

**Sandy Grant, *Botswana: Photographs of a Country in Transition People and their Places 1965-2016***

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This important book is the first photographic record of the way of life of the people of Botswana during the historic period of transition from one of the poorest countries in Africa to one which ranks as middle income. It preserves and makes public a part of the remarkable photographic archive that Sandy Grant has built up since his arrival in Botswana in 1963. Sandy's extraordinary photographic 'eye' coupled with his interest in the culture and heritage of the people and the places of his adopted country makes his photographic record unique. The perceptive foreword by Festus Mogae, president of Botswana from 1998 to 2008, helps to highlight the significance of the book. There are plenty of photographs and films of the magnificent wildlife and wildernesses of Botswana but it is the people, how they live, what they do, their history and their heritage that is the essence of this and all other countries.

Grant emphasizes in his preface that this is a personal book, compiled from the photographs he took over a 50-year period. They are organised by the different settlement types in Botswana. We start with Mochudi, the tribal capital of the Bakgatla, followed by its surrounding villages. This accounts for the largest part of the book. Many of these photographs are also illustrative of life elsewhere in the country.

The next section concerns the six other traditional tribal capitals, substantial settlements of between 30,000 and 80,000 people, followed by photographs from over 20 villages throughout the country. Finally, there is a section devoted to the four urban centres of Gaborone, the capital, Francistown, Lobatse and Selebi-Phikwe, the mining town. The captions to each photograph are a key feature of the book, setting out details that are essential to understanding what the photographs illustrate. This enhances considerably the historical record presented by the book, as well as bringing to life in the photographs the people and how they live, maintaining the interest of the reader throughout the book.

Grant has captured many of the features of traditional society that have changed and sometimes disappeared during this period of transition. In the area of transport, we see the massive ox-drawn wagons, the ox-drawn sled, and the ingenious 'donkars' with one or more donkeys pulling the flat-bed back-end of an old pick-up truck. 'Donkars' can occasionally be seen in the developed eastern side of the country but the blacksmith and the ox wagon are no more.

The traditional thatched rondavel, ideally suited to Botswana's climate with its thick mud and cow dung walls, high-pitched roof and overhang shading and protecting the walls from the sun and the rain, has given way to breeze-block constructions with tin roofs, and tiled roofs for the better-off. Grant has included some photographs of the beautiful decorations on some traditional houses and courtyard (*lelapa*) walls, part of the Tswana heritage and the pride of earlier generations in their homes.

Livestock are central to rural life in Botswana, and there are illustrations of life at the cattle-post (*moraka*), including Kgosi Linchwe II of Bakgatla showing how to lasso a steer for branding. The arable activities of threshing and winnowing sorghum, and then pounding it in the now obsolete *morula* wood mortar and pestle -which once produced one of the memorable sounds in the villages -are also shown.

The photographs of the initiation exercises in 1980 and 1982 in Mochudi revived by Kgosi Linchwe in the mid-1970s are of historical importance. Functional traditional crafts, including the making of clay pots and baskets for storage, carving wooden cooking spoons, and musical instruments are shown. We can find many photographs of large crowds of people taking part in significant events, such as queuing to vote in the first elections, coming together to celebrate the anniversary of independence, to attend funerals and weddings, participating in meetings in the tribal meeting place (*kgotla*), rounding up stray cattle, the installation of new tribal elders, and so on. These are witness to the communal traditions of the villagers.

But it is Grant's portraits of individuals or small groups of people, children at play or collecting water, old women and men sometimes working, sometimes just relaxing with a gourd of sorghum beer or chatting which are such a delight of this book.

It is the section on the urban centres, particularly Gaborone, which illustrate most graphically in comparison to the traditional towns and villages the transformation of Botswana society over the period. Comparing the photograph from 1974 of the 'donkar' and donkey cart carrying firewood past the British High Commission - and no other traffic - with the photos of the shopping malls, urban traffic and the 15-seater combi mini-buses in 2013 and 2015 summarises nicely how things have changed.

Sandy Grant has published several welcome books about Botswana's cultural and historical heritage. This current well-presented volume will be enjoyed by all people interested in the country in particular and Africa in general.

*Reviewed by John Speed*