

Of Botswana's Administrative Centres and their Movements: Vryburg, Mahikeng and Gaborone, 1885-1966

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Abstract

With Botswana celebrating a milestone 50th anniversary of Independence in 2016 a lot of activities took place in the country's capital Gaborone –the unique History of which this paper reflects on. This paper uses primary and secondary sources to make an enquiry into the reasons why it was thought prudent by the colonial Botswana (Bechuanaland Protectorate) administration to have an administrative base of the territory outside its boundaries. It also argues that the establishment of the administrative centre of Botswana outside its boundaries was motivated by factors of expediency, top among which were economic and infrastructural while those that later motivated the movement to inside the territory encompassed both economic and political reasons. The paper further argues that the latter factor particularly, linked with the fervor of the rise of African nationalism and its emphasis on equality for all and condemnation of racism and colonialism of which Botswana was part, became instrumental in the movement of the administrative centre from the then Union of South Africa into Botswana in the mid-1960s. The secession of South Africa from the Commonwealth in 1961 to become a republic with a legally racist ticket added impetus to the movement from Mahikeng into the territory. The agitation of the African leadership together with that of the minority European settlers in Botswana also contributed to the movement of the headquarters to its present location. The paper finally examines the nine locations earmarked for the headquarters of the country and why Gaborone, the present capital of Botswana, was considered the most appropriate at the time.

Introduction

Quite often the seat of administration of the Bechuanaland Protectorate in Mahikeng, South Africa, is referred to as the *capital* instead of an administrative centre. In addition to the definitions of a capital below, a brief history is necessary in order to understand why the seat of the administration of the Bechuanaland Protectorate was outside its boundaries. There is need to define, albeit briefly, the terms *administrative centre* and *capital town* or *city* in relation to the seat or headquarters of colonial Botswana. It is important from the outset to define these terms because there is a general misconception as to whether Vryburg and Mahikeng were *capital towns* in the true sense or just administrative centres of the Bechuanaland Protectorate. In that way the readership will be able to understand and appreciate whether colonial Botswana had administrative centers or *capital* towns outside its boundaries.

An *administrative centre* or *base* is defined by the *Longman Dictionary* as a centre with a small population, few buildings and few administrative personnel. The few personnel administer the territory or institution from the few buildings existent in the area. A *capital town* or *city* is defined as the seat of government of a territory. It is characterised by a larger population compared to that of an *administrative centre*. It has many ministerial government buildings, a large civil service, a municipal government, an industrialised or commercial area, police stations, a judicial system and other general characteristics of a town or city such as museum, a church and a city or town hall (Mitchel 1987). Being situated in the imperial reserve and surrounded by the township called Mahikeng, which belonged to the Cape Province, South Africa (Grant 2012; Sillery 1965 and Shillington 1986), the inescapable conclusion is that Mahikeng, and Vryburg for that matter, could not have been the *capital towns* or *cities* but rather *administrative centres* of colonial Botswana. It was *Gaberones* (now Gaborone), which would, after completion, have most of the characteristics of a *town* or *city*, which would become the *capital town*

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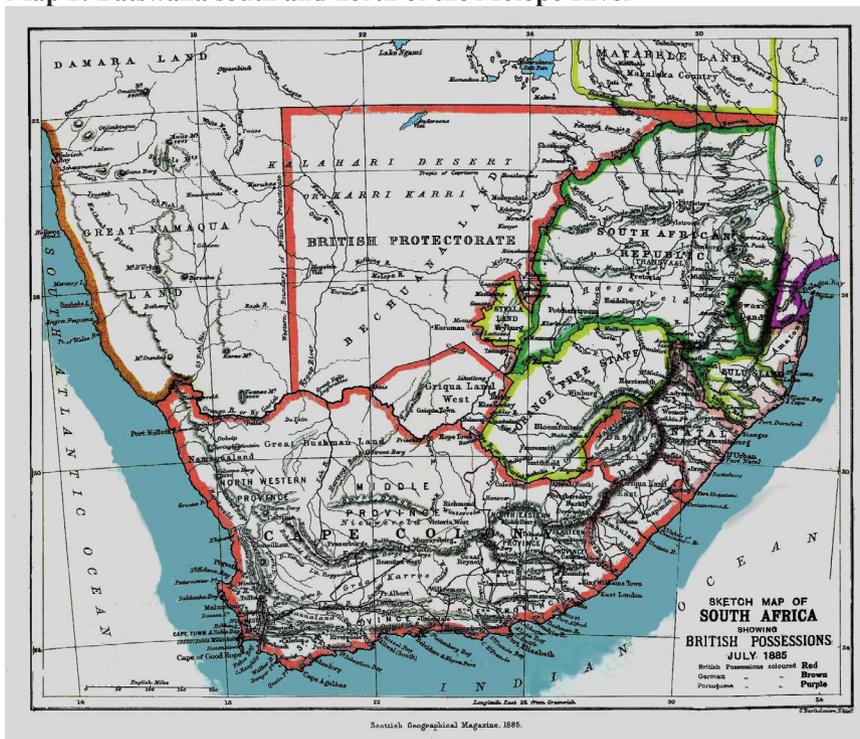
of the Bechuanaland Protectorate in the very last years of colonial rule, and subsequently Botswana.

Bechuanaland or the lands of the 'Bechuana' (Batswana) became a British protectorate on 30 September 1885. The Protectorate came about against the background of land encroachment on the part of the Afrikaners or Boers of the South African Republic, later the Transvaal as well as the British from the Cape Colony. The British later annexed the diamondiferous southern part of Bechuanaland in what became British Bechuanaland to the Cape colony. Between 1880 and 1884 the South African Republic intensified its desire to acquire the lands of the Barolong, Batlhaping, Griqua and Kora. Taking advantage of the rivalries among Batswana groups, the Boers offered themselves as volunteers to these groups who were at war with each other, the reward of which was the acquisition of three to six thousand morgen of land (Sillery 1965; Sillery 1974 and Fawcus 2000). By doing so, the Boers were able to amass tracts of land from which they declared, and, eventually, set up independent Boer Republics of Stellaland, whose capital was at Vryburg amongst the Batlhaping, and Goshen, whose capital was Rooigrond east of the Barolong village of Mahikeng (Shilington 1985; Fawcus 2000 and Mpusu 2003).

The Germans, through their merchant Franz Adolf Luderitz, had acquired a territory in what would become German South West Africa (Namibia). The Boers straddled the British 'missionary road' (an important trade link to the interior of Southern Africa), and the Boers of the South African Republic threatened more and more, their westward expansion. An 'unholy alliance' between the Germans and the Boers could not be ruled out, a likelihood that would block the British trade route to the interior (Sillery 1965; Sillery 1971 and Sillery 1974).

In 1885 the British instructed Sir Charles Warren, to raise an army of four thousand men in order to remove the Boers from the 'disputed' area and declare a protectorate. The Boer elite guard, the commandos, offered no resistance at the approach of Sir Charles Warren's strong force. The protectorate came into being on 30 September 1885 and encompassed both the Batswana south and north of the Molopo River (Map 1).

Map 1: Batswana south and north of the Molopo River



Source: The Journal of Geography of Scotland (1859)

Vryburg: First Administrative Base of the Bechuanaland Protectorate

It is possible that only a few people know that Botswana had two administrative centres. Even fewer people are aware of the fact that the two administrative centres were outside the country and that colonial Botswana was one of the only two colonies or protectorates in Africa with their seats of administration outside their boundaries. The other colonial dependency which had its capital outside its boundaries was Mauritania in Western Sahara which first had its capital in Port Louis, Senegal, but in 1958 moved inside the country where it became known as Nouackhott, capital of Mauritania (Dale 1969). What may not also be common knowledge is that the seat of administration of Botswana was first in Vryburg then Mahikeng until its movement to Gaborone which became its *capital* in 1965.

Upon the British declaration of the protectorate in 1885, Vryburg became the administrative centre of British Bechuanaland south of the Molopo River and the Bechuanaland Protectorate north of the same river. Initially, the base of a small puny Boer republic of Stellaland, Vryburg lay across the missionary road to the interior. A sister 'republic' founded at the same time and on the same footing, by other Boers from the South African Republic, existed east of Barolong's village of Mahikeng. Both 'republics' straddled the missionary road. However, the British thwarted the possibility of taking the missionary road (Sillery 1965) by declaring a protectorate to the west of the South African Republic which included, for the most part, Stellaland and its administrative base, Vryburg.

Sir Sidney Shippard was appointed administrator of British Bechuanaland and deputy commissioner of the Bechuanaland Protectorate and tasked with sorting out land problems in the two Boer republics. Responsibilities of the larger protectorate, the Bechuanaland Protectorate, were also executed from Vryburg. These included settling 'native' disputes or trying cases of capital crime. He was assisted by the Bechuanaland Border Police (BBP), a force formed after the Bechuanaland Protectorate had been declared and Sir Charles Warren's army withdrawn (Sedimo 1986). Shippard had a lean budget of only £701, 000. With it he built a cottage hospital in Vryburg and a fortified central prison. From the same small budget he paid about 150 policemen who helped administer the Bechuanaland Protectorate. Members of BBP did numerous errands for Shippard, acting almost like shuttling diplomats between British Bechuanaland and the Bechuanaland Protectorate (Sedimo 1986 and Mphusu 2003).

Administering a territory as vast as the Bechuanaland Protectorate even though Ngamiland was not yet part of the protectorate, from as far a place as Vryburg, compounded by skeletal staff was not easy. In that regard, Shippard found it fit to appoint an assistant commissioner stationed within the Protectorate to help with some aspects of administration. Assistant Commissioner John Smith Moffat, first stationed at Gaborone (now written Gaborone) and then Palapye reported to Shippard in his dual capacities of deputy commissioner of the Bechuanaland Protectorate and the administrator of British Bechuanaland. The assistant commissioner's responsibilities were not limited to the Protectorate but also extended to Matabeleland (Mphusu 2003).

Moffat's duties included providing assistance to the Batswana *dikgosi* (chiefs) should they be invaded by undesirable elements such as 'freebooters' or renegade Boer commandos. His instruction was not to interfere with the affairs of the 'natives' leaving the *dikgosi* to be assisted, to a large extent, by the police in the territory. While the police may have been involved in settling disputes, they pretty much administered the protectorate on behalf of Shippard (Mphusu 2003). Moffat helped in the collection of taxes, sinking of wells, surveying of roads, and administering postal and telegraph line (Mphusu 2003). From Vryburg therefore, Shippard was able to set up an administrative base that affected the two territories both of which he administered.

The year 1891 saw steps being taken to move the administration closer to the Protectorate. The 9 May 1891 Order in Council created resident, deputy, and assistant commissioners, magistrates and judges. Shippard became the resident commissioner of the Bechuanaland Protectorate, still administered from

Vryburg (Sillery 1965). That soon changed after British Bechuanaland (South of the Molopo River) was annexed in 1895 to the Cape Colony. With the annexation of British Bechuanaland, Vryburg ceased to be the administrative base of the Bechuanaland Protectorate.

Debates on the location of a new administrative seat, base, or centre of the Bechuanaland Protectorate ensued. Shippard suggested Fort Gaberones situated near the old prison and adjacent to the present Thapong centre in what is called the 'Village,' a few kilometres from the centre of Gaborone while Major Goold Adams suggested the Barolong's village, what the Boers called *stadt* or small town of Mahikeng. He argued that Fort Gaberones had acute water shortages (Mphusu 2003 and Main 1996). Several options regarding the establishment of an administrative centre for the Bechuanaland Protectorate were considered. The first consideration was Fort Macloutse (Motloutse), the headquarters of the BBP so strategically located in the Tuli Block to invade Matebeleland (now part of Zimbabwe) in 1893 under the instruction of the Cape Colony-based British imperialist Cecil John Rhodes. Once Rhodes's mission had been accomplished, the officials concerned concluded that Fort Motloutse had outlived its usefulness as the headquarters of the BBP (Sillery 1965).

All sorts of reasons were found regarding the unsuitability of Fort Motloutse. It was found to have unhygienic conditions in its camp despite 'the establishment of a fifty-four bed hospital, there had been an outbreak of fever at Elebe and Macloutse which affected 197 men and there were many cases of dysentery and that finding a better site had proved abortive' (Shippard to High Commissioner 12 February 1894, Botswana National Archives and Records Service (BNARS) HC 110/3). Colonel Goold-Adams of the BBP supported the movement to Mahikeng. He cited Mahikeng as advantageous to Fort Gaberones on account of water shortages at Fort Gaberones (Goold-Adams to Shippard 26 February 1894, BNARS, HC 110/3).

Another official, John Newton, was unequivocal about the suitability of Mahikeng as the administrative centre of the BP. He cited the availability of existing buildings, healthier climate, abundance of water, proximity to the railway, and cost savings in building a new administrative centre for a territory that was financially poor and which could not simply afford to build a new capital (Main 1996). Goold-Adams and Newton proffered persuasive suggestions to the authorities and it was agreed that the administrative centre for the Bechuanaland Protectorate would move from Vryburg to Mahikeng.

For 69 years Mahikeng became the citadel of the Protectorate administration until 1964 when it moved inside the Bechuanaland Protectorate proper. As a result of the establishment of the Union of South Africa in 1910, there had always been an unpronounced 'understanding' between the British and South African governments that the Bechuanaland Protectorate would eventually be incorporated into the Union of South Africa (Parsons and Crowder 1988; Fawcus 2000; Selolwane 1978 and Dale 1969). The understanding, to some extent, 'legitimised' the administrative centre's presence in South Africa as it was believed that it was simply a matter of time before the territory became part of the Union of South Africa.

Mahikeng as the Second Administrative Centre

Mahikeng ('the place of rocks'), the Barolong's *stadt*, located within the precincts of the lush headwaters of the Molopo River had always been the envy of the South African Republic (Molema 1966). As already mentioned, the latter was keen to see the town's incorporation into the 'Goshen Republic (Sillery 1965 and Molema 1966). It was not only Rhodes's railway line from Kimberley reaching Barolong's headquarters that contributed to the administrative centre of the Bechuanaland Protectorate being established in Mahikeng. The town had assumed some measure of fame and publicity before, during, and after the 'freebooting' years of the late 1870s and early 1880s. It was also the base for Sir Charles Warren expedition force which removed the said freebooters (Sillery 1965). A fort was then built there around late 1884 and early 1885 by the soldiers of Sir Charles Warren (Sillery 1965 and Grant 2012). During the South African War of 1899-1902 in what was called 'the siege of Mahikeng', it again became the main focus when the Boers

surrounded it for almost two years in the conflict with the British. The establishment of the BBP, the railway line, the infrastructural development left by the Warren's force all contributed to the suitability of the Barolong *stadt* being made an administrative centre for the Bechuanaland Protectorate (Goold Adams to Shippard 1894, BNARS HC 110/3). It was, therefore, considered cheaper to have the center of administration in Mahikeng. Comparatively, the Bechuanaland Protectorate had no advantages to speak of, especially in regard to water. The irony was that in 1965 the eventual *capital* of the Bechuanaland Protectorate was built in the very place dismissed some 70 years prior to 1965.

The choice of the administrative centre of the Bechuanaland Protectorate was thus decided, more for expediency than its resultant implications. The centre of administration was built on either side of the Molopo River, close to the western boundary of the Transvaal (Main 1996) in what would become the Imperial Reserve, meaning a small piece of land belonging to the British imperial government but situated in the Cape Colony and after 1910, Cape Province of the Union of South Africa and not in the Bechuanaland Protectorate. More precisely, the town which was initially a village and subsequently a camp or fort, was built by the Bechuanaland Protectorate authorities on the eastern side of the Barolong *stadt* around the fort that Warren had erected five years earlier (Grant 2012 and Magang 2015).

This camp eventually came to be known as the Imperial Reserve and included a military camp and two forts namely Warren and Canonkopjie. 'The area was rectangular, but narrowing in the centre where it crossed the Molopo River between Mahikeng and Barolong village centre and that of the Fingo (Grant 2012) now a municipal location. As could be expected, traders soon proliferated, and a small village of Europeans was designated to the east of the Imperial Reserve. The new European township also assumed the name 'Mafeking' (English corruption of Mahikeng), with its streets named after important personalities of the time such as Charles Warren, Frederick Carrington and others (Anonymous nd). In reality, the Imperial Reserve was the land of the Barolong but it would remain the seat of the Bechuanaland Protectorate from 1895 to 1964 when it was sold to the Republic of South Africa for R412,000 (Grant 2012).

The exact location and subsequent establishment of Mahikeng was not without controversy, and sometimes opposition. The physical location of the town was viewed by some as having corrupting influence on the way of life of the Barolong. For instance, Reverend O Watkins of the Wesleyan Missionary Society complained about the bad behaviour of the white population in the new town and the members of the BBP in particular (Sedimo 1986). The Barolong 'tribal' leadership complained that the town was too close to their village and encouraged undesirable nocturnal activities in the canteens. Alcohol sale was rife, rape of the Barolong women was prevalent and the Barolong fields were being grazed and trampled upon by the cattle and horses of the BBP (Mphusu2003). These complaints point to the fact that there was a considerable opposition to the physical location of Mahikeng (Parsons and Crowder 1988). It would have been more acceptable had the administrative center been located elsewhere other than near the Barolong *stadt*.

As long as the seat of administration of the BP remained outside its borders, taxes collected in the BP and the system of justice were also moved across the border to Mahikeng where some departments of the administration were located. In short, the developments of the Bechuanaland Protectorate were decided outside the territory. That state of affairs soon changed as political developments taking place throughout Africa in the 1960s (what the British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan called 'Winds of Change') eventually dictated that the resources and institutions be directly controlled by the people within rather than without the territory.

The Arguments for Relocation into the Protectorate

Mention has already been made to the effect that only two African dependencies have had their imperial administrative headquarters outside their boundaries namely Mauritania and the Bechuanaland Protectorate. In 1958, shortly before Mauritania's Independence from France, the colonial headquarters was moved from

Port Louis in Senegal to Nouakchott, the eventual capital of independent Mauritania (Dale 1969). In the case of the Bechuanaland Protectorate, Mahikeng remained its administrative center until its movement to Gaborone in 1964. Several factors necessitated the movement of the administrative headquarters to a new capital. First, the inhabitants of the Protectorate, both black and white, argued for the movement of the administrative centre from Mahikeng to the Protectorate. The Batswana *dikgosi* had been vociferous for the translocation of the headquarters as well as being against incorporation of their country into the Union of South Africa for decades (Robertson 1978). In the 1940s and 1950s sympathetic settlers, through their European Advisory Council (EAC), also called for the translocation of the administrative centre into the Protectorate. This was the period when most African countries were agitating for the establishment of political institutions such as the legislative councils which would pave the way to self-government and eventual independence. However, the Bechuanaland Protectorate was not left behind for good as it was granted the status of having a legislative Council in 1960.

Secondly, one of the arguments advanced for the translocation of the administrative centre was economic. It was argued that Mahikeng and its inhabitants benefited from the tax revenues generated from the Bechuanaland Protectorate residents. The said revenue, it was further argued, was used for developments in Mahikeng rather than the Protectorate proper (Dale 1969). Since its formation in 1919, the African Advisory Council (AAC) meetings had always been held in Mahikeng. The members of the AAC were important people in their territory by virtue of being *dikgosi* and other high ranking members. They often found it cumbersome to travel to Mahikeng to attend meetings and moreover irksome, as they were required by the laws of the Union of South Africa to secure 'passes' (official travel documents) from the native commissioner in Mahikeng (Dale 1969). While attending the AAC sessions in Mahikeng these leaders had to use separate and racially segregated facilities for accommodation and food. This state of affairs increasingly became problematic (Hermans 2006). In 1958 the AAC started meeting in Lobatse to avoid such indignities and inconveniences.

It is noteworthy that before the final decision to move to the capital in 1964, there had earlier been efforts made to translocate the administrative centre. Firstly, by the British government, and secondly by the EAC, AAC, and Joint Advisory Councils (JAC) respectively (Bechuanaland Protectorate 1959). An attempt by Resident Commissioner Ralph Willams to relocate the capital inside the Protectorate in 1905 failed (Parsons and Cowder 1988), and as early as 1928 for example, the British government was in a position to consider, favourably, the relocation of the administrative centre of the Bechuanaland Protectorate into the territory itself (Dale 1969). Surprisingly, the gesture, for inexplicable reasons, did not elicit a response from the residents of the Protectorate and so the British government let 'sleeping dogs lie'. Besides, it was cautious not to 'rock the boat' with the South African government on the issue, as, since 1910, the latter had been arguing for the incorporation of colonial Botswana into the Union of South Africa. While it was expected that the *dikgosi* would have jumped at the idea, the 1928 minutes of the AAC do not mention anything related to the relocation of the administration from Mahikeng into the Protectorate. However, the minutes of the AAC of 1925 do reflect, especially Isang Pilane (regent of the Bakgatla), and other *dikgosi*'s strong opposition to incorporation into the Union of South Africa (Bechuanaland Protectorate 1925).

Following that initiative, the AAC and EAC to look after both European and African interests albeit separately, made various attempts to persuade the Protectorate administration to transfer the administrative centre into the territory. Both put forward cogent economic arguments that if the headquarters was moved into the territory it would impact positively on the economic developments of the territory. For instance, the EAC minutes of 1942 indicate that the Europeans had been arguing for the relocation of the capital for a long time but to no avail (Bechuanaland Protectorate 1942). In a motion moved by Robert McFarlane that 'the headquarters be moved into the Protectorate, the members lamented that they had long requested for this move and that thus far nothing had borne fruit' (Bechuanaland Protectorate 1942). LS

Glover, who seconded the motion, reiterated the same. The AAC through its chairperson Kgosi Bathoen II echoed the same sentiments in 1944 when he put the issue to the Resident Commissioner Lieutenant-Colonel Aubrey Forsyth Thompson arguing that it would serve the interests of the inhabitants well if it were inside the territory (Bechuanaland Protectorate 1944).

The motion was unanimously adopted, but as in other sessions in the past, nothing substantial developed out of these deliberations despite promises made by the resident commissioner that 'your motion will receive every consideration, I hope in the post war development schemes' (Bechuanaland Protectorate 1944). By 1944 the argument regarding the movement of the headquarters was no longer focusing on the justifications, but where the *capital* would be located inside Botswana. Members quizzed the resident commissioner on the wide spread rumour that the Protectorate administration had settled for Bokaa/Pilane in present Kgatleng District as the future capital of the Protectorate (Bechuanaland Protectorate 1944).

The Councils preferred Lobatse (Mgadla 1978) to be the capital arguing that that the venue had been put forward since the 1880s as the capital of the territory. They lamented that since then, the state of affairs had not changed. Lobatse was preferred as the capital of the BP. Several reasons were proffered. Among them were Lobatse's proximity to the Union of South Africa and the railway line, availability of good underground water, pretty and healthy environment that was malaria free, best hospital in the country, a modern school, availability of land, and food from the surrounding farms (Bechuanaland Protectorate 1944).

The sentiments of the EAC and those of the AAC coincided with the formation of the JAC, a coalition of the AAC and EAC members in 1950. The new board, and subsequently its successor twelve years later, the Legislative Council (Legco) met in Lobatse and pursued with vigour, the issue of translocation of the administrative headquarters. By 1960, the Protectorate administration was in concert with the idea of rallying behind the movement of the capital into the territory. Members of the Legco, which comprised both Africans and Europeans, were vocal about the establishment of the Legco but insisted that such an institution could only serve best the interests of the people of the Protectorate if the territory was outside the Union of South Africa. Political considerations appeared to outweigh economic ones regarding the translocation of the administrative centre. After the Second World War, and as the decolonization process was getting underway, many British dependencies were expected to attain self-government gradually and eventually, independence (Mokopakgosi 2008). At the same time the rise of African nationalism, aiming to achieve the latter, also fervently began to take root. The Bechuanaland Protectorate, not so politicized initially, eventually got on to the bandwagon of this nationalistic fervor in the early 1960s. To that end, the process of aiming to get Independence was set in motion in the Protectorate with the establishment of the JAC and subsequently Legco in 1960. It would be an anomaly for a territory such as the Bechuanaland Protectorate or any territory for that matter, to attain Independence with its capital outside its boundaries.

African nationalists and European inhabitants, some of whom became members of the Bechuanaland Democratic Party (later Botswana Democratic Party, BDP) emphasized repeatedly how they wanted to have control of their own affairs had the capital been inside the territory (Minutes of an Informal Meeting between the JAC and the High Commissioner 1959). Tshekedi Khama of the Bangwato (who had died in 1959 before the formation of political parties in the early 1960s), Kgosi Bathoen II of the Bangwaketse and Kgosi Molefi Pilane were vocal about the establishment of institutions which would give the inhabitants more power and a say in the administration of their country (Bechuanaland Protectorate 1959). They argued that for this goal to be achieved both the administrative centre and the Legco should be inside the Protectorate and not Mahikeng. These sentiments were further echoed by other nationalists of the time, Seretse Khama, Quett Masire, Leetile Raditladi, Tshenko Tshenko, Achie Tsoebebe and Silas Molema. Support also came from European representatives such as Russell England, Jimmy Haskins, George Sim, Thomas Shaw, Louis van Gass, Daid Morgan (Bechuanaland Protectorate 1961a).

Besides the attainment of self-government and independence, the leadership in the territory and the Protectorate administration, also advocated for establishment of a non-racial centre within the territory that would serve as an example to the racist territories that surrounded it. Seretse Khama, particularly, was vocal about the achievement of this idea (Bechuanaland Protectorate 1958). The location of Mahikeng as the administrative headquarters of the Bechuanaland Protectorate was certainly not ideal for the envisaged multiracial hub. Even member of the House of Commons, Fenner Brockway, a British liberal politician sympathetic to subjects of the colonies articulated similar sentiments during parliamentary debates in London. For instance, he argued that ‘The whole of my appeal today is that we must make our administration of the Protectorates in South Africa models and examples of racial equality and of the social, educational, economic and political advance of the African peoples. If we do that, it will be impossible for the Government of South Africa to retain the principles and policy of apartheid in its midst’ (British Government 1957).

Members of the radical Bechuanaland Peoples Party (BPP) also detested the fact that the headquarters of the Bechuanaland Protectorate was in the racist and oppressive South Africa. The BPP leaders namely Patrick Tshane, Motsamai Mpho, Klaas Motshdisi and Peter Maruping when giving evidence to the Select Committee of Legislative Council on discrimination in the Bechuanaland Protectorate expressed concern that the racism prevalent in the country was not different from that in Mahikeng and argued for the headquarters coming into the Protectorate without any vestiges of apartheid (Bechuanaland Protectorate 1963 and Robertson 1978). One reason why it took almost 70 years for the relocation of the administrative centre was, as already mentioned, the unwritten ‘understanding’ that the three High Commission Territories of Basotholand, Bechuanaland and Swaziland would eventually be incorporated into the Union of South Africa. However, a significant development occurred that made the translocation of the administrative headquarters of Bechuanaland inevitable. In May, 1961, the Union of South Africa seceded from the British Commonwealth of nations to become the Republic of South Africa. In addition, earlier in 1948, two events occurred that made South Africa unpopular and unacceptable to most counties. This was apartheid, a system of governance that made it legal to discriminate on the basis of skin colour. The other was the marriage of Seretse Khama, the would-be first President of the Republic of Botswana. His marriage to a white woman in the same year made it impossible for him and his wife to enter South Africa as they would be discriminated against. Therefore, the British government could not cede the administrative centre and the territory to a non-member of the Commonwealth, least of all a racist government that South Africa was (Dale 1969 and Hyam 1972). Neither did the Protectorate inhabitants countenance being part of a racist and oppressive regime when they themselves were contemplating a multi-racial seat of government and society. There was, therefore, little choice but to move the administrative centre.

A Feasibility Study and Movement to Gaborone

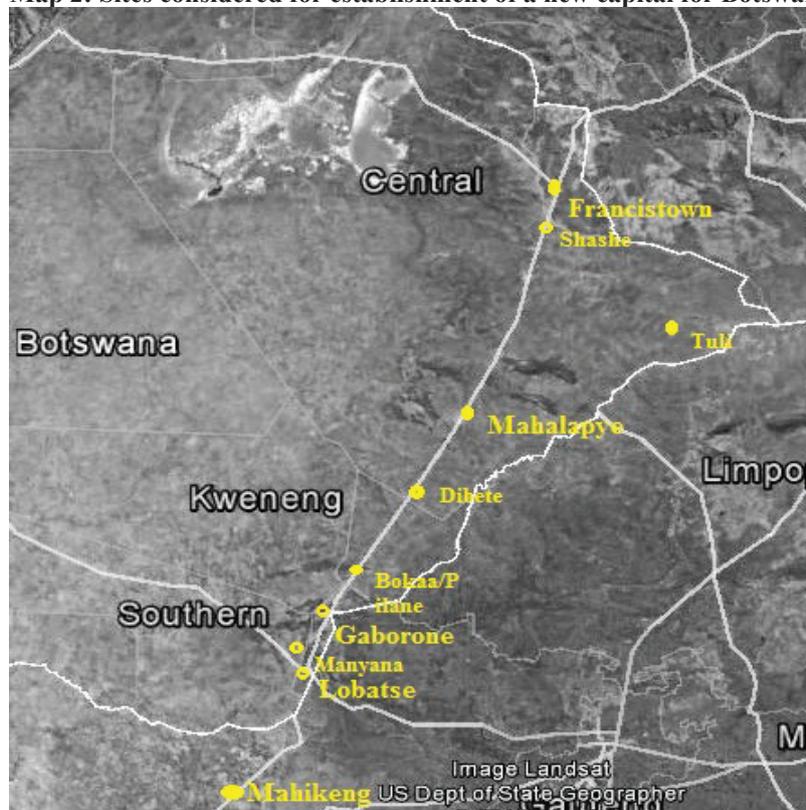
Given these developments a committee was then set up to undertake a feasibility study including justifications and cost implications of such a move. In a report titled ‘The Legislative and Administrative Headquarters of the Bechuanaland Protectorate’ (Bechuanaland Protectorate 1961b), the committee endorsed reasons that had long been advanced by the AAC, EAC, JAC and subsequently, Legco. In its findings it observed and indeed endorsed the fact that Mahikeng had increasingly gotten out of touch with developments and opinions in the Protectorate and that the administrative staff in Mahikeng should be in close touch with the country and its people. The Bechuanaland Protectorate Order in Council of 1961 provided for the establishment of an executive and legislative council in the territory that set forth the task of finding a suitable site within the Protectorate where a real capital would be established (Bechuanaland Protectorate 1961c). In that regard, Resident Commissioner Peter Fawcus was tasked with the responsibility of establishing a committee, chaired by the government secretary whose responsibility was to determine the site of a permanent legislative and administrative capital of the BP (Bechuanaland Protectorate 1961c).

The terms of reference further stated that the headquarters should be, or near to, an established centre, that both the northern and southern sites be considered, but that a balance for the centrality be explored and that the selected site be amenable to both African and European interests. It was further stipulated that the planned site be for a population of 5000, and finally, that the overriding factor be the *adequacy of water supply* (Bechuanaland Protectorate 1961c).

It has not been possible to establish if any of the local inhabitants (their names are not written on the report) were part of this fact finding mission, suffice it to say that the committee did consult some of the *dikgosi* and the subsequent Legco minutes of September 26-27, 1961 simply referred to the said committee as a team of government experts (Bechuanaland Protectorate 1961c). Even Masire's book just referred to it as the Government White Paper which came about because of the investigations by a team of government experts (Masire 2006).

The committee examined a total of nine possible sites for the capital, in particular recognizing their potential for water supply, topography, soil accessibility, communications, existing and potential public services (Bechuanaland Protectorate 1961c). The nine sites (See map 2) considered were Lobatse, Manyana, Gaborone, Bokaa/Pilane, Dibete, Mahalapye, Tuli Block, Shashi and Francistown. Each was dismissed or endorsed on its own merits or demerits (Bechuanaland Protectorate 1961b). Lobatse, the small town in which the Legco occasionally met and one that both the AAC and the EAC had lobbied for to be the headquarters of the protectorate was dismissed by both the report of the Committee and the Legco because of several reasons. Although it possessed a good climate and beautiful scenery, its drawback was the inadequacy of water supplies and 'poor prospects of water development except at prohibitive cost' (Bechuanaland Protectorate 1961b). Its location also worked against it because it was considered not central enough and inaccessible to other parts of the Bechuanaland. Also, the availability of Crown Land for the expansion of the capital was found to be limited. Lobatse was in a government owned Crown Land and not a 'tribal' reserve.

Map 2: Sites considered for establishment of a new capital for Botswana



Source: Produced with kind assistance of Senwelo Isaacs from Google Earth

Manyana, Shashi, Bokaa, Mahalapye and Debete did not meet the requirements because of the inadequacy of water supplies and the lack of existing infrastructural developments. The Tuli Block had no communication, especially rail services, and was considered remote in relation to the rest of the country (Bechuanaland Protectorate 1961b). Although possessing the advantages of being the only northern commercial and industrial centre, Francistown did not make the grade either. Adequate water supplies could not be guaranteed as technical services showed that large scale development of water projects would take investigations of anything up to five years to conclude, with any degree of certainty, that the water would be suitable and sufficient for the development of the capital (Bechuanaland Protectorate 1961b). Francistown, just like Lobatse, had the disadvantage of being located in the far northern part of the Protectorate, and therefore, not central enough for accessibility by the rest of the territory. It also did not have the required Crown Land as most its land was owned by the Tati Company.

It was Gaborone (Gaberones) which had considerable advantages suitable for developing a capital town. As already mentioned, in 1895 Gaborone had been dismissed as unsuitable because it was considered not to have enough water supplies. But in the 1960s one of its main advantages was, surprisingly, good 'prospects that adequate water supply would be available' (Bechuanaland Protectorate 1961b). Moreover, the Crown Land was available, accessibility to six of the eight 'principal' ethnic groups, being the Barolong, Bangwaketse, Bakwena, Balete, Batlokwa and Bakgatla, with the seventh, the Bangwato, being reasonably near. Thirdly, Gaborone (Mike Main and Campbell 2003) was also close to the seat of the High Court, and fourthly, it used to be the headquarters of the assistant commissioner for the southern part of the Protectorate, and was the seat of administration during the siege of Mafikeng mentioned above. Fifthly, it had the advantage of infrastructural developments in the form of important branches of the police, public works departments, and a central prison. Sixthly, the existing government camp in the 'Village' provided some of the services that would be needed by the capital, such as the post office, running water, and some administrative buildings, and finally, was well served by road and the rail line and a hotel (Bechuanaland Protectorate 1961b).

To ensure the potential of the water supply, a water survey was carried out by an expert, a Professor Desmond Midgley, who was a professor of Hydraulic Engineering at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. Working with the Public Works Department (PWD) of the Bechuanaland Protectorate, water supplies were located along the Notwane River (five miles from the proposed site of the capital) where a dam would be built to supply the new capital with water. The dam was built in 1963 and completed in 1965 and had a capacity of nine million gallons of water (Steel 1968).

The next step was to plan for the new capital and build the cherished multiracial centre that would be exemplary to the rest of racist Southern Africa (Kebifetswe 2006). Between 1964 and 1965, the administrative centre started moving from Mahikeng to the-would be new *capital* in Gaborone. A then Rhodesia company was hired to help with the movement from Mahikeng to Gaborone. The capital itself was built in the bush area between the Gaborone train station and the old government camp that was called Gaborone village. 'The most visible sign of the new town from the railway, apart from the shanty village (Naledi) used by construction workers of Messers Costain was a fifty-metre tall silver metal water-tower shaped like an onion on a stalk' (Parsons, Henderson and Tlou 1995:224 and *Kutlwano* and 1965). From then on ministerial, parliamentary, first mall with banks Barclays and Standard Chartered Banks, Post office, Botswana Book Centre, residences were built. A Catholic Cathedral, Trinity and Assemblies of God Churches were built. A museum and a stadium soon followed. (Kutlwano: 2011). By the 30th of September in 1966, when the Union Jack was replaced by the Botswana flag several heads of state were invited from independent African States at the time, to witness the momentous occasion. Dignitaries also came from Europe, North America, former Soviet Union and China.

Gaborone as a capital was unique. Unlike other inherited capital towns in the Southern African re-

gion such as Livingstone in Zambia (before moving to Lusaka), Windhoek in Namibia, Salisbury (Harare) in Zimbabwe, and Lourenco Marques (Maputo) in Mozambique, Gaborone was built from scratch for the Independence of Botswana.

Conclusion

The establishment of administrative centres of the Bechuanaland Protectorate outside its boundaries was motivated by economic expediencies as well as political considerations. The Bechuanaland Protectorate was a very poor territory, with no infrastructural developments let alone the financial muscle to undertake such a venture. Mahikeng was better placed to be the administrative headquarters as it had some buildings erected by Warren's force, and subsequently renovated and refurbished by the Bechuanaland Border Police. That itself saved costs of building a capital inside a territory that did not have the financial capital to do so. Mahikeng was close to a railway line that had reached it in 1895 while the Bechuanaland Protectorate had no access to that kind of transportation before then. It also had access to water, it being in the proximity of the Molopo River. The Bechuanaland Protectorate, known as an arid country largely because of the Kgalagadi Desert, was infamous for its acute water shortages. In short, Mahikeng, with its physical location aside, had several advantages over any area inside the Protectorate at the time.

There were also political implications, which although not so initially crystallized, nonetheless tacitly existed. Besides being a strategic conduit to the north, the British were not really so interested in the territory. The thinking then was that eventually the territory would become part of the Cape Colony or what would become South Africa. It made logical sense that even if the administrative centre of Bechuanaland was outside its borders, it was not so much an anomaly as it was a matter of time before the whole territory would become part of the Cape Colony. In fact, the same tacit implication applied to the other two High Commission Territories although the two did not have their capitals outside their borders.

It is therefore, important that as Botswana joyously and rightly celebrates 50th anniversary of Independence on 30 September 1966 most of which is done in Gaborone, the city's History be shared.

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