

## History and perceptions of regionalism in Botswana, 1891–2005

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Although economic, political, ethnic and religious factors have led to regionalisms and other divides, causing civil strife and civil wars in many countries, in Botswana the north–south divide existed for a long time merely as a political undercurrent. However, the turn of the twenty-first century saw the explosion of issues motivated by perceptions that it was the north–south divide that caused imbalance in the provision of infrastructural development and ethnic inequality. This article traces the north–south divide in Botswana back to the early British colonial enterprise, when it was used for administrative convenience. Although in the post-colony the first president handled the situation pro-actively, his successors abandoned this approach. Regionalism ensued as personal ambitions for power and wealth took political and sometimes tribal dimensions. Ethnic identities were used to bolster campaigns despite the fact that identities in Botswana are multiple and multi-layered rather than mutually exclusive.

**Keywords:** north–south regionalism; ethnic identities; undercurrents; infrastructural development; ‘minority’ tribes

This article argues that Botswana’s first president, Sir Seretse Khama (1966–1980), a northerner, was conscious of the north–south divide and took it into account in appointing people into his cabinet, particularly into the vice-presidency. Although he was a chief of the ‘dominant’ Bangwato *morafe* (tribe), which had been favoured by the missionaries and colonial government officials alike, he was careful to maintain this precarious balance. However, his successor, Sir Ketumile Masire (1980–1998), a southerner, initially followed Seretse’s example but departed from the practice in 1983 when he appointed a fellow southerner as vice-president. The country’s main opposition parties also initially adopted, somewhat unwittingly, a proactive approach but later expediency and internal electoral politics led to undercurrents and an explosion of regionalism.

A significant number of citizens turn to seeking political office in a bid to improve their lifestyle or to maintain a lavish lifestyle, and to have influence in society. Increasingly, especially given the growth of consumerism, such individuals mobilise support along tribal or regional lines. In the process arguments are peddled of ‘bias’ to certain regions over others in terms of infrastructural development and tribal composition of key and critical structures such as cabinet and political-party central committees (Makgala 2006b). This is where the dynamic of regionalism comes from. It also comes from the tension over power and resources between the traditionally dominant Tswana-speaking groups and historically marginalised ethnic

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ones. In 2001 and 2002, some key leaders made a major issue of the north-south divide in terms of provision of infrastructure and the constitution of Botswana. In the 2003 Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) primary elections in the northern constituency of Francistown West, the north-south issue was central to the campaign strategy of one of the competing factions. Francistown West has been associated historically with one of the 'minority' but vocal groups, Kalanga (Werbner 2004). This development takes place regardless of the fact that there is hardly any sense of mutually exclusive identities in Botswana but multiple and layered identities (Bennett 2002, 5-17). As we show below this helps in understanding the layers of region, ethnicity and party.

This article examines the permutations of ethnic composition of the two regions under discussion and the politico-cultural aspects within the country's body politic. Thereafter it looks at the beginning and use of the north-south designation in colonial Botswana. It is argued that during the colonial era this was used mainly for administrative convenience. This is followed by the highlighting of some issues which were debated along the north-south divide and how it silently swayed the discourse of the ruling BDP (in power since independence in 1966) and the main opposition parties. An account is also provided on the explosion of regionalism resulting from allegations that developmental infrastructure and constitutional arrangement in terms of the country's ethnic composition were manipulated in such a way that people from one region could dominate those from the other.

For this article regionalism is two-pronged. It refers to perception of deliberate and concerted efforts by political leaders at the national level to favour and promote their region of origin over another region in terms of social amenities or infrastructural development and appointments to positions of influence. It also refers to the perception that political leaders from one region deliberately make efforts to dominate and control a political party and marginalise members from a different region. Linked to this is the situation whereby a politician competing with a party colleague from another region uses tribal or ethnic sentiments in order to outflank a competitor in the same constituency.

In this work ethnicity simply means cultural and linguistic identity while tribalism means the mobilisation and exploitation of ethnicity for political and economic gain. Tribalism is also tied to regionalism.

Historically, the Dibete veterinary fence, which is the boundary of the Kgatleng and Central districts (called Bakgatla and Bangwato Reserves during the colonial period), in the south-eastern part of Botswana has been used as the dividing line between the northern and southern regions (see Figure 1). As a result of the railway line (built in 1897) and the Gaborone-Francistown tarred road (built in the post-independence era), which pass through Dibete in the eastern part of the country, an overwhelming majority of people travelling between the north and the south invariably pass through Dibete. Although in the 1990s, tarred roads such as the trans-Kgalagadi highway, and the Molepolole-Shoshong and the Scrowe-Orapa-Francistown highways provide alternative routes between the north and south, most people still travel on the Gaborone-Francistown highway. One of the reasons is that most people or settlements in Botswana are found in the east.

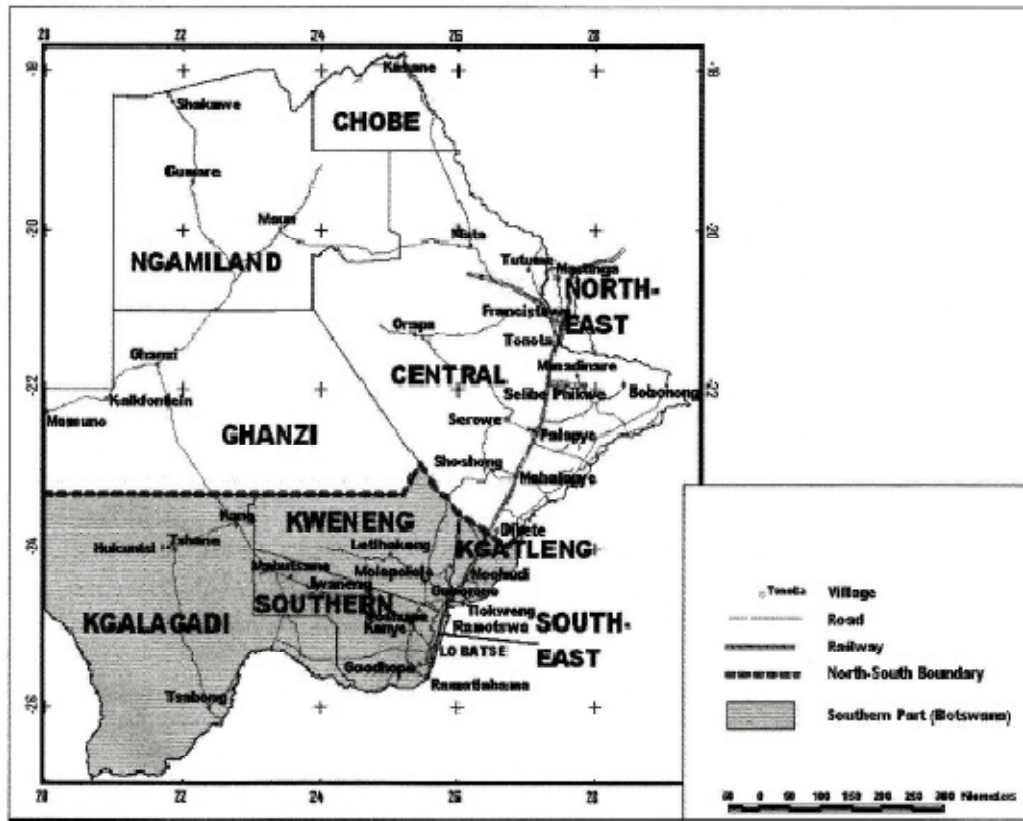


Figure 1. Map of Botswana showing the north-south divide.

**Ethno-political permutations of north-south divide**

Until very recently there was broad consensus that Botswana is an ethnically homogenous polity. However, the turn of the twenty-first century saw this perception being turned on its head by a spirited campaign by the country's ethnic 'minority' groups which called for their recognition at the same level as the dominant Tswana-speaking groups. A large number of these so-called tribal minorities fell under the suzerainty of the Tswana kingdoms either voluntarily or through conquest in the precolonial era. Although there are minor linguistic and cultural differences between the Tswana-speaking tribes themselves, by and large they have a lot in common. When these Tswana-speaking polities, which were hitherto politically independent of each other, fell under British colonial rule in 1885 they were the ones recognised by the British. In 1899 the British demarcated tribal boundaries and the eight territories of the Tswana groups became known as tribal reserves.

The Bangwato and the Batawana had migrated from the south to the north of the modern day Dibeite boundary long before colonial rule. An overwhelmingly large number of 'minority' tribes, who speak various different languages and have different cultural practices are found in the northern region under the control of the Batawana and the Bangwato. The colonial period is marked by numerous futile instances where many 'minority' tribes tried to assert their independence from their Bangwato and

Batawana overlords. The minority groups complained of being downtrodden and exploited.

At independence in 1966 all languages of the minority groups were marginalised and subordinated to Setswana as the national language. The government of the late Sir Seretse Khama argued that this was needed for unity in the nation-building exercise. Between 1966 and 2000 there were undercurrents and occasional mild complaints by leaders or politicians from the minority groups that their tribes were being marginalised in the national matrix. The most prominent of these leaders were those from the numerically superior Wayei in Ngamiland which is the tribal area of the Batawana, and the Kalanga, who are found in the Northeast and Central districts. The latter is the territory of the Bangwato. The overlordship of the Bangwato and the Batawana in the north has been a source of resentment on the part of the minority groups there for a very long time. The historian Bruce Bennett argues thus: 'It is a fundamental mistake to think of the Batswana of the past as belonging to one or other of a set of mutually exclusive identities. Identities were multiple and layered, just as they are now, when one person can be simultaneously a MoTawana, a Northerner, and a Motswana' (Bennett 2002, 12). We find the argument by Bennett appealing and it is used as a lever in the thesis of this article.

However, the Bangwato have become the most dominant tribal entity in the politics of the postcolonial Botswana. Generally people from the north are the ones holding high and influential positions in the areas of political and economic leverage. Although sometimes this domination is questioned, in the main it has become accepted as a matter of political expediency, the reason being that the ruling BDP draws the bulk of its loyal support and votes from the Central district. Although post-independence censuses have not taken people's tribal identity into account, and population data for the various regions of the country do not reflect ethnic composition, it is acknowledged that the Central District has the highest population (31%) and more constituencies (19) than any other district in the country.

At the cultural level, the elite of the tribal minorities, who are overwhelmingly from the north, complain of marginalisation by the Tswana groups, while the Bangwato and Batawana join forces with other Tswana groups in the south to counter such charges. However, at the political party and power level, which involves access to state resources in the form of lofty remunerations and privileges for elected councillors and parliamentarians, the north-south issue has taken a different and interesting dimension. There have been instances of a group of politicians from the north with southerners among them arguing that the southerners have monopolised political power and marginalised the northerners. This is how factional fighting in the ruling BDP began. However, it was common for a faction of the northerners to include some southerners and the southerners' faction to include northerners. Furthermore, northerners who had been appointed to cabinet defended the status quo, but after being dropped from cabinet they became critical and alleged that their region had been marginalised in infrastructural development. See Table 4 below for recurrent budgetary allocation for the tribal areas.

By the turn of the twentieth century, two BDP members of parliament from the Kalanga tribe who had been dropped from cabinet agitated against what they saw as marginalisation of their tribe and the northern part of the country in terms of infrastructural development. This was a case of members of the ruling elite, who had lost their places at the high table, whipping up tribal and regional sentiments in a bid

to avenge their personal losses. The motives and causes of regionalism in Botswana are therefore not clear cut ethno-geographical factors but also tools of personal ambition to attain political power, wealth and influence by some of the country's elite. However, the call for constitutional equality by the minority tribes was justified.

Although the opposition Botswana National Front (BNF) has over the years made an issue of the country's discriminatory constitution which recognises the existence of only Tswana-speaking tribes and does not promote the minority languages, this has not translated into sustained electoral gains. 'The BNF strategy tended to focus on the cultural aspects of peoples' grievances and did not pay sufficient attention to the material base' (Selolwane 2002). Furthermore, 'independence under a BDP-led government not only promised but actually delivered, material benefits that cut across the ethnic spectrum and have thus tended to outweigh the indignity of cultural subjugation' (Selolwane 2002). Those seeking to capitalise on the ethnic question have therefore been largely disappointed as is shown in the case of the Francistown West constituency discussed below.

#### **The foundation of the north-south divide in Bechuanaland, 1891-1966**

Following Britain's colonisation of the land of the Batswana and calling it the Bechuanaland Protectorate in 1885, nothing much was done. It was only in 1891 that some effort was made to put into place a skeletal administrative structure (Sillery 1965). Colonial Botswana was governed from Mafikeng which was in the British-controlled crown colony of the Cape. The British high commissioner in Cape Town was the governor of the Bechuanaland Protectorate. The resident commissioner was based in Mafikeng assisted by assistant commissioners, one based in Gaborone in the south, the other in Palapye in the north. The Palapye centre was moved further north to Francistown in 1904. In the tribal areas the colonial government was represented by the resident magistrate, called the district commissioner from 1936. A colonial government official, John Millard, who was transferred to Bechuanaland in the early 1950s, writes in his memoirs, 'I was now Divisional Commissioner administering the northern and western half of the territory. For administrative purposes Bechuanaland was divided into two with a senior administrator in charge of each portion' (Millard 1996, 185).

By the 1950s, there were the Northern Divisional Intelligence Committee and the Southern Divisional Intelligence Committee in Bechuanaland. It appears this north-south designation during the colonial period in Botswana was made purely for administrative convenience and did not have economic or political motives. Yet there were times when some issues were raised or debated along the north-south divide, although these were not quite the controversial or explosive issues that would become the case in the post-colony at the turn of the twenty-first century.

In 1919 the Bechuanaland Protectorate government had established what was styled a Native Advisory Council (NAC), renamed the African Advisory Council (AAC) in 1940. This was a forum where the chiefs and their nominees met annually with the resident commissioner and colonial government officials to discuss issues of interest to the tribes. Chiefs of all the southern Tswana-speaking tribes attended the early meetings of the NAC, which were held in Mafikeng, while two northern Tswana-speaking tribes did not. These were the Batawana in far

away Maun in Ngamiland, who could not attend until the early 1930s owing to distance and poor transportation. Another northern group, the Bangwato, did not attend the NAC sessions because their influential Kgosi Khama III stated that he would not attend because chiefs in Southern Bechuanaland did not fight vigorously against the drinking of alcohol in their areas. This was one of the early issues concerning the north–south divide in colonial Botswana. Although Khama III died in 1923, the Bangwato did not become members of the council until 1940. Perhaps Khama III saw the NAC as a step towards the dreaded planned incorporation of Bechuanaland into the Union of South Africa which was established in 1910 (personal communication with Professor Neil Parsons, 14 March 2008). Khama was a leading figure in the campaign against this planned amalgamation.

According to Quett Masire, who was a member of the Legislative Council (Legco) in the early 1960s and president of Botswana (1980–1998): ‘If one goes through the instances of recorded votes in Legco, or if one looks at the debates themselves, one sees there were seldom divisions of whites versus blacks, traditionalists versus modernists, northern versus southern, or the like’ (Masire 2006, 36). Masire goes on to say:

As the debate in Legco opened, Jimmy Haskins, who was from Francistown, proposed a motion that Legco establish its own committee to study the issue of location [of the new capital for the country] rather than rely on the White Paper. There was a lively debate which quickly raised the issue of north versus south as an issue relevant to the decision... I told the Council: ‘I would like to strike a note of warning that we must try to aspire to the unity and oneness of this country and not be tempted to split it into political regions such as North and South. I think we must not think in terms of any geographical lines of demarcation when we come to think of this country. We must solely think of the development which will help the country in its entirety’. Jimmy Haskins withdrew his motion (Masire 2006, 38).

In short, the north–south divide had minimal political salience, whereas in the post-colony it became manifest through conscious regionalism and political ambitions.

#### **Undercurrents of the north–south divide in the post-colony, 1966–2001**

The north–south designation has also been used for administrative convenience in the post-colony. For example, the construction of a water pipe transferring water from the Letsibogo dam in the north to the Mmamashia water treatment plant in the south was officially called the North–South Water Carrier project. In most cases, though, the north–south phenomenon in Botswana had controversial and political dimensions. The first president, Seretse Khama (1966–1980), has been lauded for having laid a firm foundation for nation building. Seretse was a hugely popular but uncrowned chief of the Bangwato in Central district, the biggest and most heavily populated one in Botswana. However, a significant number of the population are non-Bangwato. Seretse formed the BDP in 1962 and his popularity and wisdom helped it win every election from 1965 to date.

Yet, Seretse was conscious of the potential conflicts that could be caused by geographical divisions. According to Michael Crowder, ‘many people believed that the stability Seretse had given Botswana was a stability very much of his own

making that could not survive his own death. They speculated that the transition of power from Seretse to his vice-president, Quett Masire, under the provisions of the constitution might be placed under strain as a Mongwaketse from the south replaced a Mongwato from the north' (Crowder 1988, 470).

For even though official policy in Botswana has been to not publicly acknowledge ethnic differences and inequalities for fear of unleashing some primordial genie that the national leadership believed could scupper programs of developing a single national identity, ethnic under-currents have historically informed public policy and decision making. In fact ethnic under-currents have been an on-going subtext in Botswana's state building and modernization program throughout the post-independence era. These undercurrents have occasionally flared up to the surface at certain points. For instance in the late 1960's and early 1970's a group of southerners expressed concern over the apparent tendency for ethnic Kalanga to have favourable access to government bursaries and public sector jobs after someone had spread a rumour that senior Kalanga officials used a selection strategy that was ethnically biased. Some informants suggest that the tensions around this conflict necessitated a public address by the then president against tribalism.

Another major ethnic flare up happened in the 1980's over issues relating to competing interests following policy revisions allowing public servants to enter into private business for property development. The conflict centered around two major companies competing over pieces of prime property, and also highlighted tense ethnic relations between Tswana speakers and Kalanga speakers in the public service. (Selolwane 2004, 2).

A perception has emerged that the country's leadership in the twenty-first century has become insensitive to ethnic balance in the composition of the cabinet. For instance, the post-2004 general elections cabinet was viewed as dominated by Bangwato from the Central district or the north (see Tables 1 and 2). However, one

Table 1. Masire's cabinet, March 1995.

Ministry	Minister or assistant	Region
State Presidency	K. Masire	South
Finance and Development Planning	F. Mogae	North
Works, Transport and Communications	D. Kwelagobe	South
Education	G. Chiepe	North
Labour and Home Affairs	B. Temane	North
Presidential Affairs and Public Administration	P. Kedikilwe	North
Health	C. Butale	North
Foreign Affairs	M. Merafhe	North
Local Government and Housing	P. Balopi	North
Mineral Resources and Water Affairs	D. Magang	South
Agriculture	R. Blackbeard	North
Agriculture (Assistant)	R. Sebegu	South
Commerce and Industry	G. Kgoroba	South
Finance and Development Planning (Assistant)	L. Mothibamele	South
Local Government and Housing (Assistant)	B. Mokgothu	South
Local Government and Housing (Assistant)	M. Nasha	South

The north and south representation was 50% each.  
Source: Republic of Botswana (1995).

Table 2. Mogae's Cabinet, November 2004.

Ministry or office	Minister or assistant	Region
State Presidency	F. Mogae	North
Vice-Presidency	I. Khama	North
Finance & Development Planning	B. Gaolathe	North
Foreign Affairs	M. Merafhe	North
Communication, Science & Technology	P. Venson	North
Presidential Affairs & Public Administration	P. Skelemani	North
Mineral Resources & Water Affairs	C. Tibone	North
Lands & Housing	D. Seretse	North
Local Government	A. Masalila	North
Education	J. Nkate	North
Education	M. Mbaakanyi	North
Health	S. Tlou	North
Works & Transport	J. Ramsden	North
Labour & Home Affairs	O. Mfa	North
Environment, Wildlife & Tourism	K. Mokaila	South
Trade & Industry	N. Moroka	South
Local Government	M. Nasha	South
Works & Transport	L. Motsomi	South
Labour & Home Affairs	M. Pheto	South

Representation for the North was 84% while the South had 16%.

Source: <http://psclclasses.ucdavis.edu/ire190/Documents/BotswanaFile3.doc>.

observer Molefhi Kalaota (26 November 2004) commented: 'With the southern region of the country in the hands of the opposition, it was obvious that northerners, primarily Bangwato, would dominate the cabinet'. Yet Seretse's biographer, Wellie Henderson writes that 'Seretse gave no special political influence to Central District politically; his cabinets, when he did come to power, were balanced. (It must be remembered that Central District contains approximately 37% of the total population and must therefore be expected to have considerable political significance)' (Henderson 1990, 37).

Seretse's deputy in the BDP after its formation was a Mosotho, Achie Tsoebebe, who became a naturalised Mongwato. However, after assuming political power following the BDP's victory in the country's first ever democratic elections in 1965, Seretse appointed Quett Masire from the south as his vice-president. After Masire's defeat in the 1969 general elections Seretse retained him as a specially elected member of parliament. Masire was retained as vice-president even though in the BDP and cabinet there was Mout Nwako, an ambitious Mongwato who was also very close to Seretse. After Seretse's death in 1980 Masire became president and appointed Seretse's cousin, Lenyeletse Seretse as his vice-president. According to Masire he chose Lenyeletse Seretse because 'the nation was grieving for Seretse, and Lenyeletse was a cousin of Seretse's. We had to do things in such a way that the Bangwato didn't feel that everything was taken away from them at Seretse's passing' (Masire 2006, 89).

'[W]hen Lenyeletse Seretse died in 1983 Masire felt confident enough to name Peter Mmusi, a...[Mohurutshe from the south], as his new deputy', observed Crowder (1988, 470). Masire himself states:



When Lenyeletse Seretse died in 1983, I felt the moment of national mourning of Seretse Khama's death had passed. I also thought it would be wrong to give the impression that the country belongs to north and south, and that every time one or the other president or vice-president, must be from each area. So I selected Peter Mmusi. This, of course, disappointed my colleague Mr Nwako [from the north], since he thought he was the natural successor. But the decision to ignore north and south worked, and the people didn't make any hullabaloo about it' (Masire 2006, 36).

Although Masire points out that there was no disquiet about appointing his fellow southerner as vice-president, a former BDP MP and a cabinet minister claim that the factional strife that later wrecked havoc in the BDP in the 1990s began in 1983. Ostensibly this coincided with the appointment of Mmusi as vice-president. Masire himself says:

We did not seek strict geographical balance for its own sake. For example, at one time we had two ministers from the little village of Tonota [in the north], and none from the big village of Mochudi [in the south]. However, we wanted to pay attention to people who felt they had been discriminated against and should be represented.... When I selected Peter Mmusi to be vice-president, I did not give consideration to the fact that he and I were both from the south of the country. In fact it was almost a good thing to have Mr Mmusi, just to show that geographic balance was not necessary, since, of course, he was a good person for the job (Masire 2006, 87).

Interestingly, in 1962 the regent of the Bakgatla in Mochudi, Kgosi Mmusi Pilane, allowed the BDP to hold its inaugural congress in Mochudi but when the party members arrived in town he withdrew the permit and they had to make hasty arrangements for the alternative venue in Gaborone instead. To this day there has been only one cabinet minister from Kgatleng/Mochudi (1989 and 1994). Many now believe that the Bakgatla are being punished for the 1962 incident. In some quarters, too, it is believed that the marginalisation of Kgatleng is a result of the fact that, unlike other groups, the Bakgatla have a long history of not sticking to one political party but voting candidates from different parties.

It is said that when Masire became president in 1980, the perception among the Bangwato was that he was only holding the fort for Seretse's son and chief of the Bangwato, Ian Khama Seretse Khama, who was the second in command at the newly formed Botswana Defence Force (Molomo 2000, 101). In 1982 Masire's portrait replaced that of Seretse on the country's pula bank notes. Although this development was in accordance with the law of the land, it met with serious protest and harsh condemnation of Masire by the Bangwato who felt that he was trying to usurp Ian Khama's future position (Makgala 2007a). However, in 1998 when BDP fortunes were seriously declining, Masire retired and was replaced by Festus Mogae as president, and Mogae appointed Ian Khama as his vice-president.

In the early 1990s, the BDP started to experience serious factional fighting between new members and key veteran activists. One faction was led by the party's secretary-general, Daniel Kwelagobe from Molepolole in the south while its rival was led by Lieutenant-General Mompoti Merafhe from Serowe in the north. 'There were several issues that we had to negotiate around factions', writes Masire in his memoirs (Masire 2006, 134). 'One, perhaps the beginning of the factionalism, was where to locate the first diamond-cutting factory – Kwelagobe's home in Molepolole, or Serowe, which was Merafhe's home'. In the early 1990s the top three BDP central committee positions – president, chairman and secretary-general – were in the hands

of veteran party stalwarts from the south, namely President Masire, Vice-President Peter Mmusi and Daniel Kwelagobe, who was also the minister for Agriculture. However, a number of new professionals in the cabinet were from the north.

In late 1991 President Masire released to the public the findings of a commission of inquiry in which Mmusi and Kwelagobe were implicated (Republic of Botswana 1991). The commission's findings came to be known as the Kgabo Report after its chairman, Englishman Kgabo, former BDP MP and cabinet minister. The result of the Kgabo Report was the beginning of open factional clashes in the BDP as Mmusi and Kwelagobe together with their supporters publicly clashed with their fellow BDP parliamentarians who supported the findings of the report. Kwelagobe and Mmusi resigned their cabinet positions and Masire appointed Festus Mogae as his new vice-president. Mmusi had also resigned the vice-presidency. Mmusi and Kwelagobe then took the government to court arguing that the inquiry was held in camera contrary to rules and regulations. The BDP suspended them from their central committee positions. The two ultimately won their case. Meanwhile factional fighting heightened in the BDP. Kwelagobe and Mmusi were reported to be leading the 'south' faction while Lieutenant-General Merafhe was claimed to be in command of the 'north' faction although the south faction had northerners and the north faction also had southerners in them.

During the interregnum in the vice-presidency position a political observer called Metlhaetsile Leepile emphasised the north-south divide on the BDP scene:

Should Masire decide to ditch his long-time friend [Mmusi], the choice for v-p would then be narrowed to the north. I raise the issue of the north-south divide deliberately because although party bigwigs like to underplay it, it is very much a contentious issue within the party going down to the grassroots. The bigwigs like to say it is a power game between Merafhe and associates and the Mmusi-Kwelagobe-Mathabaphiri triumvirate. It is reported that the two sides are hoping to further their ambitions.

That the politics of north-south are occasionally coloured by personality differences is not in doubt. However, they may not be wished away. I am informed that these politics flare in important party fora as well as Cabinet from time to time. For instance, they are said to have come to the fore when Cabinet had to approve the composition of the Kgabo Commission. The initial group it is said, was composed of the people who were known to be close to Mmusi. The Commission was changed at the insistence of some from the north who felt that it should be more representative (Leepile 1992).

The build-up to the 1993 BDP national congress for the central committee elections in Masire's hometown of Kanye augmented factional combat in the party. 'No other Central Committee elections have ever been as hotly contested as this one', wrote a former BDP woman MP and cabinet minister, Clara Olsen (1993). She continued, 'Those who are vying for offices are aware that those who are elected to the Central Committee will wield a great deal of influence in the party and will most likely have a great influence in the selection of parliamentary and even council candidates for the 1994 general elections, primary elections notwithstanding'. Olsen reiterated the north-south issue and also shed some new light on the predicament facing the BDP:

The North/South Divide, which goes back almost ten years ago [to 1983] but which has never been as deep as it is today, seemed to have assumed a new dimension with 'Southerners' labelling the faction led by Lt. Gen. Mompoti Merafhe as the 'Big Five' group. Through this strategy, they may be attempting to isolate the so-called Merafhe

faction, underplaying the regional aspect of the division to give credence to their claim of being the legitimate side.

The reward would net them unaligned or neutral northerners who would strengthen their claim for legitimacy. The South Group, whose unofficial leaders are... Daniel Kwelagobe... and Peter Mmusi... has taken the offensive with both addressing party meetings whenever an opportunity presents itself, to put their case across. Their message is that the 'Big Five' want to topple President Masire and install one of themselves as president.

Working behind the scenes in fomenting the 'Southern' cause is Specially Elected MP, Mr G.U.S Matlhabaphiri who has his eye on a safe southern seat. The Northern group's counter accusation is that Kwelagobe and Mmusi are cloaking their ambition in pious protestations of patriotism and loyalty to the president, when, they claim, Kwelagobe has his eyes on the presidency.

Characters are assassinated and tales are told to the President in an effort to get him to endorse one side. No one can remain neutral in this vicious fight for the domination of the party. Party members who have steered clear of the controversy have been labelled as 'snakes' who are lying low and are too cowardly to raise their heads. (Olsen, 1993).

The 'Big Five' mentioned by Olsen were Lieutenant-General Merafe, Festus Mogae, Bihiti Temane, Chapson Butale and Ms Gaositwe Chiepe who were all cabinet ministers and northerners. Given Kwelagobe's massive following at the party's grassroots level, it was widely believed that his faction was going to emerge victorious. However, Olsen disagreed:

A win for the Kwelagobe faction, which is widely expected, will in no way solve the Botswana Democratic Party's problems, because the leadership of this faction is cliquish, has been wedded to confrontational politics over a long period and will never be able to knit the Party together. Theirs will most likely be an exclusive, rather than inclusive rule. And it will raise the Northerners' hackles.

At the Kanye congress, Mmusi and Kwelagobe's suspension was lifted and the two fought to regain their previous positions. The Merafhe faction was seen as likely to win at Kanye as a result of Masire and Mogae having condemned Mmusi and Kwelagobe for refusing to drop their case against government. However, the so-called Kwelagobe-Mmusi axis swept the board. The position of treasurer was retained by Ponatshego Kedikilwe from the north, who was unopposed. He was 'said to be non-aligned in the running power struggle between the Mmusi-Kwelagobe camp and Lieutenant-General Mompoti Merafhe faction' (*Gazette*, 21 July 1993). However, the mid-1990s led to speculation that Masire was intending to retire from the presidency and consequently Kedikilwe was seen as having become ambitious to gain the position. Although he was from the north, he became associated with the powerful Kwelagobe group in a bid to out-compete Mogae to the presidency in the event of Masire's retirement. By now Mogae was also said to be a full member of the Merafhe faction. Whereas factions persisted in the BDP, the presence of Kedikilwe in the Kwelagobe faction appears to have shifted the basis of factionalism from the obscure north-south issue to the Kedikilwe-Mogae rivalry for the presidency.

So bad was factional fighting in the BDP that in 1997 Masire avoided a possible split in the party by suspending the central committee elections and endorsing a list of candidates hand picked by each faction. These formed the new central committee. In 1997 Masire was advised to retire in order to pave the way for someone who was not associated with factional warfare in the BDP. Thus, when Mogae, a northerner, ultimately succeeded Masire in April 1998 he appointed Seretse's son and chief of the Bangwato, Ian Khama, as his vice-president. According to Molomo, (2000, 101),

this move together with Mogae's appointment of Ian Khama as minister of the powerful ministry of Presidential Affairs heartily pleased the Bangwato.

But Masire sees it differently: 'I'm glad I did it [appointing Mmusi as vice-president], and I think people like President Mogae later appreciated that I did it that way, since he was free to select Ian Khama as his vice-president without too much complaint that both were from the north. We had established that the vice-president could come from anywhere' (Masire 2006, 36). Still, it is extremely doubtful whether there would have been no serious disquiet had Masire's successor and his vice-president been both from the south, let alone originating from the same village as is the case with Mogae and Ian Khama.

Oral interviews and the *Hansard of parliamentary debates* have been used by Onalenne Selolwane (2004) for tabulation of ethnic composition of the cabinet as shown in Table 3.

#### The undercurrents of the north-south divide in the opposition, 1967-2005

The late Dr Kenneth Koma, a Mongwato, founder and long-time president of the main opposition party, the Botswana National Front (BNF), noted the importance of being conscious of the north-south divide in the election of the party's president and vice-president. In March 1988, he opined, 'Choosing a vice-president is something that calls for great thinking. You have to bear in mind that you could in fact be choosing the next president. We also want someone not from the north. Those are the two basic conditions' (*Guardian*, 11 March 1988). When the BNF's first central committee was elected in 1967 Daniel Kwele, a Kalanga from the north

Table 3. Ethnic Composition of cabinet, 1965-2005.

	1965	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005
European	25%	11%	7%	7%	6%	0%	6%	0%	0%
Bakalanga	13%	11%	7%	13%	13%	12%	13%	18%	27%
Bakgalagadi	0	0%	7%	7%	6%	0%	13%	12%	9%
Bakgatla	0	11%	0%	0%	6%	6%	0%	6%	0%
Bakwena	0%	11%	14%	20%	19%	18%	13%	12%	5%
Balete	0	0%	0%	0%	6%	6%	0%	0%	5%
Bangwaketse	13%	11%	14%	13%	19%	18%	13%	6%	9%
Bangwato	25%	22%	36%	27%	19%	29%	25%	35%	27%
Barolong	13%	0%	0%	0%	0%	6%	6%	0%	5%
Batawana	13%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	6%	0%	5%
Batlokwa	0%	11%	7%	7%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Batswapong	0%	11%	7%	7%	6%	6%	0%	6%	0%
Bayeyi	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	6%	5%
Other	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	6%	0%	5%
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Size of cabinet	8	9	14	15	16	17	17	17	22
% Tswana	62%	67%	72%	60%	69%	82%	62%	58%	50%

Selolwane provides an excellent analysis of the above table in a study commissioned by the United Nations Institute for Social Research (2004).

Source: Selolwane (2004, 26); the statistics for 2005 were provided by C.J. Makgala.

was elected president and George Kgakge from the south became his vice-president. In 1977 Koma became BNF president while Chief Bathoen II from Kanye in the south was elected his vice-president. Bathoen II retired in 1986 but a replacement for Koma's vice-president was not appointed.

In 1993, the BNF held its congress in Mahalapye for the election of a new central committee. At the congress, Michael Dingake was elected the vice-president, ending almost nine years of lack of a deputy for Koma. Dingake was a former African National Congress (ANC) political prisoner on Robben Island (Dingake 1987), where he had spent 15 years alongside Nelson Mandela and other key ANC leaders. Dingake was thus useful to the BNF because of his ANC background and connections and Koma had openly supported his candidature (Makgala 2006a). Interestingly, Dingake like Koma was from the Central district in the north but unlike Koma, Dingake was not a Mongwato proper but came from the minority Babirwa tribe.

After the BNF split in 1998, when Dingake and the majority of the central committee members left to form the Botswana Congress Party (BCP), Koma and Peter Woto became president and vice-president of the BNF respectively, yet the two came from the north. Woto himself was a Kalanga. Members of the BCP elected Dingake as president and Peba Sethantsho, a Mokgalagadi from Ghanzi in the north as vice-president. BCP members stated that their party was different from the BDP and BNF because it was led by people from the minority tribes.

In 2001 Otswetse Moupo, a northerner, was elected BNF president while Kopano Lekoma from the south became vice-president. One of the defeated contestants for the presidency, John Modise from the south, openly blamed his defeat on the machinations of the northerners or regionalism. In the BCP Otladisa Koosaletse from Kanye in the south became president while Gilson Saleshando from the north was elected vice-president. In 2005, Moupo retained the presidency of the BNF while Dr Kathleen Letshabo from the south was elected vice-president.

However, again in 2005, the BCP congress elected Gilson Saleshando as president and Dr Kesitegile Gobotswang from the north as his deputy. All the top four positions in the BCP (presidency, vice-presidency, national chairmanship and secretary-general) were won by northerners who were perceived as being strongly opposed to co-operation with the BNF. This led to murmurs that the BCP had been taken over by the northerners. Some months later, the former BCP president and secretary-general and a number of others, who were also from the south, decamped back to the BNF. Interestingly, in the 2004 general elections, the BCP did well in the north (although its sole parliamentary seat was gained in the south) while the BNF won all its 12 parliamentary seats in the south and none in the north.

The scenario above shows that while party leaders may want to have an inclusive geographical representation for their top two positions, the reality does not always make it possible.

### **Of development and tribalism: The explosion of regionalism, 2001–2003**

The north–south divide has also percolated issues of development and ethnicity in Botswana. On numerous occasions, ordinary people and parliamentarians from the north have argued that infrastructural development was concentrated in the south to the disadvantage of the northern part of the country. Those from the south have

argued that the north enjoys more development projects than the south. There is also a perception that political and economic power in Botswana is in the hands of the northerners. In November 2001, Chapson Butale, a Kalanga and member of parliament for North East argued 'that the southern part tended to enjoy development at the expense of the northern part of the country. He cited the building of the University of Botswana, the abattoir in Lobatse and senior secondary schools to demonstrate how development was skewed and biased towards the south' (*Mmegi Monitor*, 23–29 November 2001, 3). Butale was a former cabinet minister and never complained of these 'inequalities' when he was in cabinet.

Table 4 below provides the recurrent budgetary allocations of the district and town councils and their corresponding populations. It should be borne in mind that some districts are large in area but have scarce and scattered populations, so that they need a lot of money to transport goods and services over long distances.

Although the seat of government is Gaborone in the south there is a strong perception that political power is wielded by the northerners. In 2004 when cabinet unilaterally decided to locate the envisaged second university in President Mogae's home village of Palapye contrary to public opinion and recommendations of the presidential task force which was commissioned to gather opinions countrywide, this was seen in terms of regionalism by some (Makgala 2007b).

The diamond industry is key to Botswana's economic development since diamond revenue contributes approximately 75% of revenue to government coffers. The idea of establishing a diamond-cutting factory in Botswana thus led to a bitter argument which was debated along the north–south divide by the BDP leaders:

Whether the first diamond-cutting factory should be in Molepolole or Serowe was another issue on which there were serious differences. That was an issue that nearly split cabinet, and I had to nurse it very carefully. My view was that Molepolole already had the advantages of being near Gaborone, and it derived benefits from all of the jobs and purchasing power that came from that proximity. Therefore, I felt it would be better to locate the factory in Serowe. I also thought that, to the extent the decision could be seen

Table 4. Recurrent budgets and census of local district authorities (tribal areas), 1991 and 2001.

District Council	1991/2 budget (pula)	1991 census	2001/2 budget (pula)	2001 census	Area (km.2)
<i>Central</i>	P44,575,160	412,970	P265,268,000	563,260	147,730
<i>Ghanzi</i>	P11, 270,900	24,719	P65,199,340	33,170	117,910
<i>North East</i>	P8,139,080	43,354	P49,022,880	132,422	5,120
<i>North West</i>	P16,319,920	57,811	P108,493,320	75,070	86,400
<i>Chobe</i>		14,126		18,258	20,800
<b>Kgalagadi</b>	P10,467,240	31,134	P59,469,700	42,049	106,940
<b>Kgatleng</b>	P9,148,840	31,134	P56,083,110	73,507	7,960
<b>Kweneng</b>	P17,092,400	170,437	P110,433,540	230,335	35,890
<b>South East</b>	P6,291,490	43,584	P41,867,200	60,623	1,780
<b>Southern</b>	P16,293,110	147,389*	P100,873,950	171,652	28470

\*This excludes the population for the Borolong region. Local Authorities written in italics are for the northern region while those in bold is for the southern region. Chobe District was part of the North West District until about 2004.

Source: [www.statoids.com/ubw.html](http://www.statoids.com/ubw.html) and Republic of Botswana (1991/2 and 2001/2).

as mine rather than as a victory by one faction and a defeat for the other, it would do less damage to the working of cabinet and the party (Masire 2006, 84–5).

In matters pertaining to tribalism the north–south divide became quite open and explosive. In 2000, leadership of tribal groups viewed as minorities argued quite strongly that the constitution of Botswana discriminated against them, as it recognised the existence of only eight Tswana-speaking tribes. The chiefs of these eight tribes are ex-officio members of the House of Chiefs, while the so-called minorities periodically have to elect a representative to the House of Chiefs, now called Ntlo ya Dikgosi. The Tswana speakers countered this view and the debate became inflammatory and seriously threatened national unity.

The situation was so disturbing that President Mogae appointed a commission of inquiry to look into ways to resolve the matter (Republic of Botswana 2000). The recommendations of the commission of inquiry and government's attempt to redress the problem were not appreciated by some conservatives who felt that the government was out to destroy the chieftainship institution.

In particular, a Tswana-speaking deputy chairperson of the House of Chiefs, Kgosi Oarabile Kalaben from the south openly alleged that MPs from the north particularly Attorney-General Phandu Skelemani (Kalanga) as well as President Mogae actively undermined chieftainship and were part of the northerners' hidden agenda. He argued that cabinet was dominated by northerners who wanted to speed up the proposed changes. 'Kalabeng singled out Skelemani as proactive in matters where the small groups are vying for equality with the so-called major groups. He said in the cases where the state lost [to 'minorities'], Skelemani because of his northern origins did not bother to apply for appeal because he rejoiced in the victory meted out by the courts' (*Mmegi Monitor*, 2–8 April, 2002, 4).

He gave as an example the Bakwena [one of 'principal' groups in the south] chieftainship case in which Skelemani personally represented the government while he could have delegated his juniors to do so. The opposite occurred in the Wayeyi [a vocal northern 'minority' tribe] case which was handled by a principal state counsel, Tshepo Motswagole. When in the latter case, the High Court handed down a 'wrong judgement', Kalaben said that Skelemani was pleased with that outcome and saw no need for appeal (*The Midweek Sun*, 27 March 2002, 12).

Whereas there are some minority groups in the south, the most combative have been those from the north.

Kalabeng was condemned by parliamentarians from the north but he was supported by a fellow southerner, the youthful chief of the Barolong, Lobatlamang II who 'said that what Kalaben meant was that the northern citizens have been preoccupied with the topic of discrimination for a longer time than the southerners'. He added that 'it is true that people from the north have had the problem with paramount chiefs and that they have been encouraged to fight the battle by the same northern legislators' (*Mmegi Monitor*, 2–8 April 2002, 4). But the editorial of the private *Mmegi Monitor* newspaper was quite scathing in condemning Kalaben:

The comments made by ... Kgosi Oarabile Kalaben that the country's attempt at national unity is threatened by a bunch of members of parliament from the northern part of the country is unfortunate. Kgosi Kalaben did not only go as far as the legislators but he took an unwarranted swipe at the first citizen, President Festus Mogae and Attorney General Phandu Skelemani. In Kgosi Kalabeng's scheme of things, the northerners have also taken hostage of the cabinet.

We do not hold any brief for northern-based MPs, Attorney General Skelemani, President Mogae and cabinet nor do we intend to gag Kgosi Kalaben... At best Kalaben was espousing his tribal prejudices against the minority. Kalaben's bizarre logic is that the justifiable demand by minority ethnic groups in the country to demand equality before the law is treason. As a supremacist, his conservative stance is understandable. . . . It is the likes of Kalaben who should stand accused of causing disunity in our nation by merely peddling their unsubstantiated theories. Unless Kgosi owns up and apologises, he does not deserve to be in that august house (*ibid*).

The BDP primary elections for parliamentary candidates in the Francistown West constituency in 2003 was a rough campaign as regionalism was openly exploited. Here the incumbent MP, Tshelang Masisi, a Tswana-speaking southerner, was challenged by a northerner and mayor of the city of Francistown, Peter Ngoma, Kalanga. It was claimed that Ngoma agitated against Masisi and whipped up tribal and regional sentiments, saying that Masisi could not represent Francistown West since it was a predominantly Kalanga area while Masisi was a non-Kalanga from the south. There was total lack of co-operation between Masisi and Ngoma as well as their supporters. Numerous efforts by the BDP leadership to bring about peace in the campaign failed (Makgala 2006b, 188–9). Interestingly, the predominantly Kalanga residents of Francistown West constituency voted for Masisi. Ngoma protested saying that the elections had been rigged and demanded re-election, which happened, and in which he was also defeated by Masisi with a comfortable margin. This shows that people here were more concerned with their material needs than regional and tribal sentiments. In another predominant Kalanga constituency of Francistown East, a non-Kalanga, Khumongwana Maoto, also won a parliamentary seat.

### **Conclusion**

The north–south divide is traceable to the colonial period when it was used merely for administrative convenience although there were times when serious issues were debated along the divide. While the first president of the republic took account of the possible dangers of north–south regionalism in appointing people to key political positions his predecessors ignored that approach, thereby inviting long-drawn-out disputes in the ruling BDP. These disputes have seriously affected service delivery by central and local governments in some places.

Whereas the opposition parties also tried to accommodate the north–south divide in the election of the presidents and vice-presidents, there were times when events went against their wishes. In some instances some defeated former position-holders in one region defected to other opposition parties which they viewed as stronger in those regions. The provision of infrastructural development and constitutional clauses in terms of ethnic composition have also been questioned and debated along regional lines.

Nonetheless, overall the suggestion that infrastructural development has been structured by the north–south divide does not stand up to serious scrutiny and appears motivated by individuals who feel personally marginalised. Even the composition and dynamics of the competing factions within the political parties do not fall neatly into the ethno-geographical space. Any logic of mutually exclusive ethnic identities is rendered spurious by the multiple and layered identities at the ethnic, regional and party level.



### Note on contributor

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