

## Does Ruretse Belong to Batlokwa? What History Can Tell Us

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First a disclaimer. My wife and I live on and own a plot in an area that has come to be known as Ruretse. The name for this plot and all the others surrounding and including the 'Khama farm' are actually registered as portions of 'Kenmoir'. After Botswana's first president Sir Seretse Khama and his wife Ruth purchased Kenmoir, it became popularly known as Ruth and Seretse's farm, 'Ruretse' for short.

It has become a habit of late for some living in Tlokweng to claim that the Khama family took Batlokwa land and are now bound to return it to the Batlokwa. The question is, on what basis do the Batlokwa have a claim to this farm and the 107 freehold 4-hectare plots created in 1987 that form its perimeter? This is a question that interests me not only as a Ruretse resident (and permanent resident of Botswana. I am an American citizen), but because for many years I have carried out historical research on Botswana both in Botswana and South Africa. You may sample some of my writing on <https://ub-bw.academia.edu/FredMorton>. Here is what I have learned about Tlokwa history and how they came to be located in what is known in Botswana as Tlokweng or more properly Moshaweng. My information is taken from publications by other authors, from oral histories recorded many years ago in the then Bechuanaland Protectorate (colonial Botswana) and western Transvaal, from archival records including official and missionary correspondence, and from archaeological research. Among these, the richest source is Vivien Ellenberger's 'History of the Batlokwa of Gaborone' (1939).

The Batlokwa of Moshaweng originate in South Africa and are one of the most recent settlers in Botswana. Either of Sotho or Nguni origin the Tlokwa venerated *Nkwe* (tiger or leopard) originally, then adopted *Thakadu* (antbear) as their totem. Before coming this way the Batlokwa occupied a large stonewall settlement known as Marothodi, located just west of present Sun City in the North West Province of South Africa. Marothodi was a copper and iron smelting centre and the capital of Kgosi Bogatsu Taukobong (d. 1820) and his son Kgosi. The latter was killed in 1823 during skirmishes with the invading followers of Sebetwane (Bakololo). From this point, the Batlokwa broke up into several groups, some travelling as far as Serowe in Botswana. Matlapeng, son of Kgosi, was safeguarded by Bashe who returned with him to their original area and settled at Letlhakeng, where Matlapeng's son Gaborone was born.

Years later, when Matlapeng had become *Kgosi* (chief), the Boers came into the area and named the hills around Letlhakeng as Matlapengsberg, after the Tlokwa *Kgosi*. The Batlokwa naturally resented submitting to Boer rule, and it is said that Matlapeng shot a Boer man trying to 'interfere' with his wife. Rather than suffer his own execution as punishment, Matlapeng took his followers west to join Sechele's Bakwena at Dithejwane. For a time they remained Sechele's subjects and moved with them to Molepolole (Ntsweng). But in c.1868 after a falling out, Matlapeng and his people relocated across the Ngotwane into the Dwarsberg and settled at Tshwene-tshwene (inside the present Madikwe Game Reserve).

Several years later, the Bakgatla-ba ga Kgafela under Kgamanyane left the Transvaal, stayed briefly with Matlapeng, his uncle (Kgamanyane was the son of Bogatsu's daughter Mankube, Pilane's wife), before settling in Kwen territory at Phuthadikobo hill. When fighting broke out between the Bakgatla and Bakwena, the Tlokwa assisted the Kgatla. During the war, Matlapeng died and Gaborone succeeded. The Bakwena-Bakgatla war ended in 1883, with the Kgatla having seized the eastern portion of Kweneng. The Batlokwa then moved to their final place of settlement after Gaborone paid tribute to Sechele, who in turn granted him Moshaweng. However, not long thereafter, the British proclaimed the Protectorate and

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after a while pressured *Dikgosi* (Chiefs) to grant land for the building of the railway. In response, Sebele I, Sechele's successor, granted the British a large eastern area that included Moshaweng. Sebele's grant ultimately became the Gaberones Block (see the Map 1), which the British handed over to the British South Africa Company, the railway builders. Apart from the Crown Reserve, which the British kept, the Company prepared to divide the rest into freehold farms and sell them to white settlers. Sebele invited the Batlokwa to relocate into the Bakwena Reserve, as it became known, but Gaborone struck a deal with the Company to pay rent in order to stay put in Moshaweng, 'provided that the land should be held at the pleasure of the Company'. The rental agreement, moreover, would lapse upon Gaborone's death, at which point, 'the Natives now our tenants should move without further delay'.

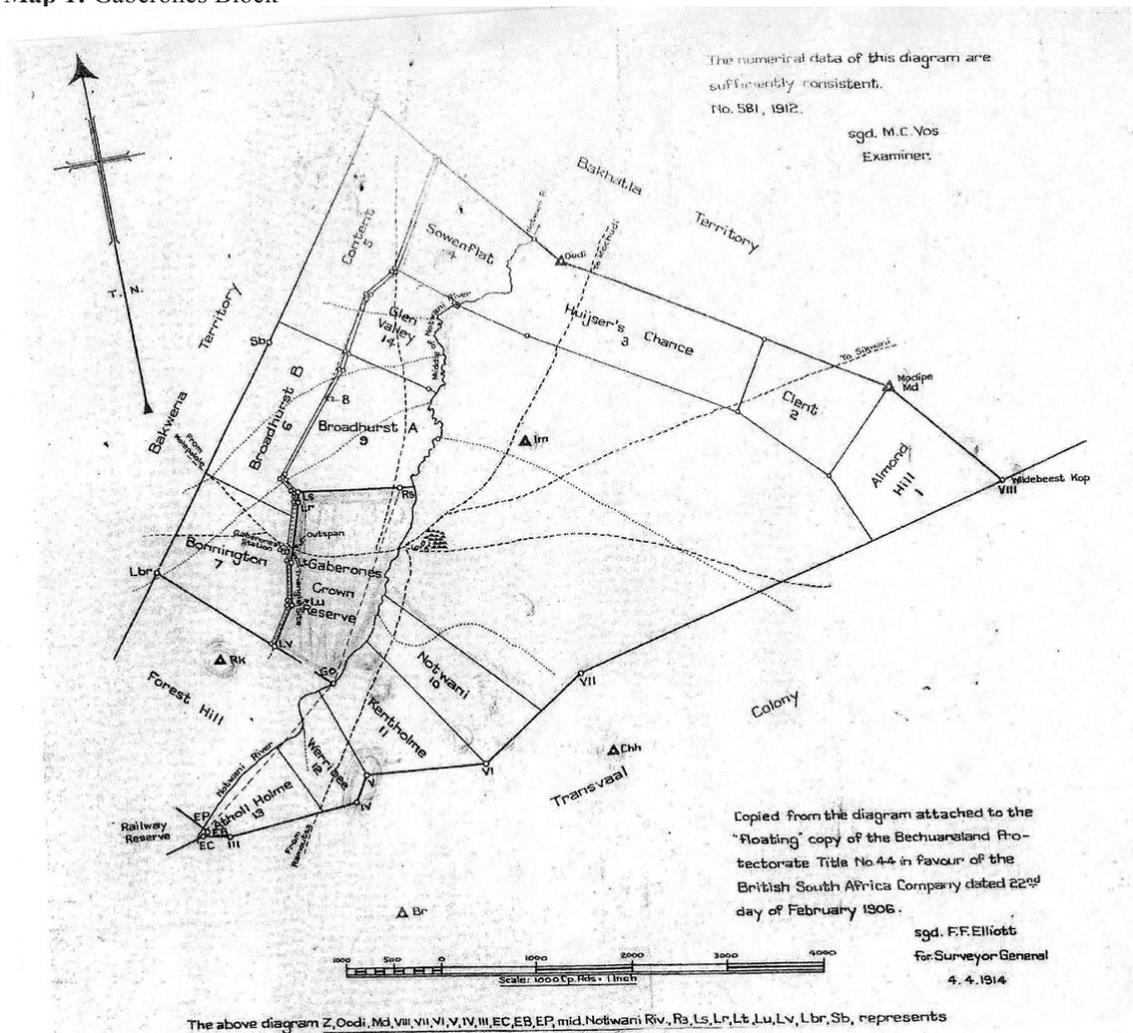
When the ancient Gaborone died at an estimated age of 106, in 1931, the issue was resolved with a new agreement. The Company transferred Moshaweng to the British High Commissioner, and in 1932 the British proclaimed it as the "Batlokwa Native Reserve". In summary:

1. The Batlokwa of Matlapeng and Gaborone settled at different periods in Bakwena territory, first at Dithejwane, then Molepolole, and eventually Moshaweng. Each location was understood to be under the authority of Sechele I.
2. Sechele granted Gaborone the rights to occupy Moshaweng
3. Sechele's son Sebele, however, was regarded by the British authorities as having dominion over Moshaweng and the area around it.
4. Sebele granted this entire area to the British in 1895.
5. The British later granted this land, with the exception of a small Crown Reserve, to the British South Africa Company, and the Batlokwa became the Company's rent-paying tenants.
6. In 1931, the Company granted to the British that area occupied by the Batlokwa and which then became the Batlokwa Native Reserve.

As to the question, is Ruretse historically part of Tlokweng/Moshaweng? The answer is not an easy one. Can we ignore the colonial period by going back to Sechele's grant to Gaborone prior to the Bechuanaland Protectorate, and thereby disallow Sebele's grant of the area to the British and subsequent creation of the Gaberones Block? If so, the question then becomes: What were the dimensions of Moshaweng granted by Sechele to Gaborone? There seems to be no record. A glance at the Gaberones Block map below indicates that four farms separate Moshaweng from the Bakgatla Reserve southern boundary –these include Sowenflat (present-day Phakalane), Huijers Chance (later Kenmoir/Ruretse), Clent and Almond Hill. It is possible that the Batlokwa were using that land for *meraka* cattle posts and *masimo* (ploughing fields) prior to the formation of the Gaberones Block. Of course the same could be said of the Bakgatla, who had crowded out the Bakwena during their war. Moreover, when Batlokwa rented Moshaweng from the Company, Kgosi Gaborone appears to have been content with the agreed upon area, along with a concession in the form of a passageway between Sowenflat and Glen Valley to enable the Batlokwa to access the railway.

One should note that long before the Bakwena, Bakgatla and Batlokwa arrived in the Ruretse area, others had occupied this land. Just down the road from our plot at the base of a *kopje* (small hill) is pottery that archaeologists estimate to be 400 years old. The same may be seen at the foot of Modipe hill, where the Clent and Almond Hill farms were surveyed as part of the Gaberones Block. Who these people were is unknown, but most likely they were the ancestors of the people who today are referred to as Bakgalagadi.

Map 1: Gaborones Block



Source: [https://www.google.co.bw/search?q=gaborones+block&source=lnms&tbn=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjoqsqxsndAhWpIMAKHU0CAk0Q\\_AUDigB&biw=1366&bih=567#imgrc=Bev-9EqNTQsQYbM](https://www.google.co.bw/search?q=gaborones+block&source=lnms&tbn=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjoqsqxsndAhWpIMAKHU0CAk0Q_AUDigB&biw=1366&bih=567#imgrc=Bev-9EqNTQsQYbM) accessed 20 September 2018. The map also appears in *Kutlwano* (March 2012).

### Acknowledgement

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