Insecurity of chieftainship and its implication on Botswana’s national security: the case of Bakgatla Ba-Ga-Kgafela

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A B S T R A C T

Chieftainship being well anchored to hold the cultural fabric of Botswana together remains an institution of interest to uphold democracy in the country. Despite this important function, political administration misconstrues the strategic function of chiefs, leading to insecurity of the institution of Chieftainship. A case in point in this study is that of the principal chief of Bakgatla-bagga-Kgafela, Kgosi Kgafela II was the paramount chief of Bakgatla-bagga-Kgafela from 2008 to 2011 when the government of Botswana derecognised him. This is a qualitative study that used documents as the main source of data collection. The study analysed the sequence of events and activities during Kgafela’s tenure as a Chief till he fled the country to South Africa in 2012. While there is existing literature on how chieftainship has posed a threat after democratic consolidation in many African states, not much has been done on Bakgatla-bagga-Kgafela’s case. Documents were analysed in line with the theory of societal security which states that when a referent object is faced with an existential threat it develops a mechanism to ensure its survival. In this case, the study seeks to evaluate if there are implications for Botswana’s national security as Chiefs respond to such societal threats. Further to determine if tribesmen continue to be loyal to their chiefs. The main findings of this study were that; Kgosi Kgafela declared that the bogosi institution is threatened. The institution still seeks to find itself in the governance structures with power and decision-making. Bakagatla reacted to the threats, through initiatives that the community itself carries out and also moved the matter to the political sphere and put the matter as a state agenda item which is in line with propositions of societal security.

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Introduction

The institution of Chieftainship dates back to the pre-colonial times as a form of traditional structures of governance and this was not limited to Africa only but also other parts of the world. The traditional leaders commanded over their tribes and had powers over resources predominantly land and played a vital role in the judicial system of the tribe during the pre-colonial era. Sharma (2005) emphasises that the powers vested in chiefs included but were not limited to the allocation of land for ploughing and residential purposes, dividing the tribes into villages and wards, and appointment of headmen to settle disputes, manifesting on tribal customs and traditions with consultation with members. After many states gained independence, the institution was faced with several challenges about its status, powers, and functions (Sharma, 2005).

Botswana gained its independence on the 30th of September, 1966, which was declared an independent state with a political administration led by the president (Makgala & Seabo, 2017). As a state tribe were now consolidated into a nation of Batswana, without each independent tribe conducting their affairs as independent tribes but as a single nation. This implied that the Institution of Chieftainship had to undergo a disintegration of some kind through losing some powers to the political elites. While the political administration did not get rid of the institution, a lot of powers were taken from them including the appropriation of land and the general management of the tribe as a whole (Stevens, 1966; Gillett, 1973). The approach of many states was to unite different tribes within them and this is called a pluralistic approach, where no one will have to identify themselves with their tribe but rather with the nation. This threatens the identity of various tribes, which it is the mandate of the chiefs to protect.
The changes brought about by the political administration did not sit well with the institution of chieftainship as this amounted to encroachment which prompted the chief to react as they would not be seen to be simply passive and cooperative as their powers were taken (Heizue, 2015). The institution of chieftainship can be seen as facing an existential threat which is said to be at the heart of intergroup conflicts (Hirschberger, Ein-Dor, Leidner, & Saguy, 2016). There is limited literature that exists in discussing the relationship between chieftainship and national security in Botswana. The research has concentrated on new knowledge on advancing women's status in the political, social, and economic spheres to include their appointment as chiefs (Matemba, 2003); the pivotal role of chieftainship (bogosi) in the administrative, judicial, political, and social systems of Botswana (Sharma, 2005; Morapedi, 2006); enduring of Bogosi through the phase of the democratic consolidation process of Botswana (Gillett, 1973; Molomo, 2014) and diminishing powers of chiefs and the legal system (Olhogile, 1993; Morapedi, 2005). In closing this literature gap this study seeks to explore the degree to which the consolidation process of democracy in Botswana does infringe on the legitimacy of the institution of chieftainship. The study further wants to establish chiefs’ actions in preserving their institution with a view to determining implications on the state’s national security. This study is further motivated by the narration by BoafoArthur, (2003) who asserts that Chieftaincy as a political and cultural identity marker should be researched, not disregarded, regardless of whether it is a product of colonialism. This study argues that as Botswana conducts its democratic consolidation process, the institution of the chieftainship becomes compromised as they lose power and resources to the politicians. The Chieftainships in trying to maintain relevance to its existence there are implications to threaten Botswana’s national security.

**Literature Review**

This section gathers timely and pertinent research on the chieftainship and national security topics and combine it into a coherent synopsis of the body of information already known in the area. In doing so it prepares the author to make own argument on the topic. This section will define the institution of the chieftainship, how the chieftainship fits within the context of societal security/insecurity, and how societal security is linked to national security.

**Brief history on the evolution of Bakgatla baga Kgafela chieftainship**

The origins of “Bakagatla-ba-ga-Kgafela” (BBK) have been traced to the Bahurutshe. The BBK are said to have been followers of Kgafela, Matshego’s eldest son from the second house (Schapera, 1942). The Bakgatla’s story began in the Transvaal near Rustenburg. Around 1800 Bakgatla claimed land stretching from Dwarsberg, North of Limpopo and North East of Waterberg (Morton, 2008). The Bakagatla were rich in cattle, mined copper and tin, and traded over long distances. This was during the time of Pheto, whose capital was Sefikile (Schapera, 1942). Pheto conducted raids on neighbouring tribes, such as Bakwena. The wealth created by Pheto generated jealousy among those who wanted to succeed him. After Pheto, Motlotle was made regent, and instead of conducting the affairs of the tribe properly he decided to disrupt the succession plan. According to Schapera (1942), Motlotle killed Pheto’s sons, who stood between him and bogosi (chieftainship). Bakagatla were attacked by Mzilikasi and by Sebetoane’s Kololos which dispersed Bakagatla all over the region. Pheto’s surviving son, Pilane then took over the chieftainship of Bakagatla (Gillett, 1973; Croucamp & Roberts, 2011).

Pilane’s task was to group the scattered Bakagatla. According to Schapera (1942), Pilane was a great leader, fierce trader, and maker of alliances. Pilane had a son called Kgamanyane, whom he worked with to make Bakagatla a great tribe (Croucamp & Roberts, 2011). They aligned themselves with the Boers, who had modern weapons and were trading at a higher level. The Bakagatla and the Boers joined their cattle and slave raided the Balala and Bapedi. Bakagatla accumulated more cattle and traded in ivory. Their empire began to expand vastly. According to Croucamp and Roberts (2011) after Kgamanyane took over, he became richer and eventually started to look down on the Boers. As a result of this, the Boers, who were once allied to Kgamanyne, now viewed him as a threat. He had become uncontrollable, and this led to an outbreak of controversy between the Bakagatla and the Boers (Croucamp & Roberts, 2011; Porsel, 2014).

 Tribes have historically broken into sub-tribes and BBK was not an exception. Among the major issues that led to BBK splits is the appointment of a woman to the throne. BBK cultural practice does not allow the appointment of a female chief. This is contrary to the current democratic practice in Botswana. The Constitution does not discriminate on such matters. This, according to their culture, amounts to a possible loss of identity (Morton, 2008). The split of Bakagatla dates back to the years before 1700 when the tribe was divided, giving birth to Bakagatla-ba-gaMmanaana (Matemba, 2003). There was controversy on the issue of chieftainship when there was a woman earmarked for leadership. According to Matemba (2003), the Mmanaana group decided to escape and settle among Bangwaketse and later split with another group, seeking refuge among Bakwena (Matemba, 2003).

Another earliest split of Bakagatla was also around 1700, after the death of Matshego (Schapera 1942). Matshego’s first house had the only female child called Mosethla. A group of Bakagatla followed Kgafela while the other followed Mosethla. The group under Kgafela is one which has shown that under their practices a chief woman should never knowingly be made (Croucamp & Roberts, 2011). This has been the practice of the Kgafela faction since this split. According to Nyamnjoh (1996), the practice of males dominating the institution serves as enough evidence to confirm its undemocratic nature. This poses a challenge to the existence of this practice, as the constitution of Botswana promotes equality among men and women, which contravenes the cultural practices of Bakgatla. As it’s the case and according to the Chieftainship Act, anyone can be nominated as a chief regardless of gender (Government of Botswana, 1987).
The Bakgatla are said to be loyal to their beliefs and customs (Schapera, 1942). Around the mid-18th century there was famine in Transvaal, and Paul Kruger wanted to build a dam. According to Schapera (1942), Kruger then summoned Kgamanyane to provide labour for this project. Kgamanyane refused to provide Bakgatla to labour for the Boers. This resulted in Kruger ordering Harklaas Malan one of his generals to cane Kgamanyane in the public (Porsel, 2014; Croucamp & Roberts, 2011). This led to fierce hatred between Kgamanyane and the Boers. The Boers then decided to disarm Bakgatla, and still Kgamanyane declined (Croucamp & Roberts, 2011). It was then that Kgamanyane decided to flee northwest of Pilanesburg, where he settled near Phuthadikobo hill, the present day Mochudi around 1870 (Croucamp & Roberts, 2011). In 1875 Kgamanyane died and was succeeded by his son Linchwe I (Grant, 2001).

After the Bechuaneland was proclaimed, the Bakgatla reserve was demarcated and Linchwe I, was recognised as the chief (Grant, 2001). This was not so easy because Linchwe I wanted his control to stretch as far as Saulspoort, an area already inhabited by some Bakgatla (Schapera, 1942). The demarcation of borders denied him such direct control; however, he assumed indirect control (Schapera, 1942). The most notable change in the chieftainship of Bakgatla was after the death of Kgosi Molefi in 1963 when Kgosi Linchwe II was installed as the chief of Bakgatla (Morton, 2008). Linchwe II was educated and was the only chief who served under both the pre and post-colonial era (Ramsay, 2007). He was against racism and played a major part in facilitating the activities of the African National Congress (ANC), the anti-apartheid regime against white dominance in South Africa. According to Ramsay (2007), Linchwe II, like Bathoeng II and Mokgosi of Balete were not impressed with the transformation of the country through independence. This was mainly due to the fact that there was no assurance that the chieftaincy was to be a part of governance. In a meeting held in Lobatse on the 14th April 1964, Kgosi Linchwe II told her majesty’s commissioner that he sees no value in the house of chiefs. He however, opted to serve in the house as a temporary measure as he was of the view that electorates lacked maturity at the time (Ramsay, 2007). According to Ramsay (2007), Linchwe felt that the leaders served as the cornerstones that maintained the tribes’ unity and that if he gave up the chieftaincy so as to enter politics, that would be a neglect of his responsibility. Bakgatla’s resistance through vocal expression continued into the period after independence. Linchwe II died in 2006 and was succeeded by his son Kgafela II in 2008.

Institution of the chieftainship

Owusu-Mensah (2010) defines a chief as, an individual who, in compliance with the applicable customary law and family heredity, has been duly chosen, or picked and coroneted as a chief or queen-mother. Drawing from the provisions of the Chiefthood Act (2008) of Ghana, Owusu-Mensah (2010) further posits that a person nominated to be a chief must be free from any criminal record worse off, those dealing with treason, morality and security of the state. This definition indicates that a chief must represent a particular ethnic group either by nomination, selection, election, or any other legitimate means. Owusu-Mensah’s (2010) definition brings out the element of security in relation to chieftaincy. He maintains that a chief must not be a person convicted in the past. In addition, Hornby (2010) concurs that a chief is the head or ruler of a tribe or clan. Furthermore, the Rivers State Government of Nigeria (1999) Chiefthood Laws states that a chief is a person with a traditional title whom his people have chosen based on customs and procedures of exercising control over them in a town or community. This definition brings out the point that the legitimacy of a chief lies in the people.

From the perspective of this study, a chief is the leader or titular head of a people of a similar ethnic group. However, it should be noted that a chief cannot only be selected or elected to lead a particular group of people but can also be honorary. In the instance of honour, a chief does not lead any group of people. Lateju and Oladosu (2012) point out, that the honorary chieftaincy title is a common practice in the contemporary Igbo and Yoruba societies of Nigeria and other West African countries. They maintain that the honorary awards are offered on the basis that recipients have given services for the uplift of society or they are culturally privileged to be assigned or given certain responsibilities which require their honorary titles. Within the context of this study, chieftaincy does not include that of the honorary because it is not a common practice in Botswana.

Chieftaincy institution involves a chief, sub-structures and all the activities of cultural status, as well as the willingness of the people to be led by such a candidate. Shilling (2007) sees the concept of chieftaincy as a cultural form of human affairs that engages in creating leaders for both socio-cultural and socio-political needs. Therefore, chieftaincy, within the context of this study will refer to the several chiefs or traditional leaders and lower-level leaders who are in charge of politics at various levels within an ethnic group. Chieftaincy is an enduring part of Africans’ heritage, identity, and dignity. According to Nlerum (2010), the chieftaincy institution acts as a repository of local political authority. She argues that the institution is still respected particularly in areas where local prosperity has allowed chiefs to carve out positions for themselves. In terms of being at the forefront of local development, the chieftaincy institution serves as a centepiece for mobilising people for the betterment of communities and serves as a productive conduit between the populace and the national government.

Commenting from the Nigerian perspective, Nlerum (2010) contends that the chieftaincy institution commands sanctity and respect from the grassroots; links closely with the grassroots; and understands the problems of the people. In addition, Ansah-Koi (1998) contends that chieftaincy is a formidable force to be recognised within contemporary African politics, particularly in light of the growing demands made by cultural and ethnic communities for representation, reparation, and acknowledgement. In a similar vein, Ray, Van-Nieuwaal and Andriean (1996) concluded that the state has been mismanaged by violent and greedy political elites, which is why African states have been comparatively unsuccessful in bringing about democracy and development. Within and outside
Africa, Chieftaincy has come back to prominence as a significant platform for essentially genuine indigenous political expression. Ray et al. (1996) further argue that chiefs control small pieces of land with minimum resources, while politicians control the country as a whole. The politicians have access to all resources, much to the benefit of themselves and the elite few. The degree of resource exploitation is less in chiefs than in politicians. Chieftaincy as a political and cultural identity marker should be researched, not disregarded, regardless of whether or not perceived as a product of colonialism (Boafo-Arthur, 2003).

There has been intellectual debate on the chieftaincy and such debates have produced respectable literature. According to Nzimiro (1972), there are three critical strands of the intellectual debate on chieftaincy: the "Republicans," who believe that chieftaincy is out of date and should be eliminated in many African countries because they live in an era of recent liberal democracy. There are also the "anti-republicans", who perceive the ongoing existence of chieftaincy as a means of reclaiming the contemporary for the old kingdom; and the "students of society" who only have a curiosity about how the chieftaincy institution helps preserve traditional societies' social structures in the face of swift social change.

In fact, the combination of all these ideas or works offers an intriguing addition to a better comprehension of the chieftaincy in Africa. However, this study approaches the concept of chieftaincy from the dimension of the third strand of the debate. The rationale of this position is that chieftaincy is a select few unbreakable establishments that have persevered during all three political eras of Botswana's history: pre-, during-, and after colonisation. Furthermore, chieftaincy has also survived amidst the environment of one-party dominance, irrespective of the leader’s reservations towards chiefs and the institution itself. As a representation of governmental authority, especially before colonialism, chieftaincy in Africa has undergone transformations as a result of former colonial control, the establishment of military authority upon independence, and democracy.

In Botswana the Chieftainship (Bogosi) is regulated under Bogosi Act Chapter 41:01. With regard to the recognition of tribes, this act sets provisions on such matters as well as the management of the institution and traditional leadership by a person chosen by the tribe and acknowledged by the minister. The act, among other things, outlines the process for designating and recognizing leaders, offers a means of appealing the minister's judgments, specifies the courts' authority to hear cases involving the administration of tribes, and specifies the minister's regulatory authority (Government of Botswana, 1987). As it is clear above Bogosi exists in a politically administered environment contrary to the old practices and a conclusion can be made that Bogosi is facing societal security threat as its existence is challenged.

**Societal insecurity**

In discussing societal security, it is worth defining security first which will culminate in defining national security. In defining security one has to asks whether there is a generally accepted meaning of security or if it ought to be considered a fundamentally disputed idea (Vladimir, 2010). Trying to define security has been an evolving phenomenon since the days of traditionalists like Walt. Walt (1991, p. 160), defines security as a “state” being free from intentional attacks which may compromise the state's survival as “states” exist in an international system which is chaotic. Walt (1991, p. 212) also defines security studies as “the study of the threat, use and control of military force”. This was the notion of the state as the only object that can be threatened. Another school of thought spearheaded by Buzan, Weaver and De Wilde (1998), called „the wideners”, tried to explain security by not focusing only on military but widening the definition horizontally and vertically. The horizontal widening explains that the concept of security should not focus only on the military but should include political, economic, societal and environmental sectors. A vertical scope of security should not only refer to the “states” being the only referent object, but should also recognise people, societal groups, and the entire human race (Buzan, Weaver, & de-Welder, 1998). All the components as outlined above contribute to national security. As alluded, chieftainship is seen as a societal construct hence the discussion to focus on societal security.

The nation of Batswana is comprised of different societal units such as Bakgatla, Bakwena, Bakalaka and many others. These are societal units which identify themselves with common aspects, such as culture and common practices. The threats to identity are therefore seen as a construction of something threatening some. According to Buzan et al. (1998), a number of issues are viewed as dangers to the safety of society such as migration as well as a pluralistic approach to governance. The modern political administration does not want people to continue to be identified by tribes but by nationality. This threatens the identity of various tribes, which it is the mandate of the chiefs to protect.

Buzan et al. (1998) further state consolidation projects intended to shape ethnic groups culture to tie it to that of a state, may control most of the machinery of cultural production such as schools, language rights and churches. In trying to counter this individual tribe will fail because the state has all resources to shape the state culture. Buzan et al. (1998) further explains that some Social security challenges are battled in peoples' hearts and minds, while others focus on material issues that affect identity. Societal issues are therefore about identity and are fought within the medium of identity (horizontal and vertical). In a way, Buzan et al. (1998) says, Societies respond to these dangers in two ways: firstly, through community-led initiatives or by attempting to bring the problem into the political sphere and place it on the state agenda. In some instances, societies decide to use non-state actors to address perceived identity concerns while they continue to survive; secondly, they may choose to take control of the current one, establish their own government, or be left alone. According to Makgala, (1999) chiefs were responsible for taking action against societal threats and ensuring the preservation of culture and the tribe itself. It is thus important to discuss the linkage between societal security and national security.
Societal security and National security

Chieftainship had its security implications from the beginning of its existence. Disputes within the issues of chieftainship have always been a threat to tribal stability. When there is instability in a nation, the security of that nation is threatened. The issue of succession to the throne has been a source of instability in some tribes. The truth is that many of the contemporary chiefs are not the original heirs to the throne. This has brought up serious issues, which have compromised the security of many tribes. Mbuya (1999) asserts that families have been torn apart due to disputes of chieftainship, lives have been lost and some people have even been banished, like in the case of Kgosi Sebele II of Bakwena, who was banished and died in exile (Morton & Ramsay, 1987).

Another example of chieftaincy linked to national security was in the case of Frende de Libertacao de Mozambique (FRELIMO). After winning the first post-independence elections in 1978 abolished chieftainship. This was mirrored as an anarchic institution which collaborated with colonial regimes (Goncalves, 2006). Resistencia Nacional Mozambique (RENAMO) on the other hand used the abolishment of the institution to its advantage. In some cases, Chiefs hosted RENAMO soldiers by feeding them and providing spiritual protection (Alexander, 1997). RENAMO ended up in full control of the North of Mozambique (Goncalves, 2006). In Zimbabwe around 1890 after colonisation, the chieftaincy institutions were dismantled and replaced with modern institutions which were pursuing the interests of the coloniser to also exercise firm control on the native blacks. Chigwata (2016) asserts that, post-independence the traditional leadership was given recognition as it was realised how influential chiefs were especially in mobilizing people for community projects and maintaining social order. However, they work within the jurisdiction of institutions such as the local government (Chigwata, 2016).

The literature emphasises the important role played by chiefs in the past. It is evident that after most states got independence chieftainship institutions were dissolved as they were seen as a threat to the political administration and had to be dealt with forthwith. At some later stage, they were recognised within the structures of political administration (Chigwata, 2016). With this approach, the political administration was in total control since the chiefs were even part of the payroll. Most of all the resources which were accumulated by chiefs in the form of land were now in the hands of politicians. This has been declared to be robbery by politicians to have what did not belong to them (Kgafela, 2014).

Methodology

This part of the study seeks to explain the systematic way of solving the research problem. This part should be understood to systematically explain the procedures which were conducted to collect data and analyse it (Kothari, 2004). This section of the study will highlight the research approach, research design, data collection and data analysis.

Research approach

This study was espoused on a qualitative study approach. Qualitative research involves extended and intensive engagement with the field or real-world scenario. Most of the time, the circumstances are ordinary and represent people's daily lives in their individual, social, and professional contexts (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Studying the institution of chieftainship is therefore appropriate to be understood through this approach as the study reflect on a social entity and involves people’s daily lives.

Research design

This study adopted a case study design with the main focus on Bakgatla-baga-Kgafela in Botswana. A case study examines a current phenomenon (the "case") in the context of the real world, particularly in situations where it may be difficult to distinguish between the phenomenon and the context (Yin, 2014). The study covers the period 2008 to 2011 when Kgosi Kgafela was the chief of BBK.

Data collection methods

Data collection methods are approaches used to collect data in a study. In a qualitative study these techniques can range from interviews to comprehend a situation, experience, or event at a personal level, "Semi-structured interviews" to gather perspectives on a specific topic, contextual information or an institutional perception; and "documents analysis," such as official reports, websites, media articles or diaries, to investigate attitudes, convictions, and notions of appropriate behaviour (Hammarberg, Kirkman, & de-Lacey, 2016). In this study, data was collected in the form of documents. During the period of Kgosi Kagafela II, there were ten (10) Daily News articles on the Bakgatla chieftainship and there were two versions of the Bakgatla magazine called Bua-Kgabo. There was also a book titled; The King’s Journal: From the Horse’s Mouth, authored by Kgafela Kgafela II. All documents were selected on a non-statistical purposive sampling technique for data analysis. Such documents are accessible from Botswana National archives in Kgosi Kgafela’s profile folder. Other documents were also extracted from former Minister Lebonaamang Mokalake’s folder also from National archives. Various incidences reported by the Daily News were triangulated and augmented with private media reports.

Data analysis

This study used the Thematic Analysis (TA) technique for data analysis. This technique has become popular in psychology and other fields for analysing qualitative data (Terry, Hayfield, Clarke, & Braun, 2017). This technique needs the researcher to carefully review the data in order to find recurring themes, subjects, concepts, and meaning patterns.
Findings and Discussions

This section of the study presents the findings and discussion in line with the objectives. This study sought to explore the degree to which the consolidation process of democracy in Botswana does infringe on the legitimacy of the institution of chieftainship.

Findings

Bakgatla-baga-Kgafela has shown loyalty to their customs and the chieftainship. Bakgatla-baga-Kgafela in pursuing their practice of their culture and customs created an environment insecure for people living in their territory. Further to the insecurity of the people, there was a creation of conflict with the government which forced the government to use constitutional powers resulting in the chieftaincy trying to validate its legitimacy. It has also come out that the democratic consolidation in Botswana has total control over the institution of the Chieftainship.

Discussions

After Kgosi Kgafela’s took over as a chief in 2008 he was clear about his agenda. During his inauguration speech, he told the audience that he will reinstate bojale and bogwera (female and male initiation). These cultural initiations were discouraged by the colonial rulers, who wanted them to be Christians and encouraged people to do things the western way (Kgafela, 2014). The last initiation’s group of Matukwi was conducted in 1989 and the practice has since stopped. After almost 20 years, Kgafela reinstated the practice. This can be said to be a test of patriotism from Bakgatla. Kgafela wanted to see the loyalty of his subjects and also wanted to find out if Bakgatla still respected their identity and their chief. He continued to indicated his agenda against the government through his speeches and various activities conducted in Mochudi. The traditional initiation has been conducted by various tribal groups in Botswana as a means of guiding teenage boys and girls into adulthood. It was a transformation through which individuals were given a new role (Selabe, 2009). Among the rituals performed on males was circumcision. After the initiation is over the chief will give the regiment a name. The name given is always attached to meaning to reflect the task ahead or challenges facing the tribe.

Kgafela’s naming of the tribes further reflected his agenda, specifically trying to show insecurity of the institution of the chieftainship. In 2009 the first female group graduated and was named Madisakgosi, which means those who protect the chief. It was a group of about 1800 young women from the Bakgatla tribe (Bua Kgabo, 2010). The emblem was dominated by a weapon, which Kgafela says taught him the real significance of a weapon and why they are handed a weapon at the coronation (Kgafela, 2014). The second group was Madibela-nkwe meaning those who protect the leopard. Chiefs, on the basis that they are inaugurated with Leopard skin, are sometimes referred to as Leopards (Nkwe). The symbol was a winged Leopard in flight clutching at five straws. About eight hundred (800) men graduated and during the graduation he said “I could understand the power of tradition in the emotions of tribal people” (Kgafela, 2014). In 2010, another group of one thousand four hundred and forty (1440) women were mobilised. They graduated and were named Matsosakgabo meaning the awakening of a monkey (Bua Kgabo, 2010). Kgafela said this name serves as a reminder of the awakening process as it is presently unfolding in our daily lives. The symbol is of a monkey sitting around fire. He says this symbol seeks to awaken Bakgatla to follow their tradition and not to follow others (Kgafela, 2014). Matsosakgabo were followed by a male regiment called Matlotlakgosi (those who look upon the chief with profound respect). About eight hundred and fifty (850) men enrolled for this intake, which included twenty junior chiefs, from which ten were from Bakgatla in South Africa.

This is how Kgafela built his source of adopting a rebellious attitude towards government. He could now ascertain that he has a good following in his tribe. Many for having been initiates could identify themselves as Bakgatla with pride and dignity for having been afforded an opportunity which had been frozen for decades. In military terms this is called the Centre of Gravity (CoG). A military force’s centres of gravity are the traits, capacities, or locations that give it its mobility, physical prowess, or fighting spirit (Strange & Iron, 2004). Having built loyalty and being assured of his security, Kgafela was now prepared to take on the government of Botswana. All the names were focused around the protection of the Chief and the revival of the Bakgatla’s identity. With all the comments he makes, one could predict that something serious was coming. When graduating Matlotlakgosi, Kgafela told the tribe not to put their trust in politicians, whom he described as “crooks” and “thieves” who do not know the definition of unity. He said he named the regiment Matlotlakgosi in “a world full of corruption and chaos where they have no choice but to rely on their chiefs” (Gaotlhobogwe, 2010).

Since Kgafela became head of the royal house, he dominated the media headlines (Otlogetswe, 2011). He was still working as a full-time lawyer and wanted to also be part of the House of Chiefs at the same time. The House of Chiefs is a consultation body that advises Parliament on matters of culture within the legislative branch of Botswana’s government. He started to practice law enforcement the way it was traditionally done. In the traditional way those who wronged the tribe were lashed/whipped (The voice, 2010). This has since changed over time and the common law took precedence over customary law. The common law requires that anyone who is suspected to have done wrong must undergo a certain procedure of legal proceedings and be given a punishment, which is in accordance with the law (Otlogetswe, 2011). All these measures of ensuring discipline within Kgatleng was seen to be unlawful, and Kgafela and many others were taken to court for unlawful flogging (Baatise, 2010).

In one of the instances when Kgafela and others were to be detained, the Bakgatla regiments were tested on their obligation to protect the chief. It was, indeed, on that day that Kgafela was sneak out of police security after Regional Magistrate Barnabas Nyamadzabo had ordered that he be remanded in custody (Sunday Standard, 2010). The regiments escaped Kgafela to Mochudi and denied the
law enforcement officers the opportunity to execute their duty (Sunday Standard, 2010). While his case was still on, Kgafela challenged the legality of the constitution of Botswana as he felt it was not constructed with proper consultation with the people (Otlogetswe, 2011). This was the turning point of events which saw the battle between Kgafela and the state increase in intensity. Kgafela then proclaimed the executive members unwanted in Kgatleng. Kgafela wrote a letter to District Commissioner, Ms Samapipi, and stated that: “Your cabinet was aware that both Mr Mokalake and Re Siele are not welcome in our kgotlas” (Mmegi, 2011, p. 4). This was an egotistical statement from Kgatleng, where the president and his cabinet had been banned or at the very least considered unwelcome. Kgafela then insisted that the sub-chiefs should not allow the ministers to address meeting in the Kgatleng kgotlas. One of the incidents was when Minister Siele wanted to address a meeting in Oodi village where a group of Bakgatla from Mochudi occupied the kgotla and did not allow the minister to address the meeting (BOPA, 2011). This was seen as evidence enough to prove Kgafela’s words that the ministers and the president were not welcome in Kgatleng (Keoreng, 2011).

On the 28th October 2011 Kgosi Kgafela II was de-recognised by Hon. Lebonaamang T. Mokalake, Minister of Local Government, as provided for in the Bogosi Act of 2008. Kgafela was being de-recognised for having (a) dissatisfied with government attempts to interact and discuss with the Kgatleng community on matters of development that impact the community (b) misused his authority by giving the Kgatleng Dikgosana (sub-chiefs) orders to disregard and obstruct Ministers’ attempts to hold meetings in the Kgatleng District and (c) incited sub-chiefs (Dikgosana) to be disobedient and refuse to follow the legitimate commands of Ministers (Otlogetswe, 2011). Minister Mokalake, therefore, took a decision to apply the provisions of Section 15 of the Bogosi Act, Chapter 41:01, in the general good, to immediately revoke Kgosi Kgafela II’s recognition (Mmegi, 2011).

The deductions made from the sequence of events are very clear that Kgosi Kgafela’s actions were motivated by the response he got from the tribesmen as loyal and supportive to their chief. Kgosi Kgafela waged war against political administration and sort to make the state of Botswana dysfunctional when attacking the constitution as null and void. What would have been the implication of nullifying the country’s constitution after 50 years of independence. There would have been anarchy as the country would be restructured into the traditional setup.

Among the options raised in the literature Bakgatla reacted to the threats in various ways. One of the ways was through initiatives that the community itself carries out, like practicing traditional punishments and also taking the law into own hands by vandalising some infrastructure like the communication tower. Four Bakgatla royals and three other males were found guilty by the Southern Regional Magistrate Court of damaging a metre box belonging to the Botswana Power Corporation and a tower belonging to the Mascom Wireless Company that was worth close to P1.4 million (Sunday Standard, 2012). Kgafela also moved the issue to the political sector and putting the matter in the state agenda, which was not given attention by political actors as it also threatened their existence. In all the efforts that Kgosi Kgafela had made to communicate with the government, there was never a formal response from the government.

After the government of Botswana decided to conduct a constitutional review in 2021, Kgafela wrote to the president of Botswana in a letter dated 9th December 2021, that Bakgatla would only consider the constitutional review as long as it gives back the Bakgatla land (Weekendpost, 2022). He even said in the same letter that the government must release Bakgatla into independence. This is a separatist approach which may be associated with catastrophic security outcomes. However, one of the University of Botswana analysts Mokalaba Mokalaba argues that Kgafela II’s secession talk is still just wishful thinking with almost little chance of coming true. He also believes that the Bakgatla tribesmen lack the motivation to leave Botswana, as well as the dominating Western culture and its values, in favour of the unknown (Bagwasi, 2022). Another analyst Keaoleboga Dipogiso voiced disbelief at Kgafela II’s secessionist aspirations since he is of the view that Kgatleng lacked the economic base and power to beat the drums of territorial independence (Bagwasi, 2022).

Kgafela faced charges of flocking people in Kgatleng and failed to appear in court on several occasions. He was ultimately issued a warrant of arrest which forced him to flee the country to South Africa, where he is said to have acquired citizenship (Piet, 2010). He is currently trying to resolve the chieftainship issues within the Bakgatla in Moruleng in the North West province in South Africa. While analysts view Kgatleng as lacking the economic base and power to beat the drums of territorial independence, they need to analyse Kgatleng beyond the Kgatleng district, where the territory speeds over some vast land rich in mineral deposits into the Republic of South Africa. It must further be understood that instability does not require masses but a small group is capable of destabilising peace in some cases even individuals.

Conclusions

The sequence of events that happened over the time of Kgafela as a chief is a clear indication that there is resistance from the institution of the chieftainship to the way political administration has taken authority from them. The institution still seeks to find itself in the governance structures with power and decision-making. Kgafela pleaded with his tribe to rally behind him in whatever option available to restore Bakgatla’s identity and repossess of land that belongs to the tribe. The major issue of the government’s concern as deduced from Kgosi Kgafela is the declaration of the Constitution of Botswana null and void. Botswana has accepted the unity of the nation and live with each other without emphasising identity by tribal lines. Kgosi Kgafela’s agenda would bring about a lot of controversies which has the potential to collapse the state of Botswana.
The ultimate truth is that tribal identity is fading away through the democratisation of the state of Botswana. However, the Constitution has made a provision for cultural practices to be observed as long as they do not infringe on the rights of others. Despite tolerance by chiefs to the democratisation process, some have reached a point where their elasticity has stretched beyond the limits. It is at this point that the chieftaincy tries to resurface to gain authority especially if there tends to be maladministration from the political administration. As a lesson to all African states, the African indigenous government system continues to strive to find its legitimate position within the contemporary structures of governance. It is a matter of time and space and states must have plans to mitigate such before it happens. As a recommendation, the institution of chieftainship must be revisited to be part of the administration of the state, not only in an advisory role but in a direct role. Chiefs can be given the role of consultation on issues of development and fair distribution of resources. It is thus on the basis of the case of Bakgatla-ba-ga-Kgafela that this paper concludes that, Kgafela II in trying to preserve the tribe’s existence and identity there is a potential threat to Botswana’s national security.

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