

## The Eventful Month of August in the Annals of History of Mochudi

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The month of August 2021, marks 152 years since a section of Bakgatla-ba-Kgafela under Kgosi Kgamanyane fled the Transvaal arriving two years later in the present day Mochudi which at the time was a territory of Bakwena of Kgosi Sechele I. It was on 1 August 1869 when the trip from Moruleng across the Madikwe or Marico River started with another section of the *morafe* (ethnic group) remaining in Moruleng. When they left, they knew their destination but camped at a place called Tshwene-Tshwene for two years. They had the ‘promised land’ in the Kgalagadi at a place belonging to the Bakwena led by Kgosi Sechele. The promised land was offered to them a few years prior when they had assisted Sechele’s Bakwena against Bangwaketse to recover their cattle from the latter. The cattle had been hidden at a place called Segeng near Kanye.

Following the victory against Bangwaketse, Bakwena offered Bakgatla land stretching from what is now Sebele near Gaborone through Mmopane, Kopong and Lentsweletau up to Lephephe. Bakgatla did not immediately take up the offer. However, when Sechele heard that Kgamanyane had been flogged at a public square by the Boer leader Paul Kruger, he reminded the Bakgatla of his offer assuring them that it was still valid, and they were free to occupy the land.

Therefore, when they left Moruleng, they were aware that they had the promised land waiting to be occupied. It was almost like the biblical children of Israel having been offered the promised land to move out of Egypt where they were being enslaved and persecuted. For the children of Israel, the promised land was Canaan while for the Bakgatla, the promised land was the stretch of land in the Bakwena territory which included Mochudi. Unlike Canaan, which was the land of milk and honey, Mochudi was the land of peace. Of course, the rivers of Notwane and Madikwe offered plenty of water for the people and their cattle. That was the reason why Kgosi Kgamanyane refused Sechele’s instruction to go further than Mochudi to go and settle at what is called Semarule near Molepolole. Under Kgosi Linchwe I, Kgamanyane’s son and successor, 1 August has since been declared a day to be celebrated annually. In fact, it is Bakgatla’s ‘freedom day’. It is the day when they said goodbye to persecution and slavery at the hands of the Boers of the Transvaal Republic.

Therefore, during the week of 1 August 2021, the Phuthadikobo Museum in Mochudi reminded people of the importance of 1 August in their Facebook page. Quoting from Professor Isaac Schapera’s book, *Ditiragalo tsa Merafe ya Batswana*, the museum noted ‘in August 1892, under the leadership of Kgosi Linchwe I’, the Bakgatla started celebrating the day by giving out *dikgafela* (gifts of agricultural harvest) to their *kgosi*. The day is, therefore, also an important one in the calendar of the people of Mochudi. The Museum plans to celebrate this day every year. Their plans were however, disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic which started wreaking havoc in 2020.

Looking at the whole history of Bakgatla-ba-Kgafela, it appears that the month of August is pregnant with historical events than any of the 12 months of the year. This does not mean that all the historical events fall in August. There is the South African War of 1899-1902 (sometimes called Anglo/Boer War) in which Bakgatla actively participated. Kgosi Molefi of the Bakgatla (1929-1958) was also expelled from the area by the British colonial authorities in August 1936. Other important events of this month are rarely remembered yet they are very significant. For instance, fewer Bakgatla hardly remember the destruction of Kgosi Linchwe II’s famous Datsun with registration number BL 1 which also took place during the month of August. It was in the evening of 28 August 1975 that after arriving from a football match in Lobatse, where his Mochudi Rovers football club had walloped Maletamotse football club, that

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he parked the car at a local bar in Mochudi unaware that he was using it for the last time. It was set alight while he was busy drinking and talking to other patrons.

In a subsequent trial of a local man, evidence confirmed that the destruction of the vehicle was politically motivated. If Chief Leabua Johnathan government in Lesotho had not expropriated the University of Botswana, Lesotho, and Swaziland (UBLS) for itself, Kgosi Linchwe's vehicle would not have been destroyed. Its destruction followed the events in Lesotho because following the expropriation of the UBLS campus in Lesotho; he was one of those high-profile individuals to support the Botswana University Campus Appeal (BUCA) which was driven by the government of Botswana for building of the country's own university in Gaborone. The Botswana National Front (BNF), the main opposition party, was not supportive of the otherwise hugely popular BUCA initiative. The people who were linked with the torching of Kgosi Linchwe's car were all BNF activists. One of them, Rapula Tshabang Sello, had vowed at a political rally in Gaborone's high-density area of Bontleng that they would fight Kgosi Linchwe until he made his position very clear as to whether he was a member of parliament for the ruling Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) or a Bakgatla *kgosi* since chiefs were not allowed by law to be involved in partisan politics. In a subsequent interview with reporters from the state-owned Radio Botswana and the *Botswana Daily News*, Kgosi Linchwe said he was the *kgosi* of all political parties in Botswana. 'I am the chief of the BDP, and I am the chief of the BNF', he stated.

As to what happened next is too long to narrate. It involved court hearing both at the magistrate and high court levels where the Chief Justice Heyfron Benjamin held that a wrong charge had been preferred and upheld the applicant's appeal. Perhaps, it is noteworthy to state that although Rapula Sello was acquitted by the high court on appeal and went on to hold a very big home coming party at his home village of Morwa, his live seems to have end tragically as he is presumed dead. The last time relatives saw him was when he left home telling his wife that he was going to train as a traditional doctor (*ngaka ya Setswana*). He did not say where and for how long he was going, and nothing more has been heard of him since then.

21 August 2007 is yet another date which is of historical importance to the Bakgatla, and a painful one for that matter. On that day, Kgosi Linchwe II died at a hospital in Johannesburg, days after he had gone through a procedure to remove a tumour from his brain. Kgosi Linchwe was a dignified *kgosi* who was respected and admired by many throughout the country. Even in government he commanded a lot of respect within the members of the government and the opposition parties. His death shocked many in and outside Kgatleng. A week before he died, Kgosi Mothibe of Mochudi accompanied by a few of his uncles, travelled to Johannesburg to see Kgosi Linchwe in his hospital bed. On their return, Mothibe told me that 'we saw him even though he did not see us'. These are the words I had to hear and yet I did not want. The funeral on 25 August 2017 was yet another significant event recorded during the eighth month of the year, August.

It is not yet clear if it was by coincidence or design that Mmusi Kgafela, the younger brother to Kgosi Linchwe's son and successor Kgosi Kgafela II, made an impassioned plea in August 2021 to his brother to come back home after going into self-imposed exile in South Africa in 2012 following his differences with the government of Botswana. In his plea, which was carried by a local weekend newspaper, said that as part of Kgosi Kgafela's 50<sup>th</sup> birthday he wished Kgosi Kgafela could come back home to see his father's people. He is quoted as saying the family and the *morafe* would be grateful if he returned home because they 'are missing him dearly'.

Interestingly, the writer of this piece celebrates his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday on 27 August and hopes to retire from active writing at the end of 2021 to enjoy the remaining years of his life with his family.

### **Acknowledgement**

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