin’s drift road; to the north, the Tamasane-Bobonong road and the Seoka stream; to the east, the rail line; and to the west, the privately owned Tuli Bloc farms. The population of the fourteen village communities within these boundaries constitutes an electoral unit known as the “Tswapong North” constituency, which sends its own representative to the national parliament. This area, with some minor variations, is delineated as a separate unit for planning and other administrative purposes.

The Tswapong hills region lies within the Palapye-Serowe Sub-District, one of five administrative units within the large Central District. The Central District — created out of the colo-
nial Ngwato “tribal reserve” — is the largest in the country, both in area (147 730 square kilometers, about a quarter of the area of Botswana) and in population (about one-third of the national population). This large district contains great diversity in ecological, economic, and settlement patterns. The Tswapong area, lying at its center and east of the rail line, is the most densely populated one in the district. It has the most surface water in the district and is known as a comparatively favorable place for arable agriculture (Botswana 1977, 1-3).

Settlements in the Tswapong region tend to be small and located at the base of hills near water sources. Agricultural lands, cultivated by residents of the clustered village communities, are close by, at a distance of one to several hours’ walk away from the village residence. The arable land cultivated by residents of each village community tends to fall within one or more named land area blocks, which are locally known to “belong to” a specific village community. There are only very limited grazing areas in the vicinity of the arable fields because of the high density of human settlement in the region. Narrow strips of pasture land are available on the top of hills and in several locations between the cultivated zones of two neighboring villages. Herd owners from several villages use this limited area. Larger grazing areas are located outside the clustered residential and agricultural zones to the northeast (around the village of Tamasane) and to the northwest (along the Lotsane river and next to the Elibi and Seoka streams). In 1981, the total population of the Tswapong region — calculated on the basis of the enumerated population in the fourteen villages, as well as that in agricultural lands and cattle-posts “associated with” these villages — was about 21 000. By 1991, this figure had risen to about 25 000 (Botswana 1981, 1992).

In 1981, the average population in a clustered Tswapong village settlement (based on the population within the village settlement, excluding those living outside this center) was about seven hundred people. In 1991, the average village population was 1 067. The two largest villages in the region are Lerala and Maunatlala, with populations, respectively, of 1 800 and 1 500 in 1981, and 3 800 and 2 100 in 1991. In 1993, the dirt roads leading to these two major Tswapong villages were rapidly being transformed into modern two-lane tarred roads. Towards the end of 1983, most villages in the region enjoyed reliable drinking water,
as well as some access to health and educational services. A few of these services were also made available to residents of the non-village sites in the agricultural zone. The availability of these “modern” amenities and the attempt by people who resided in several non-village sites to secure them will play a significant role in the local struggles explored in the following sections of this article.

The Tswapong region reflects many of the economic patterns characteristic of rural Botswana as a whole (Botswana 1975, 88-93, 121; Lipton 1978). A large percentage of the regional population engages in labor migration and is thus absent from its village home. In 1981, from twenty-two to thirty-six percent of the surveyed working age population of Tswapong villages was absent from its home villages, with most of the men\(^5\) engaged in long-term work contracts in South African mines. Preliminary analysis of the micro-data from one Tswapong village in 1993 suggests that the number of men employed within Botswana — in mines and in urban centers — has been increasing steadily as employment in South Africa has become restricted. The number of absent women has also increased over this past decade, as more rural women find employment as domestic servants in Botswana’s growing number of urban middle-class homes.

The area, like many other rural peripheries in Botswana, offers very limited local employment opportunities beyond a few sales positions in local stores and government and district bodies. Data extracted from the 1981 census show that most of the economically active population in the area was engaged in subsistence agriculture. Maize, sorghum, beans, and watermelons produced in family plots were largely consumed by members of the household. Some more affluent farmers were able to sell part of their agricultural produce. In small villages, the sale of agricultural produce was almost unheard of.

Another important socioeconomic feature of the regional profile relevant for our discussion here is the degree of intervillage economic variability. Available data suggest that the larger the village, the higher the average income of its dwellers. My analysis of the national census data for the Tswapong population in 1981 showed a strong correlation between village size and the economic level of its residents. This pattern was in agreement with a national pattern recorded by the Rural Income Distribution
Survey carried out in the early 1970s (Botswana 1975, 88-93, 121). The historical roots of this pattern of socioeconomic intervillage differentiation and its correspondence with settlement size will be discussed later.

Perceptions of History, Perceptions in History — Land, Community, and Group Relationships in the Tswapong Region

It was evident, early on in my fieldwork, that the organization of people in space in this region is directly linked to the peripheral position of this region within the large encompassing postcolonial District and the precolonial Ngwato polity it replaced. Many of the contemporary struggles over land and the resultant shifts in settlement pattern and land use are rooted in the particular history of the region. Indeed, the territory of the large Central District in contemporary Botswana largely corresponds to the boundaries of the precolonial Ngwato kingdom. [The District Land Board is still known as the "Ngwato Land Board."\]

Serowe, the administrative center of the district, has been, since the early 1900s, the capital town of the Ngwato lineage — at the top of the political hierarchy of the precolonial Ngwato Kingdom. When the Ngwato expanded their control in the late 1860s over the Tswapong-Hills region, which lies to the northeast of Serowe, they allowed the local ethnically diverse population of the Hills region a large measure of self-rule, as long as tribute was paid to the ruling center. A key element in the history was the peripheral, and eventually subject, position of the Tswapong regional population vis-à-vis the dominant centralized Ngwato kingdom.

The precolonial history of settlement in the Tswapong Hills region can be divided into two main periods. The first was characterized by a fluid organization of politically independent small groups, lasting until the early 1800s when the region became a frontier zone separating the two rising state powers of the Ngwato to the southwest and the Ndebele to its northeast. The second period began about 1860, when the last stronghold in the Tswapong region, Lerala, fell under the force of the increasingly powerful Ngwato king, and the area became a tribute-paying periphery of the centralized Ngwato kingdom.

The early political history (of the pre-Ngwato era) was charac-
terized by the migration of several waves of Sotho-speaking people from the south, who incorporated into their social and kin networks the sparsely populated iron-working communities of the region. By the late 1700s, one migrating group, known as the Moremi-Pedi, established itself as the "spiritual lords" of the Hills. Incoming groups who wished to settle in the region had to receive permission from the leader of the Moremi-Pedi, a man named Mapulana, and pay tribute. Yet Mapulana and his group did not create a centralized power structure in the region. A fluid hierarchy of groups emerged; order of entry into the region and agnatic relationships among fragments of a single totemic group were the main criteria. In oral histories that I collected in the hills in the early 1980s and in 1993, the claim of the Moremi-Pedi group to what might be called their "moral dominance" over the Hills was widely acknowledged. Regardless of their origin, people who resided in the Hills reported that only the Moremi people could bring rain by contacting their ancestral spirits. Villagers also noted that one village was "senior" to another because of a putative agnatic link between their respective ancestors. But such seniority did not entail privileged access to resources or control over other local groups.

The onset of the Difiqane civil wars and the periodic raids by Kololo and Ndebele armies from the south by the early 1820s brought havoc and confusion to the resident population. Oral accounts maintain that the Ngwato ruler was invited into the region to protect the people from raids by the more ruthless Ndebele [Mackenzie 1871, 366]. The initial relationships between the Ngwato group and the Tswapong population, as many Tswapong informants insist, were thus based on a mutual agreement of protection and were not a result of military subjugation. Over the course of the following decades, however, the population of the Hills found itself rapidly transformed into political subjugation. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the regional population was effectively administered by the Ngwato ruler, and its place at the lower ranks of the stratified Ngwato state system was fixed. As one observer noted in 1888:

The Bachwapong and Bakalahari speak a dialect of Sechwana and are of lower and inferior rank. Many of their petty chiefs own flocks and herds and they are distinguished from the still
lower Masarwa by these possessions and the cultivating of
gardens.6

Towards the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the
Ngwato king had established an effective system of administra-
tion by positioning his own relatives and trusted commoners as
resident governors in the region and by systematizing tribute
collection. In 1896, a visitor to the Tswapong region reported: “all
these villages are placed under Bamangwato who collect taxes
from them”7

Political subjugation also resulted in significant demographic
changes in the region. In 1895, as part of his effort to ward off
encroachment into the region from Transvaal white farmers, the
Ngwato king Kgama sent a group of Babirwa to settle in the
Tswapong. In 1898, Kgama had ordered several groups of people
out of his large capital town and sent them to settle in the
Tswapong. A few years later, in 1903, he ordered the clustering
together of several local villages into one large “rural town,”
which was ruled by his appointed governor (Schapera 1970, 85).

These recent immigrants contributed not only to growing
pressure on land in the region, but also to an increasingly elabo-
rate structure of differentiation among groups and social cate-
gories within the regional population. Superimposed on the
existing local political organization of groups (which was predi-
cated on order of entry into the region and agnatic relationships
within totemic groups) was a hierarchy based on rank within the
stratified Ngwato political system. The groups sent out of the
Ngwato capital were ranked higher than the resident population
of the Hills. Thus, for example, the Maunatlala-Birwa sent to
reside in the Tswapong towards the end of the century were
considered equal to the Ngwato core group. Marriage between the
Ngwato royal family and the Maunatlala-Birwa core group estab-
lished and signified such rank. In another example, residents of
the Hills who belonged to another high ranking group (the Bakhu-
rutshe) served as tribute collectors, entrusted with delivering such
tribute to the Ngwato center. This intergroup hierarchy has
continued to structure relationships in the region and underlies,
as we shall see below, much of the more recent intervillage strug-
gles. On the whole, the few larger villages found in the Tswapong
were created by, and largely composed of, the higher ranking
groups who entered the region under Ngwato orders, while most
of the small villages were composed of various lower ranking "Pedi" groups, who later came to be known as "Batswapong" (or Matswapong) (Motzafi-Haller 1993).

This very sketchy political history provides the background for understanding the internal composition of the regional population and the processes which led to the relatively high population density in the region. It is the backdrop against which people contested and negotiated their communal rights and emerging identities.

_The Larger Research Project_

The analysis proposed in this article is based on archival and field research carried out in Botswana from 1982 to 1984 and again in 1993. During the main period of research in the early 1980s, I observed and documented the local expressions of several aspects of sociospatial transformation in the Tswapong region in east-central Botswana (Motzafi-Haller 1988, 1995). Specifically, I identified three interrelated processes. First was a dramatic erosion of existing social and political mechanisms which had regulated the distribution and control over land. This process was documented by providing detailed micro-data on one small village and its changing relationships to the surrounding arable land. By tracing the socioeconomic profiles of all eighty-two resident households in the village and analyzing their respective access to family plots in the four named "land areas" known to belong to that village, I found that there was a growing threat to "village lands" by those defined as "outsiders."

The second process was the rise of an incipient land hungry regional elite, which increasingly used tractors for cultivation, hired local labor, and fenced in cultivated plots. The local politics of a large village from which these affluent farmers came was documented, as was their relationships to their neighboring small villages. A third critical process of regional change was the emergence of several new permanent settlements in the agricultural zone. I describe the struggle of three local settlements — two former "lands areas" and one former "cattle-post" — to be officially recognized as "established villages" by the state. In 1993, I was able to follow up on some aspects of the first process outlined above, but most of my time was devoted to investigating the outcome of the three local cases I recorded as part of the third
process. I also came across a fourth case of a village which had emerged in the 1990s. The rest of this article will focus on this decade-long process of village emergence.

At the core of each of the four case studies of village-emergence there is an attempt to present and establish a unique historical charter, one that repositions the emerging community within existing patterns of group relationships. Why were new settlements emerging to assert their communal identities at that point in time? What, in the larger scheme of things (in the context of the other two processes outlined above), was the effect of the emergence of these new settlements on social and economic patterns linked to distribution of and access to land? These were the key questions I posed in 1982-83 and continued to ask in my 1993 research.

In addition, I asked why people were using the language of “traditional” affiliations and rights to establish their collective identities. What collective claims and rights were contested through such historical charters? How were people within and outside these emerging communities explaining, justifying, or resisting these claims?

**Manaledi – A Relocated Village Community**

The hand-painted sign – “Manaledi village” – leads the traveler off the main dirt road that links the village of Gotau to the regional administrative and commercial center, Palapye, and into a narrower winding road. A few miles further down that road, a “typical,” post-independence, small village scene is revealed. At the center of the settlement, one reaches a newly built kgotla arena, with an adjacent kraal. Next to the open kgotla – and clearly part of the central public space – are two square, pink-painted, single-room buildings. Constructed by the District Council to house school teachers and other locally employed government officials, these uniform buildings (always painted pink and positioned next to the kgotla arena) are rapidly becoming a trademark of every little village in the region. The most critical signifier of Manaledi’s “established village” status is a borehole supplying fresh drinking water to several taps located throughout the small settlement. Only ten years earlier, this typical small village scene was a dream, a vision fought for by a small group of people.

In 1983, when I first visited Manaledi, only two residential
units (*malwapa*) could be seen near the small *kgotla* arena. There was nothing else to indicate that a village with a semblance of public life was in existence. In official records, Manaledi was defined as a “lands area” belonging to the village of Ratholo. The 1981 national census recorded seventy-three people who occupied fifteen of the existing twenty-three dwelling units in the Manaledi locality. Indeed, the settlement had the physical characteristics of many “lands areas” – dispersed residence of family units next to their fields and a lack of public services (school, water, local shops). Still, Manaledi residents, in 1983, insisted that they lived in an autonomous village (*mots*, not a peripheral lands area of the larger neighboring village. Their struggle to redefine their relationships to their social space took two main avenues. They actively sought to restructure their spatial organization by moving their dispersed hamlets closer to the central *kgotla*, and they worked very hard to secure official recognition of their village as an “established village.” They wrote letters to District officials, petitioned the Land Board, and told the following local history to their visitors.

Their original village was located on the top of the nearby hill at a place called Maboong. Maboong was an old settlement, and its history is linked to a man named Keatoletse, the son of the legendary Mapulana, leader of the Moremi-Pedi group, who, to this day, is known as the “spiritual lord” of the Tswapong hills. In their version of the regional history, people in Manaledi acknowledge that the small village of Moremi, to their northwest, is indeed the place where Mapulana and his son, Senwedi, made their home. Keatoletse, their founding ancestor, the son of Mapulana (the son of the senior wife, in their version) was left behind in Maboong when the main group continued its migration to the other side of the hills. Since then, these descendants of Keatoletse lived in Maboong. Beginning in the late 1950s, however, many chose to remain in their lands’ residence located at the foot of the hills because this lands area was closer to the main road. This land area is called Manaledi. By the late 1960s and after independence, the old village settlement in Maboong was completely deserted. The permanent settlement in Manaledi lands meant, however, that there had been no effective leadership. For more than a decade, throughout the 1960s and until the mid-1970s, their dispersed residence pattern and lack of leadership worked against
any expression of communal or political cohesion.

The first impetus for the reorganization of their community emerged in the mid-1970s, following the establishment of Land Boards in the country. The democratically elected Land Boards replaced traditional chiefs as the land allocation bodies in Botswana. However, the local impact of this policy was felt only towards the mid to late 1970s, when sub-district Land Boards were elected. A group of affluent farmers from the neighboring Gotau village had applied for a large plot of land from the newly elected Land Board in order to construct a cattle-watering dam. The area allotted for the dam project was not cultivated at the time, but according to Manaledi people, it fell within the area which "belonged" to their village. The Manaledi headman, now permanently resident in the lands areas himself, began to play a more active role in the locality. As a first step in the fight against the dam project, he suggested that the Manaledi people should elect committees similar to those he had seen emerging in other villages. He, himself, was elected chair of the Village Development Committee (VDC). He also encouraged people to rebuild their houses clustered around the new kgotla arena. As the chair of the new VDC, the headman sent a letter to the various district bodies stating that his people wished to be recognized as a village – independent from Ratholo. Official response came only in 1984, when two distinguished visitors – the Tswapong-North Member of Parliament and the Tribal Authority Officer – summoned a public meeting in Manaledi.

The first indication that their claims for independent village status had been officially approved was the beginning of a local public project – an access road to their settlement. Manaledi residents hired for that project were paid by state funds. Then the cement, pink-painted rooms were constructed. Although no locally employed government or council workers have made use of these accommodations since they were built, these new symbols of modern village settlements send a clear message of the "established village" status of Manaledi. In 1991, the growing settlement enjoyed clean drinking water after a borehole was drilled. The expanded infrastructure of the settlement and the stability and public esteem it bestowed on Manaledi attracted many new people to live in the village. In 1993, I was told that there were eighty-three residential units in the village. This was
almost double the number I estimated a decade earlier (forty-two), and four times the number recorded by the 1981 census. Although children of Manaledi continued to walk seven kilometers to the Ratholo school, villagers were confident that their local school would soon be built. There was even talk of hiring a lawyer to fight for the control over the newly completed water dam erected by the small group of Gotau farmers.

The Manaledi case illuminates several important elements in the process of redefinition of space and the concomittant transformation of social relationships in the region. First, it shows that a political history of group relationships rooted in colonial and precolonial times continues to provide a powerful charter for intervillage association in post-independence days. Contemporary claims to communal land and collective definitions of social spaces are argued and gain legitimacy, both locally and among the relevant official bodies, through such historical positioning. Both local and official actors shared the necessary knowledge to establish or contest the claims for the access to, and the use of, space. Moreover, the position of post-colonial officials in this case was clearly articulated within the sociopolitical and cultural framework. District officials were never seen as impartial, objective, or external to local struggles. On the contrary, they were directly linked to the colonial and precolonial structure of Ngwato centralized hegemony and were thus addressed as the still powerful "people of Serowe" – Serowe being the Ngwato capital town turned into the administrative center of the post-colonial District. Once this is recognized, we can view the struggles and contests over claims to space as attempts to establish new collective rights within a seemingly obsolete "traditional" hierarchical order. Thus, in tracing their communal history back to the founding members of the Moremi-Pedi group, the Manaledi people were arguing for their collective position above, rather than as subsidiaries to, the larger village they were considered in the 1980s to "belong to." Significantly, prolonged dispersal and lack of physical existence as a clustered village community had not undermined such collective historical claims. In other words, while the physical, spatial articulation of village communal life may change, the collective rights to land vested in the sociopolitical entity are inalienable.
The Manaledi people were not only advancing the claim to their independent (and higher) position vis-à-vis the neighboring village; they were also arguing against the right of the lower ranking Gotau people to use their lands. Interestingly, and here is the second point, the Manaledi people had never directly addressed the fact that a small group of rich farmers proposed a project that was to exclude people, regardless of their village of origin. The objection was to a category of “Gotau people” and to what was considered to be unjustified claims of this village-based communal entity vis-à-vis the historically justified collective right of Manaledi people. “Traditionalist” discourse provided the most powerful and effective way of contesting a new kind of threat by exclusive, emerging class-based claims.

A third element stands at the heart of the politics of space unfolding in the Tswapong region. It concerns the unintended outcome of the multiple struggles – struggles that are material and cultural at the same time. In addition to the competition for land and the intricate manifestation of state power in this local scene, there is evidence for a critical shift in the perception of rights and in the meaning of community. The contradictory interpretations of community and rights are carried out simultaneously.

As we have seen, only after the farmers from Gotau laid claims to a specific parcel of land did the “dormant” communal awareness of Manaledi people “awaken.” An external threat acted as the impetus for communal action – the construction of a dam by those defined as “outsiders.” Prior to that threat, there was never any question or need to make explicit (and act upon) the collective right over such land or to articulate the corporate entity that legitimated such claims.

The appropriation of space for individual or exclusive small group purposes that has been felt in this region since the late 1970s has made incumbent a new understanding. Space became something malleable, dominated through investment, and thus alienable and fragmented. It is against this kind of new threat that “traditional,” historical charters were activated and provided the basic language of discourse. The logic of a “traditionalist” historical discourse – one that established the corporate rights of a village-community to adjacent lands – was invoked and used within a new reality of growing demands of exclusive rights to land. Once the process of fixing rights to land was set in motion,
local knowledge of whose rights to what land would prevail was fiercely debated. The community that was to emerge based on such “traditionalist” justifications was thus a rather novel organization. New forms of local participation (elected committees) and access to new resources (public facilities and a dam) gave rise to a very different community – one struggling to maintain and redefine its claims for land in the face of fierce competition. In the next case, social efforts to attach meaning to action and communication are played out in a rather different set of circumstances.

Mokungwane – Rebuilding Their “Father’s Village”

In the 1981 population census, Mokungwane was recorded as a “lands area” associated with the village of Lecheng. The census recorded 141 people who occupied twenty-one of the total twenty-six dwelling units in the area. Mokungwane emerged as an officially recognized “established village” only in 1986.11 In 1993, the village boasted a health clinic, a watering dam for cattle, and clean drinking water from a borehole drilled by the district council. A large shop next to the kgotla public arena was built. The local VDC was active in lobbying for access to other public resources. Internally, the village was composed of two wards: Palapye and Maokwe. The people of Palapye are known as Baseleka. The people of Maokwe are known as Bangwato.

As in the case of Manaledi, a local history is presented to explain and justify the dynamics of centralization and dispersal.12 The story begins with two men: Seloke and his mother’s brother (malome) Matuba. Matuba was the headman of the Maokwe ward in the village of Lecheng. At one point, Seloke disputed Matuba’s power. To resolve the matter, they went to Kgama, the Ngwato ruler. In 1900, following Kgama’s orders, Seloke and his followers left Lecheng and built a new village in the area upon which the village of Mokungwane now stands. A few years later, Seloke invited his mother’s brother, Basele, to join him saying that he was “lonely” in this new place. Seloke had four wives and many children. But when he died, all his children were “young”13 and could not become village headman. The settlement scattered, and many people left to settle in the villages of Matlakola and Lecheng. By the early 1930s, the clustered village settlement was completely deserted, and the mud houses had fallen into disrepair. When Seloke’s children grew up, they wanted to rebuild “their
father's place." The process of their return took many years. They were recognized by the government as an officially established village only in 1986.

The case of Mokungwane, like that of Manaledi, is one of a formerly established village whose population had dispersed. The recent reemergence of the clustered village settlement is justified on the basis of its past. Years of scattered existence do not undermine the communal right of people to "rebuild" their "father's place." The interesting element in the Mokungwane story is the direct involvement and unquestionable authority of Kgama, the Ngwato chief, to assign people to land. The contemporary claims of communal rights over that assigned land are based on an original royal Ngwato decree. A generation-long residence in another village does not undermine the basis for the collective right of the descendants of a man whose entitlement was granted by Kgama. Here again, as in Manaledi, a "traditionalist" political ideology provides the basis for contemporary legitimacy; the logic of such legitimate claims is shared by both local actors and district and state officials.

Finally, a note about the multiple faces and articulations of state presence in this and the other cases discussed. On the one hand, new laws and legislative reforms had opened the way for small groups (like the "Gotau group" in the case above) and individuals to apply for exclusive land use right. This trend towards privatization of land holding is more evident in the western region of the Central District, where large areas were fenced in and commercial cattle ranches were established, but there are ample indications that the key components of such capitalist penetration are also played out in this and other eastern regions. State presence was also felt in the 1980s, through the provision of new resources coveted by newly emerging village communities. Schools, tap water, and roads, and not only control over arable lands, made worthwhile the effort to gain official recognition as an "established village."

However, these reforms and modern services were closely connected to a seemingly "traditionalist" discourse. At the national level, democratic Botswana enabled the existence of a "House of Chiefs," and district-level "Tribal Authorities" worked next to administrative bodies. The Manaledi and Mokungwane people were successful, as we have seen, in establishing their
moral claims to communal land mainly because district-level officials shared a political culture that made possible the legitimization of such historical claims. Yet the process of arguing and establishing such claims was not always successful. In Makgabo, a lands area associated with the village of Lerala, the emergence into an independent sociopolitical unit with rights over defined zones of land was fraught with difficulties. The long struggle to control persons and to redefine space and collective rights had not succeeded in gaining the “official” legitimization in this case. Why?

Makgabo – The Denied Autonomy
Makgabo is located at the eastern edge of the Tswapong Hills, about eight kilometres north of Lerala and two kilometres off the main road (paved in 1993) that connects Maunatlala to Lerala. The 1981 population census lists Makgabo as one of seven “lands areas” belonging to Lerala. According to this census, the locality consisted of eighty-six dwelling units, fifty-eight occupied by 392 people. The population of Makgabo rose to 557 a decade later, but its classification as a lands area – despite the prolonged struggle of many of its residents – had not changed. In 1988, I described this struggle in the following way.

The spatial layout of Makgabo (in 1988) resembled land residences elsewhere: dispersed household units were located next to agricultural fields. The central kgotla arena was in disrepair. While other large, named land areas around Lerala had piped water, a small trading store, or even a local church, Makgabo did not contain any public facilities. Its water supply came from a nearby stream, and the only public services enjoyed by Makgabo residents were the periodic visits of the veterinary officer who resided in Lerala. Still, Makgabo dwellers were very vocal about their claims that Makgabo was a separate entity not belonging to Lerala. They pointed out that their residence in Makgabo was permanent and that most Makgabo people had no second dwelling in Lerala. They noted that since the source of water in Makgabo was dependable, they did not have to return to Lerala during the dry seasons, even in severe drought years. Most importantly, Makgabo residents presented the nature of their historical association with the Lerala political center as the basis for their demand for a distinct communal identity.15
When the village of Lerala was still located at a place called Gale, Makgabo was the land area of the founding royal (kgosing) ward. It was shared by the two sons of Mpheu, the Leral a chief, and their families and followers. Rramosoka was the son of the senior wife of Mpheu; Magosi was the son of the second, junior wife. The two were fierce rivals for the village headmanship, and, at one point, Rramosoka fled and found refuge with Kgama, the Bangwato chief in Serowe. Magosi, the junior but more powerful son, ruled the village until his death, whereupon Rramosoka returned and regained his position.

When Rramosoka returned to power, he allocated new fields for himself and his followers outside the Makgabo area. Magosi's descendants kept their agricultural land in Makgabo. As their position in the village political arena weakened, Magosi's people made Makgabo their center and remained in their lands' homes throughout the year. The autonomous nature of their separate permanent residence in Makgabo was acknowledged by colonial tax collectors, who stopped in Makgabo first, before their entry to Leral a.

In 1983, a similar external recognition of Makgabo's separate existence was expressed by the Tswapong member of Parliament and other officials who made Makgabo a part of their tour in the region. Indeed, when I asked the Tswapong Member of Parliament to list the villages which fell in his electoral zone, he also cited Makgabo as a village unit. Despite such widely acknowledged recognition, Makgabo did not emerge into a separate village. In fact, when Magosi, the Makgabo leader, died in 1982, his son, Rralesego, a frail and indecisive man in his early thirties, was said to be "too young" to assume power. Matuba Madikwe,16 a descendant of a junior line in Magosi's group, acted as the local headman. Since the early 1980s, such a role has consisted mainly of signing applications for land that were then submitted to the regional land board, as well as occasional unofficial mediation in local disputes.

When I visited Makgabo in 1993, Matuba Madikwe was adamant that he was not a village headman, and that Makgabo was not trying to emerge as a village. All they wanted, he insisted, was for the government to help them dig a borehole so they could water their cattle. He reasoned that the government had refused to do this because it suspected that a permanent water source would only reinforce peoples' desire to be recognized as a village. "This
is not a village,” he insisted. “People in Lerala are our seniors,” he maintained, in an obviously lame effort to lay to rest the generations-long contention by the Magkabo people for an equal and separate status. To convince the listener that this place was merely a land area, he noted that when he was cold, he had to go to his “village home” and fetch a warm blanket; in other words, he kept little in this temporary “land residence.”

On the face of it, Makgabo was indeed losing its battle to be recognized and emerge as a distinct sociospatial entity, a village. Little has changed in the spatial organization of the place over the past decade. A local entrepreneur who sold bottled Chibuku beer out of his unkempt hut in Makgabo told me, in 1993, that all his efforts to get a “small dealer” license had failed, “because the government says this is not a village.”

How different is the Makgabo case from the two previously described? At the core of this local history, in a manner similar to the other two cases, is a story of an agnatic rivalry between two ruling lines. Yet, unlike Manaledi and Mokungwane, which were known as separate sociopolitical entities at specific points in their histories, Makgabo was never able to establish its independent sociopolitical existence. The effort of this diverging agnatic line to establish independent control over its social space must therefore be understood within the dynastic rivalry inside a single village and its politico-spatial boundaries. Two factors mitigated against such diverging effort: weak leadership and the growing influence of Lerala as an administrative center. Weak, uninspired headmen, often described in the “tradionalist” discourse as “too young,” work against the establishment of cooperative action and the moral claims of the dissenting group. We have seen the effects of a “too young” or absent village headman in the former two cases as well. The rise of Lerala as the administrative center also tipped the balance against Makgabo. The failure to be recognized by the state as a separate village had very tangible consequences: Makgabo enjoyed none of the services provided to established villages — schools, reliable drinking water, and roads.

However, Makgabo, unlike the other, successful cases of village emergence in the agricultural zone, faced no immediate threat to its land. The corporate space publicly known as “Makgabo lands” would not have been altered by a change in Makgabo’s “official” status. The leadership in Makgabo, not the
central leadership in Lerala, retained existing control over post-independence land allocation and Land Board regulated procedures. This critical point sheds light on the larger process of spatial transformation in the region. Makgabo, I submit, is a good example of the preindependence dynamics of spatial and political articulations that have continued to the present. Such dynamics concern the inherent rivalry within agnic segments of the ruling group and the tendency for splitting and territorial separation of rival segments. Unlike the other three cases, the process of village emergence in Makgabo was not part of current, evolving struggles for control over land, not yet. The generations-long effort to break away from the Lerala center has not been redefined or rekindled in light of the new circumstances of struggle, as in the other cases described.

In the next and last case of village emergence, the role of local histories in justification of claims in the contemporary reality of postindependence is most explicit. Here, we have a place that was never before considered "a village" – a case in which histories are not merely manipulated, but simply invented. It is also the only case I documented of village emergence in the grazing, not the cultivated fields, zone. After outlining the circumstance of the Gamotse case, I will return to my original question: why are these cases of village emergence occurring at this particular point in time in the regional history?

Gamotse – Inventing a History

Gamotse was, until the late 1970s, a cattle-post area adjacent to the Tuli Bloc farms. The Tuli Bloc farms are large, privately owned farms which separate the Tswapong region from the South African border. When I visited Gamotse for the first time in 1983, the small settlement had very few public facilities. It boasted a newly erected kgotla arena and a single mud room which served as a local school. Private funds from a neighboring white farm owner paid for the construction of a small health clinic. Despite this modest village infrastructure, the 1981 national population census classified Gamotse as a "village," not a cattle-post. According to this census, there were 269 people resident in forty-five dwelling units in the village. A decade later, in 1991, the local population had risen to 676. There was also a staggering expansion in the village institutional base. In 1993, a large multi-classroom
school which employed thirteen teachers replaced the single mud room school of the early 1980s. The village was administered by a paid headman who was assisted by two officers [a policeman and a policewoman]. The latter held daily court in the former's office at the edge of the central, well-kept kgotla arena. The local clinic was regularly serviced by a nurse and a visiting doctor. There was also a large store, a butchershop, and a bar. In the early 1980s, about fifty Gamotse residents worked daily in a chicken farm adjacent to their expanding village. By 1993, this number had risen to more than 120. What accounted for the rapid growth and establishment of Gamotse?

Gamotse was a typical Tswana cattle-post area, containing temporary huts of transient herders and their dependents until one of the large cattle owners in the area, a Maunatlala man, dug a well in the locality. This secure source of water attracted other herders from outlying areas and adjacent cattle-posts who began to settle in the vicinity of the well. As M.M.K. Molefe, the District Officer, described it in 1984,18 "this man allowed the settlement to take root and it grew with every year without much objection from the cattle farmers in the neighboring surroundings." The proximity of Gamotse to the white-owned farms in the Tuli B
c19 and to the South African border was also important in the rapid expansion of the settlement. Men who could not continue to work on the farms after a certain age or those who chose to leave the farms as a result of other considerations came to Gamotse. Many of these farm workers were not citizens of Botswana, and some were of non-Tswana origin.20 In 1968, a further boost to the growing settlement was given, when a white South African man opened a small shop and dug a borehole near Gamotse. A poultry farm established by the daughter of the shop owner and her husband in 1977 provided more local work opportunities. Others subsisted as herders for the large herd owners in the area, supplementing their livelihood by the cultivation of small gardens. The owners of the poultry farm provided residents of the locality with clean tap water [only for domestic use] from their borehole and financed the construction of the local health clinic.

In 1975, a resident of Gamotse, a non-Tswana man, a relatively poor man in his mid-forties, began organizing the building of the much needed school in the growing settlement. A year later, in 1976, the residents of Gamotse completed the construc-
tion of their single-room school. A second communal project was begun in 1981. A large area, shaded by several trees, was cleared and bounded on one side by a crescent wall of logs. This was the central public *kgotla* arena, the most visible and explicit symbol of "villagehood" in Botswana. These efforts at communal self-help were encouraged by various official forms of recognition. As Molefe, the District Officer, noted: "From time to time, this settlement ... was visited by Parliamentarians, Councilors, Chiefs, and Government officials." Significantly, he adds, "Nobody ever questioned the existence of this settlement until recently when the residents of Gamotse appealed to the Bobonong Sub Land-Board to be allocated ploughing fields and lands in that area."

When the Bobonong Sub Land-Board approved, in principle, the request of the Gamotse residents to register their individual ploughing fields in the vicinity of their clustered settlement (many were already cultivating such land, but had not secured the official permission for this practice), the local rich cattle owners (or "cattle farmers," as Molefe refers to them) made their objection to such recognition explicit. These cattle owners not only objected to the allocation of ploughing land in the vicinity of the growing village, but also made "a very strong case" supported by some "influential tribesmen and Councilors" in the district that "that whole settlement should be uprooted and transferred to Tsetsejwe [a neighboring established village]."

The internal struggle within the growing settlement focussed on another critical issue that linked official bodies of the state with local concerns – who is the headman? Since every application for land had to be signed and approved by a local headman prior to its submission to the Land Board, assessment of who the local headman was became an issue of official concern. During the Land Board's third visit to Gamotse on 28 April 1983, two men sat with the visiting Land Board members behind the long table, facing the gathered community. One was a relatively poor man in his forties who spoke Setswana with a foreign accent; the other was an old Ngwato man, one of the richest cattle owners in the area. Both men claimed to hold the right to represent Gamotse to its official visitors. In a series of public events, described in more detail elsewhere [Motzafi-Haller 1996], these two men struggled for the official recognition of their respective claims to "village-headmanship."
On one level of analysis, the struggle in Gamotse can be easily framed and understood in terms of the distinction between the two main sections of the population: the few large cattle owners and the many impoverished herders and small subsistence farmers. The interests of these two socioeconomic categories are in direct conflict. The large herd owners originated from Serowe, the district capital, and from large established villages in the Tswapong area. Common to all is the fact that their social identity, as well as their arable fields, were linked to these large villages. For many, especially for the very affluent herd owners, Gamotse was only one among several areas where their cattle were tended. These people had no interest in improving the infrastructure of Gamotse, viewing the growing size of the settlement as a drain on available water and grazing land. In fact, this is precisely how Molefe explained what happened in Motetemane in his official report. The rich "cattle farmers," he noted, had done their best, using their powerful connections with district officials, to dismantle the growing settlement and "transfer" it to a neighboring village. Molefe pointed to the interests of this group of powerful "cattle farmers" in unambiguous terms: their position, he wrote, stems from their "land hunger" and, more specifically, from their perception of a "lack of land for grazing."

The interests of the cattle owners were in conflict with those of the second, and largest, socioeconomic category, consisting of poor herders, farm laborers, and small cultivators. The latter made a home in the locality and were interested in improving the conditions of their settled life. They contributed their labor and limited resources to the erection of their local school and the central kgotla arena, welcoming the involvement of the Land Board in the process of gaining official "established village" recognition. While many of these poor households had already been cultivating small plots next to their homes, the use of these plots was dependent on the goodwill of the large cattle owners – as long as Gamotse remained a cattle-post area. Unfenced and unregistered, these fields could at any moment be reclaimed as grazing grounds. Such uncertainty of tenure would be greatly reduced if one succeeded in registering the plot with the Land Board. Indeed, as the perceptive Molefe observed, no one objected to this settlement until an effort to register arable plots had begun.

The conflict of interests between affluent cattle owners and
the numerous subsistence farmers in Gamotse is not unique. The dynamics of the struggle over land throughout the 1980s in other regions in eastern Botswana is thoroughly documented by Gulbrandsen, a Norwegian anthropologist who was commissioned by the government of Botswana to study changes in land tenure practices in the country. Gulbrandsen cites two main reasons for the growing land scarcity in Botswana: (1) a greater demand for land by a rapidly growing population that had very few options of income and jobs outside the agricultural sector; and (2) the expansion of commercial arable agriculture, encouraged by the national land reform promulgated in the mid-1970s [1984, 4-6].

According to Gulbrandsen, this increasing demand for arable land aggravated the conflict between the two categories of the rural population with different interests in land—crop cultivation and grazing. Gulbrandsen describes several regional variations in what he calls "the arable/grazing conflict" [1984, 10-12]. The Gamotse case has many of the characteristics of such a rural conflict scenario. Unfolding in the aftermath of the national land tenure reform (which redefined access to land in the communally held zone), the Gamotse case was indicative of the prevalent uncertainty of these transitional times. Although large commercial farms and ranching had not made their appearance in this eastern region (most commercial farms were established in the western regions of the Central District – see Hitchcock 1984), the fear that land was about to become scarce informed the actions of all actors in these unfolding events.21 The struggle over land in Gamotse might have been more acute precisely because claims to land were not fixed in this outlying area – the greater the uncertainty about rights to land, the fiercer the struggle to redefine such rights by competing groups and interests [Werbner 1993, 22].

The Gamotse case illustrates the more complex dynamics of rural politics that go beyond the basic opposition between two socioeconomic categories with conflicting vested grazing and arable interests in the land. Three critical factors complicate the particular circumstances of rural struggle in Gamotse: (1) internal divisions existed within the affluent cattle-owner group – between those who originated from the remote capital center of Serowe and those who came from established villages within the region; (2) the white farmers and shop owners who employed Gamotse residents in their farms and small businesses played an active role;
(3) far from being uniform, the category of impoverished herders and farm workers was internally divided along lines of kinship, clientship, tribal/ethnic, and citizenship. As the outcome of these decade-long struggles indicates, the nature of state engagement in this rural setting had shifted in ways none of the actors could have foreseen in the 1980s.

The case of Gamotse also reveals internal conflicts within the affluent group of cattle owners, in this case between those who originate from Serowe, the District capital, and those whose primary home is in large villages in the region – Bobonong, Leralo, or Maunatlala. On the surface, this group shares the same interests in land. The division within this group of large cattle owners appeared at two important junctures – the first emerged in the historical charter constructed in the early 1980s by Gamotse residents. In inventing such communal history, the powerless herders and farm workers included as their “ward headmen” affluent herd owners who originated from the regional large villages. They systematically excluded and delegitimized the claims for leadership by those who came from Serowe – the remote, precolonial ruling capital center. Internal divisions within the group of affluent cattle owners were articulated again when the future of the locality was debated at an official level. Thus, for example, the rich cattle owners from Serowe made use of one Sub-Land Board to represent their objection to the emerging village, while the locally based cattle owners supported another. The first Sub-Land Board made a point of defending the aspiration of the villagers to permanent arable land use, while the second, manipulated by the affluent Serowe people, dragged its feet on the issue, awaiting the Serowe/Ngwato Land Board decision. The playing off of one Sub-Land Board against the other demonstrated the conflicting interests within this category of rich cattle owners.

The second critical element in the Gamotse local scenario is the vicinity of the emerging village to the white-owned Tuli Bloc Farms and the South African border. The emergence of this small settled community was closely linked to the labor needs of these capital-intensive private farms. As the size of their chicken farm expanded, the white owners needed the labor of a growing number of people in the settlement. Towards the early 1980s, the growing needs of the expanding settlement could be easily transferred to official responsibility. The white owners requested, in a series of
letters, that the District Council "take over the supply of water to
the village," because "the responsibility of such a large number of
families is now getting beyond our small resources."\(^{22}\)

The third important element in the formation of this commu-
nity is the varied makeup of its populace. The poor herders and
clients of large cattle owners who made their home in this
emerging village originated from various "ethnic" or "tribal"
groups. Many were residents of groups settled in the Tswapong
region. (Although currently known by the collective label,
"Batswapong," these people belong to various "ethnic" or
"totemic" groups [see Motzafi-Haller 1988, 1993].) Others, espe-
cially those herding cattle of the Serowe cattle owners, are locally
known as "Basarwa" [the Tswana term for "Bushmen,"\(^ {23}\) until
recently [and, in some cases, still] unpaid serfs and clients of their
precolonial overlords, the BaNgwato. A third category of people in
this community is made up of what Molefe, the District Officer,
called "foreign nationals" – people whose communities of origin
are located in South Africa. Despite internal variation, this group
of impoverished herders and day-laborers was able to conceive of
a community and, in the early 1980s, invented an historical
charter that legitimated such communal aspirations.

Against this background of the apparent "success" of Mole-
tane – its emergence in the early 1990s as an officially recognized
clustered village – the dramatic failure of these poor herders and
farm laborers in achieving their goals must be noted. Although the
state granted the communal desire to be recognized as a village, it
did so in a way that has undermined many local popular hopes. In
1993, I discovered that the battle for leadership between the two
men who represented the rich cattle owners and the impoverished
herders and foreign drifters, respectively, had not lasted long. The
young populist leader was sent to prison for illegal residence,
while the old, Ngwato cattle owner retired, but not before he
proposed his literate, young nephew for the job. In 1986, the young
nephew became a government-nominated, paid village headman.
A new ward structure replaced the one creatively articulated by
the emerging community in 1983. Instead of wards directly linked
to local herd owners [as the local people had proposed in 1983], the
new administrative village structure in 1993 assigned all
foreigners into one large ward administered by the young village
headman. Other smaller wards were assigned Ngwato headmen,
many of whom were absent from the village.

Redefining the Social Space: Policies, Local Practice, and Collective Identities

Social space has been dramatically altered in the Tswapong region over the last two decades. Among the four detailed case studies of village-emergence traced here, three have evolved into permanent village communities with a much larger resident population and a significantly expanded institutional base. Roads, schools, health clinics, and trade stores have replaced the makeshift dwellings situated next to individual arable fields and isolated, shifting cattle watering camps. The emergence of these established, clustered village communities on what had been the open arable zones altered not only the visible spatial organization of the region, but also, as the analysis developed above suggests, the key sociopolitical and economic divisions within the regional population as well. Space itself, as suggested in the introduction, functions as an object of social struggle in all the scenarios outlined.

Conclusion

In untangling the many stands of the argument linking the reorganization of space to the transformation of social and political relationships, I wish to make the following concluding observations:

(1) A somewhat mundane, but most critical observation, is that the newly established village communities are not, and must not be, understood as the reproduction of preexisting entities, structured along familiar ("traditional") social institutions and relationships. Rather, these newly established communities are a product of a dramatically shifting reality of land relationships and are, themselves, an articulation of newly defined ideas about collective identity, communal rights, and subjectivity.

(2) Each of the case studies showcases a different constellation of evolving social and spatial patterns. But there are common processes that can be traced throughout these local scenarios. One of the most obvious transformations in sociopolitical relationships within these emerging communities has been the changing role and definition of village headmanship. Paradoxically, the very legislative reform that undermined the executive powers of village
heads and transferred their land allocation powers to elected land boards had, at the same time, granted the position a new significance which has given rise to fierce internal struggles. The very process of dealing with external bodies that could grant official recognition opened the way for a profound redefinition of the role. Serving the community and playing an active role in gaining the popular support of residents were sometimes congruent with, while at times worked against, criteria of rank and priority of residence. We have seen how in one case (Manaledi), the headman whose rank and placement in the traditional hierarchy were unquestioned found it necessary to act as a head of the local VDC. In another case (Gamotse), the official need to appoint a single village head gave rise to serious internal tensions and to the emergence of a popular, non-Tswana leader. When the state stepped in to impose a new village headman, one that did not enjoy local popular support, the moral power of village headmanship was dramatically curtailed.

(3) Another important transformation in social relationships directly linked with the process of spatial rearrangement has been the shift in intervillage hierarchies (for example, between the Manaledi and the Gotau village centers on the one hand, the Lerala and the Makgabo groups on the other). The hierarchical order that links these small Tswapong communities with the preindependence Ngwato hegemonic power has also gained new meaning. District-level personnel and official bodies were seen not as representatives of a remote, impartial bureaucratic state, but as part of the hierarchical order of colonial and precolonial times.

(4) Taken together, these cases provide a powerful illustration of the many ways in which historical charters are used to consolidate communal identities in the region. In all the cases described, a political ideology was invoked to justify current claims to communal land. Yet two specific observations must be made with regard to this widely known practice of using historical charters to bolster contemporary claims and interests. First, the use of village-centered collective history proved to be the most effective strategy to fend off the encroachment of exclusivist claims to land by groups and individuals. Thus, in Manaledi, the establishment of corporate rights over communal lands was the best defence against capitalist farmers who wished to build a dam for private
use. The rhetoric employed is one of intervillage, rather than antiexclusivist, claims. In Gamotse, too, communal claims bolstered by a fictive historical charter were the best weapon used by the poorest segment of the emerging village vis-à-vis the group of affluent cattle-owners. In Mokungwane, village-based communal charters not only achieved political independence, but also secured state services and resources. In other words, communal historical charters were used not as a means to recreate or bring back a "traditionalist order," but as the most effective strategy, born of very specific and shifting set of conditions. These particular conditions emerged in this region in the early 1980s.

(5) Before I examine these 1980s circumstances, I wish to return to what might sound like yet another scenario of "history-invented-as-a-tool-for-present-interests" argument and to amend it as follows. People in these and other instances are never mere instrumentalists. More specifically — and directly linked to my main concern here with space as an object of social struggle — becoming members of a clustered village community (transforming the "space" into a "place") does not only mean securing public resources or fending off the danger of alienation of arable lands, but also signifies elevation into the status of citizenship — membership in the social realm — as well as a sense of collective and individual well-being. By redefining and transforming the social space and by remaking their environment into a named place with identity and autonomy, these people at the edges of the Tswana hierarchical world act in a meaningful and interpretive, not only an instrumentalist, fashion. In the process of remaking their world, people transform their social space and their lives in irreversible ways — ways no one had intended.

Finally, a few comments about time and shifts in state-local interactions. My analysis offered an examination of the process of changing sociospatial relationships at two points in time — the early 1980s and the early 1990s. I wish to argue: [1] that the 1980s were particularly fertile times for the local creative acts of redefinition of relationships and spaces; and [2] that many of these local initiatives were curtailed a decade later when the state acted in a more authoritarian fashion to establish structures and define boundaries. Two factors combined to define the kind of interactions between state bodies and rural people in the 1980s. The first
was the immense growth in the national economy of Botswana, wrought mostly through the late 1970 discovery of diamonds. State development efforts in those years were largely directed toward the construction of rural infrastructure and the provision of services for the rural populace. These new investments coincided with a period of great uncertainty in the rural areas in the aftermath of a series of legislative reforms. The combined effects of uncertainty on the one hand, and of immediate gains to be secured through official recognition of village status on the other, enabled this unique era of active rural redefinitions. However, such articulations of communal aspirations and the shifts in the regional spatial arrangements shaped by them were arrested towards the 1990s. "Dynastic power embedded in place," to paraphrase David Harvey (1992, 257) had reestablished itself over attempts at the "reorganization of space to democratic ends." The detailed case studies presented here provide a portrait of the ways in which state discourses and policies and shifts in political and economic structures are drawn into local experience and practice, and how the combined effects of these forces produce a new reality of space and place.

Notes
1 In Durkheim's (1965) early work or in Durkheim and Mauss (1963), attention was drawn to the "fit" or congruence between spatial orders and social forms, such that particular forms of built environment were typically associated with specific features of social organization. Thus, in Mauss's classic study on the Eskimo house, larger winter dwellings were needed to accommodate collective rituals performed during winter months.
2 Motzafi-Haller (1994) shows how prolonged residence in the "bush" and lengthy dissociation from the village political center diminish one's social standing and, in extreme cases, might relegate one to the inferior non-social "Sarwa" category. Basarwa embody the ultimate exclusion from the social world of the centralized village.
3 What constitutes "permanent" residence and what is "more or less" permanent is, of course, crucial in this case. The whole struggle for official legitimacy of residence discussed in this article is a witness to such ambiguity which plagued census takers.
4 The 1991 population of the Serowe-Palapye region was 128 471. The total population for Central District was 412 970. The total population of Botswana in the same records was 1 326 796 (Stats Update, May 1993,
released by the Government of Botswana Central Statistics Office, Gaborone.
5 Eighty-seven percent of these men in 1981. See Motzafi-Haller 1988, 108 and Table 4.4.
8 The total village population in 1983 was 432.
9 Their headman, a direct descendant of Keatoletse, was a young man involved actively in migrant labor and was thus absent from the village arena throughout these years.
10 I did not carry out a household count in 1993, and since there is no mention of Manaledi in the 1991 census, not as a village nor as a lands area, I had no other independent source to validate or reject this local estimate. Still, the staggering growth of the village was evident.
11 This is according to local people. I have no official record to support or reject such claims. The 1991 census records do not mention Mokungwane at all.
12 Based on interviews in Mokungwane on 5 May 1993. Informants were Mokente Nagaesele of the Maokwe ward and Kemoepile Magononong Basele of the Palapye ward.
13 “Young,” here, might be in reference to the biological age of the chief’s descendants. But it is also very likely that no single son emerged as “senior enough” to become the legitimate heir of the chief.
14 The present-day headman of Mokungwane, Koketso, is the son of Kenosi. Kenosi’s father is Seloke. Koketso was born in Lecheng, but that did not weaken his association with Mokungwane, his “father’s village.”
15 This historical account was recorded in Makgabo in 1982, during the course of several visits. I checked several aspects of this account in 1993. It is important to note, however, that my information at both times was provided by Makgabo and not Leral people. The “view from the center” might be different.
16 I was able to interview Madikwe only in 1993. I cannot say whether he changed his views in the course of that decade or whether he was always against transformation of Makgabo to village status.
17 The case of Gamotse has been discussed and analyzed in greater depth in a separate paper (Motzafi-Haller 1996). Gamotse is the name I had given to the village. Unlike the other three villages, where I had provided the real village name, I felt that the case of Gamotse contains sensitive information that might be used against some people, and I did not want to make their identity as individuals or as a collective village, publicly known.
18 Molefe sent a copy of his report to Smith with the note, “Please receive
two copies which I prepared to fight your case. You are not to worry. All is well.” I would like to thank “Mr. Smith” (a pseudonym) for making this correspondence available to me in 1993.

19 The Tuli Blocs are privately owned farms in the eastern ridge of Botswana along its border with South Africa. The emergence of these private farms within a general system of communally held land is a result of specific historical developments in the region.

20 In his letter, cited earlier, Mr. Molefe refers to these people as “foreign nationals.”

21 Both Gulbradsen (1984, 5) and Werbner (1982) make this point. In Werbner’s words, there is “a major conceptual as well as practical change in land tenure” (1982, vii).

22 Letter, dated 20 August 1984, to the District Council in Serowe was made available to the researcher.

23 I have written elsewhere (Motzafi-Haller 1994, 1996) about the slippage between these two categories of impoverished people. Basarwa, in other words, does not refer to people of a particular ethnic background, but to all those who fall out of the Tswana social world because of extreme marginalization and exclusion from existing social networks.

Bibliography


