

The Francistown Oriental Plaza “White Elephant”: A cultural conflict or what?

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Abstract

In 2010 the city of Francistown in Botswana received news that an Oriental Plaza was being constructed in the centre of the city. In Botswana, Chinese goods are synonymous with affordability. An Oriental Plaza, selling Chinese merchandise exclusively, has been in operation in Gaborone for several years now, and it has over those years attracted a lot of patrons. The Oriental Plaza in Francistown, in contrast, is a recent development, and it was built in Kgaphamadi opposite Tatitown Police Station. However, to date it has not opened its doors to the public. Instead, the complex is now being used as a storage facility for the Chinese shops in the city. This paper attempts to explain the reasons behind the non-functionality of this Plaza using the concept of segregation as the theoretical framework. It interrogates the possibility of cultural conflict between Botswana and Chinese and how such conflicts could have been avoided for this project to have been successfully implemented. Yuan (1963) posits that segregation may be explained along the cline of voluntary segregation (strict voluntary, voluntary, voluntary involving involuntary factor(s)) and involuntary segregation (involuntary involving voluntary factor(s), involuntary, strict involuntary). It was found that the type of segregation practised by the Chinese in Botswana is voluntary segregation because they chose to operate their businesses in an exclusive location which does not admit businesses from their host community. The paper also argues that Oriental Plazas in Botswana can be viewed as voluntary segregation which is not necessitated by hostile factors in contrast to those associated with Chinatowns. It goes further to recommend a number of interventions to promote communication and trust in order to avoid such conflict between the Chinese and the host communities, and promote cultural integration.

Key words: Chinese shops, Chinatowns, cultural integration, segregation, Oriental Plaza

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Introduction

The relationship between China and Africa is said to go as far back as the 10th century, when the city of Alexandria in Egypt started trading with the Chinese (Aubyn, 2013, see also Zhang, this volume). Opportunities to strengthen economic cooperation between China and Africa grew rapidly from the year 2000 and following the first and subsequent sessions of the triennial summits of the Forum for China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC): Beijing in 2000; Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in 2003; Beijing in 2006; Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt in 2009; and Beijing again in 2012. Aubyn (2013, p.14) further makes an important observation when he says:

Africa is a major market for Chinese manufactured goods such as textiles, clothing, consumer goods and machine tools and at the same time, the import market of energy (oil) and raw materials ... (citing Rotberg, 2008).

This therefore explains the recent mushrooming of Chinese shopsⁱ in the retail sector in African countries, including in Botswana. The relationship between Botswana and China developed after the former's independence in 1966 when the first President, Seretse Khama, took a bold step and voted in favour of the People's Republic of China to take a seat at the United Nations Security Council in 1971, even though his cabinet had objected to such a move (Youngman, 2013). Youngman further notes that by January 1975, the Botswana Government had severed its relations with Taiwan, which had been established soon after independence in 1967 (Bolaane, 2007), and established diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China.

The first Chinese to come to Botswana were in the construction industry. They arrived after the signing of an agreement in 1977 on technical cooperation by President Seretse Khama and the Chinese, and the agreement focused on railway rehabilitation (Youngman, 2013). By the end of the 1970s, cooperation between Botswana and China had been extended to include cultural exchanges which featured the Chinese photographic exhibition that was jointly sponsored by the Chinese Embassy and the Botswana National Museum. The exhibition was aimed at showcasing the China-Botswana friendship (Bolaane, 2007). In 1984, the first Chinese construction company, China Civil, started business in Botswana and was later followed by other companies. These companies worked on small projects such as building houses, junior secondary schools and some private buildings (Youngman, 2013). As the economy grew rapidly during the 1990s, the country became more and more attractive to Chinese investors and traders. According to Bolaane (2007), these companies, with the support of the state, grew rapidly after the year 2000. Thus, in addition to Chinese companies playing a dominant role in the construction industry, Chinese retail shops mushroomed all over the country. For example, in 2004 the Gaborone Oriental Plazaⁱⁱ, a large wholesale shopping complex specialising in the sale of Chinese goods, opened to the public. Similarly, numerous Chinese shops can also be found in many malls in towns and villages around the countryⁱⁱⁱ. The Oriental Plaza in Francistown would have added to the many Chinese shops had it not suffered a setback.

The growth of Chinese shops in the country is not unique to Botswana. Laribee (2008), using a case study of a small town located in the Western Cape in South Africa, examined Chinese shops and how the Chinese are trying to find competitive advantage to make their businesses succeed in a market that is becoming saturated and very competitive. Laribee observed that the Chinese shops have been successful because they "[buy] cheaply produced goods and [...] directly [import] these products themselves. [The consumers then] buy products that are directly imported from China" (Ibid, 360).

Using the concept of segregation (Yuan 1963) as the theoretical framework, this paper adds to the growing literature on Chinese retail businesses in Africa by examining the reasons why the Francistown Oriental Plaza, which was completed in 2011, has never been operational.

The paper discusses some of the factors that may have impeded the opening of the Francistown Oriental Plaza. Also, it considers whether the philosophy behind the establishment of the Oriental Plazas is similar to that of Chinatowns in North American cities. It goes further to explore whether the rise of Oriental Plazas in Botswana is governed by ideological considerations such as segregation, as has been alluded to in some places. The paper recommends that there should be interventions to promote mutual understanding between the Chinese and their host communities in order to achieve enhanced social integration of the Chinese into their host communities in Botswana.

Methodology

Data for this paper were collected from newspaper articles, especially *The Voice*, *Mmegi Monitor*, *Mmegi* and *The Botswana Guardian*. The researcher used convenience sampling, which involved selectively using articles on the China in Botswana as and when such stories could be found in the papers. Inferences were made from reading about the Francistown Oriental Plaza in these newspaper articles. On one occasion, while visiting Francistown, and driving past the Oriental Plaza the researcher observed several delivery vans parked at the Plaza and decided to stop and ask some questions on the functionality of the plaza. Two of the men delivering goods were interviewed briefly. As such, no established methodology was used to collect data, partly due to the fact that the government department that could have provided information declined to be interviewed. However, the researcher is of the view that the chance encounter with the delivery men provided valuable information, and the results of the brief interview form part of the paper because of their relevance to the discussion. However, any generalisations that are based on the data are made with extreme caution, and must be read as indicative rather than absolute proof of the phenomenon under study.

Limitations of the paper

The major limitation of this paper, as indicated above, is due to the fact that the researcher was not able to interview the government officials who dealt with the Francistown Plaza. The researcher had requested an interview with the Ministry of Trade and Industry, but the official responsible for the case informed her through a telephone conversation that she could not divulge any information because the matter was still ‘under consideration’.

Theoretical Framework

This paper uses the theory of segregation to explain the nature of Chinese settlement and business practices in Botswana in order to achieve its objectives as stated above. Segregation is defined as the forced separation of different racial groups within a community. However, the term ‘segregation’ is not always used in reference to race; there are other types of segregation which are based on religion, class, gender or the law (Yuan 1963). According to Yuan, the Chinese in the United States have tended to concentrate in segregated communities within the larger cities. Yuan studied the New York Chinatown to determine whether it represented voluntary or involuntary segregation. He formulated a scale of intensity between voluntary and involuntary segregation according to which there are three forms of voluntary segregation and three forms of involuntary segregation. Yuan’s scale is reproduced below:

Voluntary Segregation	(1)	Strict voluntary
	(2)	Voluntary
	(3)	Voluntary involving involuntary factor(s)
Involuntary segregation	(4)	Involuntary involving voluntary factor(s)

- (5) Involuntary
- (6) Strict involuntary

While strict voluntary segregation is considered almost impossible in race relations, both voluntary and voluntary involving involuntary factors are considered possible (Yuan 1963). Yuan equates voluntary segregation involving involuntary factors with the Chinese community in New York. Under involuntary segregation, Yuan contends that (4) and (5) are possible in present day race relations. These are exemplified by the "... segregated communities established voluntarily by Negroes in the South ..." and the "Negroes in the United States", respectively (Yuan, 1963, p.256). Strict involuntary segregation, which he equates to slavery, is uncommon today.

Also looking at the segregation of the Chinese in New York City, Zhou and Logan (1991, p.388) posit that ethnic segregation is "regarded as primarily an adaptive strategy to enable ethnic members to survive and overcome initial disadvantages and constraints in the early stages of assimilation". In their view, segregation is temporary and tends to diminish as the group gets more established and is absorbed into the mainstream society. Thus, with time, this group starts moving into other areas, mixing with the majority group as their socioeconomic status changes. Zhou and Logan further observed that originally the Chinatown was established as a means of:

...self-defence responding to the hostile environment that immigrant Chinese confronted. Later, to preserve group solidarity, it developed into voluntary segregation because of the need for mutual help and language and cultural security. Today, the voluntary aspect of segregation has become more resilient even with a decreasing amount of hostility actually faced by the group. (Zhou & Logan, p.402)

Zhou and Logan came to the conclusion that Chinese segregation results in large part from voluntary choices and may not cause any disadvantages.

The Francistown Oriental Plaza: a brief background

In 2010, the city of Francistown, located some 437 kilometres from Gaborone in the northern eastern part of Botswana, received news that an Oriental Plaza was being built right in the middle of the city. Chinese goods in Botswana are synonymous with affordability, especially for the low income Batswana. Since the Gaborone Oriental Plaza started operating, many shoppers from as far as Francistown, Kasane and neighbouring countries such as Zimbabwe and Zambia flocked to the Plaza to take advantage of the relatively cheap Chinese goods sold there. Popular goods included curtains, blankets and clothing items. The popularity of the services at the Oriental Plaza was in spite of the fact that Chinese goods are often considered low quality and are often referred to derogatively as "*di-fongkong*" (fake goods). News about quality goods sold at cheap prices spread by word of mouth as shoppers told their relatives about their shopping experience at the Gaborone Oriental Plaza. It was thus unsurprising that people in Francistown and other neighbouring towns and villages were excited at the prospect of having an Oriental Plaza in their city. Even more appealing to the public was its proposed location opposite the Tatitown Police Station, a walking distance for residents of Kgaphamadi and Bluetown, two of the oldest residential areas in Francistown where most low income people and new arrivals in the city reside.

The P65 million (approximately US \$7 million) project was completed in July 2011. In an article in *The Voice* newspaper, a reporter, Tshukudu, quotes the Managing Director, Mr Chen Jiang Fei, saying "... come January [2012], the new mall located opposite the Tatitown

Police Station in Francistown will be up and running” (*The Voice*, December 2, 2011). However, to date the Francistown Oriental Plaza is yet to be used for its intended purpose. The once beautiful paint is gradually fading and more than two years after its completion the Francistown Oriental Plaza is yet to open its doors to the public. It lies dormant and the public is in the dark as to why such a huge project is “unused” and that probably the investor was making huge losses. According to Tshukudu, the multi-million Pula project was funded by Mr Chen Jian Fei, a 47 year old Chinese entrepreneur who has been in Botswana for sixteen years (*The Voice*, October 22, 2010).

There were speculations on why the Francistown Oriental Plaza has never opened its doors to the public, with some people saying that the reasons were commercial. Suggestions were that there were problems with licensing, and that the Chinese could not provide the information required by the Ministry of Trade and Industry for them to be licensed to operate the businesses. However, today nothing much is being said about the Francistown Oriental Plaza. Many people are wondering whose financial nightmare it is, and who is paying for this white elephant which is currently underutilised. Passing by the Plaza during a recent trip to the North, the researcher observed that several delivery vans were parked at three of the units and decided to enquire as there seemed to be some activities. On approaching one of the vehicles, the researcher greeted a Chinese man and a Motswana man who were busy loading boxes into a van and enquired if the Plaza was now open to the public. The Motswana man responded, “*Nyaa mma, mo gotlhe ke di-storeroom. E gae bereke jaaka ya Gaborone.*” [“No ma’am, all these are storerooms. This one [the Oriental Plaza] does not function like the one in Gaborone”]. As the researcher started walking away, she decided to direct one more question at the Chinese man who was still standing outside the unit, “So, where do I go for Chinese goods?” The Chinese man responded curtly, “In Chinese shops in town”. The researcher realised it was time to leave, so she walked to her car and drove away. Such is the state of the Oriental Plaza in Francistown, a multi-million Pula project now functioning as a storage facility for Chinese retail businesses.

An article in the *Mmegi Monitor* states that one of the demands by the Ministry of Trade and Industry is that there should be no “segregation” as to who runs businesses in the Plaza, and that Batswana should also be allowed to operate in the facility (*Mmegi Monitor*, October 16, 2013). In the same article, a consultant of the Francistown Oriental Plaza is quoted as saying:

We sent to her [Minister] a list of the operators and 20 of them are Batswana who will be operating businesses ranging from boutiques to meat markets to furniture shops. ... the Oriental Plaza owners totally agree with the Minister on segregation. We gave the list about two months ago and the reply that we received was a letter advising the Chinese nationals to apply for licences that they qualify for.
(*Mmegi Monitor*, 16 September 2013)

However, no elaboration is provided in the aforementioned article regarding the type of trading licences the Chinese are expected to apply for. Nevertheless, without the Ministry of Trade and Industry’s side of the story concerning the Plaza in Francistown, it is likely that the Chinese are meant to take note of Regulation 28 of the Trade Regulations which came into effect on the 31st March 2008, which stipulates the licences that are reserved for citizens only. This regulation states that:

The following licences shall be reserved for citizens of Botswana or for companies wholly owned by citizens of Botswana: (a) auctioneer’s licence; (b) car wash licence; (c) cleaning services licence; (d) curio shop licence; (e) fresh

produce licence; (f) funeral parlour licence; (g) general clothing licence; (h) general dealer's licence; (i) hairdresser's licence; (j) hire services licence; (k) laundromat licence; (l) petrol filling station licence; and takeaway licence." (Regulation 28(1), Laws of Botswana CAP.43:02)

Regulation 28 is very clear about what licences the Chinese cannot apply for. Yet some Chinese shops around the country, including the Gaborone Oriental Plaza already have some of the licences listed under this regulation. The regulation excludes the Chinese from holding such licences as general clothing retailing. Regarding the Gaborone Oriental Plaza and these other Chinese shops dealing in general clothing throughout the country, it is likely that their licences were issued before the amended Trade Act came into effect. Perhaps the licensing authorities consider it inappropriate to revoke these licences for this reason; instead the Chinese get their licences renewed each time they are due for renewal.

Regulation 28 came into being in order to regulate competition between the local businesses and those run by the Chinese and other non-citizens. Prior to that, local businesses were in danger of collapsing due to competition from the non-locals.

Restriction of the above licences to citizens only is not unique to Botswana. Hanisch (2013, p.91) observes that in countries such as Zambia, Malawi and Ethiopia, foreigners are totally barred from operating in the small and medium scale wholesale and retail sector, as these are reserved for locals. In other countries, such as Ghana and Lesotho, there are also some restrictions imposed in terms of space and the size of stock in financial terms. In all these countries, Botswana included, these restrictions are meant to promote local entrepreneurship by minimizing competition from foreign traders.

On the second issue of segregation, the owners of the Francistown Oriental Plaza are of the view that because their prospective tenants are Batswana is an indication that non-Chinese will be included in the Plaza. On the other hand, the prospective tenants of the Plaza are said to be equally frustrated by the delays which have now stretched for over three years, complaining that they are in the dark as to when the Oriental Plaza would open for business. It is reported that at one point some of them were considering seeking an audience with the Minister in order to get some answers (*Mmegi*, November 27, 2013).

From the above discussion, two issues seem to be at the centre of this dispute, that is, trade licensing and segregation. However, without the input of the Ministry concerned, this paper cannot make any conclusions regarding the licensing problem. Therefore the question it seeks to explore in the next section is whether these Oriental Plazas in Botswana can be considered as a form of segregation, and, if that is the case, is it voluntary segregation or involuntary segregation (see Yuan 1963). It also explores the reasons for segregation, where it is found to exist, and whether, and to what extent such segregation leads to conflicts between the Chinese and their host communities.

The Francistown Oriental Plaza as segregation

As already noted above, the Francistown Oriental Plaza is not the first of its kind in Botswana. The Gaborone Oriental Plaza has been operational for over ten years now. The businesses in the Gaborone Plaza are owned and run by the Chinese, who sell Chinese goods on a wholesale basis. The shops in the Plaza used to operate as retailers and attracted shoppers who were looking for cheap and affordable goods. However, the authorities have become very strict and are forcing the Chinese to observe the licensing regulations and operate as wholesalers. To date the Gaborone Oriental Plaza is still a popular shopping destination for many Batswana. It was its popularity that motivated the Chinese entrepreneur, Mr Chen Jian Fei, to invest in another Plaza in Francistown. In his words, "... following the success of the Plaza in Gaborone, it made economic sense to open a similar enterprise in Francistown" (*The Voice*, 22 October, 2010).

The term “oriental” is used to refer to something coming from the Far East or of Asian origin and, so are the goods sold in the Oriental Plaza. The sale of exclusively Asian (Chinese) goods in a mall is a form of segregation based on trade in the sense that only those traders selling Asian goods can do business in the Plaza. Based on Yuan’s postulation, this paper argues that the concept of an Oriental Plaza in an African country is a type of voluntary segregation. However, unlike in the case of Chinatowns in the USA which were set up to protect the Chinese community from the hostile mainstream society, these Plazas maintain the isolation of Chinese businesses and, as a result, such businesses thrive because competition from local and other foreign traders is kept out of the business complex. While segregation is often associated with race, class or even restricted geographical zones during wars, in this case segregation is along trade lines. This is because firstly, the Chinese in Botswana are a very small minority. Differences between the Chinese business community and the host communities in terms of language and culture have led to the Chinese operating their businesses in a complex that excludes local traders. The only relationship between the Chinese and their hosts is that of business owner and customer respectively. Similarly, the Francistown Oriental Plaza, just like the Gaborone Oriental Plaza, was meant to sell Asian goods exclusively. The Managing Director, Mr Chen Jian Fei, was quoted as saying that “... the Chinese emporium was established to provide a wholesale outlet for quality oriental products” (*The Voice*, October 22, 2010). This implies that Botswana traders would be excluded from this complex as they are not Chinese and they do not sell Asian goods. It is therefore logical to conclude that the existence of Oriental Plazas, whether in Francistown or Gaborone, constitutes segregation.

The type of segregation presented by the Oriental Plazas in Botswana may be viewed as voluntary segregation in the sense that the Chinese community intentionally chose to operate their businesses in an exclusive location such as the Gaborone Oriental Plaza. I argue that two factors are at play in this type of voluntary segregation, that is, economic and cultural factors. First, and from an economic perspective, Chinese businesses stand to benefit from using a location that virtually closes out competition from locals. Because an Oriental Plaza is a novel concept in Botswana, and is associated with affordable goods, many customers flock there looking for bargains. Additionally, Oriental Plazas, just like Chinatowns, are a tourist attraction to many people who visit the city, because they constitute a one stop shopping experience for visitors. The fact that many Chinese shops are within reach in the Plaza promotes sales for the whole Chinese business community. Furthermore, the label “Oriental Plaza” markets Chinese businesses across the region as has already been seen at the Gaborone Oriental Plaza. The Plaza attracts customers “... from all over the country as well as from neighbouring countries” (*The Voice*, October 22, 2010). Secondly, the Chinese feel safer as a homogenous cultural group trading on the same premises in large numbers. Since most of them do not speak English, the official language in Botswana, the linguistic homogeneity of the small Chinese business community makes them feel more secure when they are enclosed in an exclusive complex, especially in countries such as Botswana where there are no Chinatowns. Moreover, as food plays an important role in the socio-cultural profile of any community, to be able to find various types of Chinese food in the same place is an added advantage for the Chinese community. Thus, Oriental Plazas in Gaborone and Francistown appear to be creating an outpost of Chinese culture in Botswana which, as stated in the *Mmegi Monitor*, could be viewed as a form of segregation if it excludes non-Chinese people from carrying out business in these plazas.

Oriental Plazas versus Chinatowns

This section highlights the fact that the philosophies behind the establishment of Oriental Plazas and the Chinatowns found in some cities in North America are similar. To begin with, the word ‘plaza’ is a Spanish word referring to a field, but is now used as an English word

meaning an open urban space. Oriental, on the other hand, derives from the word Orient which means the East, a metonym for the continent of Asia. Thus, we can conclude that the term Oriental Plaza is used to mean a large place where one can find all kinds of goods that are Asian or originate from Asia. A search of the history of Oriental Plazas on Google Scholar yielded the result “Oriental Plaza in Johannesburg, South Africa”. This Oriental Plaza, situated in the suburb of Fordsburg in Johannesburg, is a major centre of Indian and Pakistani culture. Historically, the Oriental Plaza at Fordsburg was created by the apartheid government as a large shopping centre for Indian-owned shops. These Indian traders were forcibly removed from Fietas 14th Street shopping centre to the Plaza under very harsh conditions, which resulted in some traders losing their businesses. However, due to the traders’ resilience and excellent business acumen, they won back many of their customers. Today the Oriental Plaza at Fordsburg, with over 360 shops, remains one of the main attractions to the city of Johannesburg. This Plaza is therefore different from the Francistown Oriental Plaza because the Francistown one was developed by a Chinese businessman after the success of the Plaza in Gaborone; it did not result from any forced removal of the Chinese as was the case with the Fordsburg Plaza.

The Francistown Oriental Plaza, just like the Gaborone one, would have constituted a voluntary form of segregation. This contrasts with Chinatowns in the West which were a result of the Chinese congregating together for survival. According to Anderson (1987, p.580), when the Chinese migrated to different parts of the West, they were subjected to “... many forms of victimization at the hands of a vigorously nativistic white community”. In response to such prejudice, Chinese overseas formed Chinatowns within which they could live and run their businesses. Anderson (1987, p.580) further notes that “Chinatown has been a victimized colony of the East in the West [...]. Subjected to hostile receptions, Chinatowns serve as commentaries on the attitudes and behaviour of their host societies.” In the USA, Chinatowns served as ethnic enclaves which were meant to ease transition into the American culture by the Chinese immigrants. These Chinatowns are found in large cities such as San Francisco, New York and Los Angeles (Yuan, 1963).

This paper therefore argues that an Oriental Plaza, a place where all goods sold are of Chinese origin, is a result of the same ideology as Chinatowns found in many big cities in the United States of America, although in the case of Botswana they did not result from any hostilities, real or perceived, towards the Chinese. Johannesburg boasts of two Chinatowns, the old Chinatown at the bottom of Commissioner Street, though somewhat rundown now, and the new bustling Chinatown in Cyrildene. The Oriental Plazas in South Africa are both similar to and different from Chinatowns in the west; the old Plaza resulted from discriminatory practices of South Africa’s apartheid system which segregated people along race lines and thus forced Indians into an exclusive location, namely the Fordsburg Plaza, while the Cyrildene Plaza constitutes voluntary segregation. During apartheid the Chinese are said to have straddled the colour line, and were not accepted by either blacks or whites (Wilhelm, 2006). Thus said, both the Oriental Plazas and Chinatowns exist in those countries where Chinese immigrants have come into a foreign environment either as migrant workers or to open businesses, except for one Oriental Plaza in Johannesburg, South Africa, whose tenants are mainly Indian.

There are differences between an Oriental Plaza in Botswana and a Chinatown. Firstly, a Chinatown serves as both a business and residential district, while an Oriental Plaza in Botswana is solely used for business. In the West Chinatowns acted as safe havens for Chinese immigrants who found themselves in a hostile environment (Anderson, 1987), while the Plazas in Botswana have not resulted from any hostility towards the Chinese; the Chinese businesses congregate together in these complexes to maximize profit by excluding Botswana owned businesses. Secondly, the Chinese in Botswana live among the locals; there is no one place where they all live together as is the case of a Chinatown, and this makes them part of the

mainstream society. Given this situation where no one can ever expect to hear of a Batlokwa or a Bakalanga^{iv} market, where only Batlokwa or Bakalanga sell Tlokwa or Kalanga goods respectively, it makes sense that an Oriental Plaza, where only the Chinese community runs their businesses, would be viewed as some form of segregation. For the Chinese though, it seems to be a tradition that when they are in a foreign country, they congregate either in Chinatowns, as is the case in some of the big Western cities, or to have a Plaza where only goods from China are sold. As noted above, this study argues that this type of segregation is for commercial reasons and for security. Thus, it has become part of their culture for the Chinese to congregate in one place to run their businesses when they are in a foreign country, whether in the form of a Chinatown or an Oriental Plaza.

The way forward

The paper suggests that Batswana businesses selling Chinese merchandise only should be included in the Plaza for two reasons: a) so that Batswana can learn from Chinese business people how they conduct business in order to gain competitive advantage over others; and, b) for Batswana businesses to benefit economically alongside those of the Chinese. In so doing, the Francistown Oriental Plaza would still retain its main objective of selling Chinese goods, rather than dilute the concept by bringing in butcheries and other merchandise which are not from the East. In other words, operating side by side with Chinese traders would force Batswana businesses to find their own competitive edge. That way, the Plaza also does not lose its position as a tourist attraction in the city.

Secondly, members of the Chinese community should be encouraged to learn the official or national language of Botswana to promote communication and understanding between the two communities given that they live side by side. This would also promote interaction between the Chinese and their host community. Events such as the China Fun days held at the Airport Junction Mall in Gaborone are a good example. Thirdly, efforts should be made to educate the Chinese community on the licensing regulations of Botswana in order to avoid such misunderstandings in the future.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper observes that the reasons behind the non-functionality of the Francistown Oriental Plaza may be two-fold: first, the problem of the licensing of the Chinese traders, and second, the problem of segregation. While problems relating to licensing are governed by the laws of Botswana and the Chinese people need to understand and abide by these, the problem of segregation is much more complex. This paper has argued that Oriental Plazas in Botswana are a form of 'segregation' (see also *Mmegi Monitor*, October 16, 2013). The practice of congregating in one place by the Chinese community seems to have become part and parcel of their culture whenever they settle in a foreign country. For Chinese, due to their history of migration to cities in the West and in South Africa where they became a minority group, it has become part of their culture to congregate in Chinatowns or to run their businesses in Oriental Plazas at the exclusion of their host communities. Thus, unlike Chinatowns, Oriental Plazas can be viewed as voluntary segregation which is not necessitated by any hostile factors. Instead, the Chinese community run their businesses in these Plazas for profit because they realize that this gives them an edge over their local competitors unlike when their shops are scattered in different places or malls around town.

ⁱ In this paper, the term 'Chinese Shops' is used to refer to shops that are owned and run by the Chinese people.

ⁱⁱ The use of the term 'Oriental' in this article derives from the actual names of these Chinese malls in Botswana, hence the Oriental Plaza in Gaborone and the Francistown Oriental Plaza.

iii From her survey of over 500 China shops in Botswana, Yanyin Zi observed that 99% of these shops are Chinese-owned while the 1% is owned by Chinese who are now Batswana, having naturalised. Zi also notes that it is difficult to say the number of Chinese in Botswana because estimates differ depending on who you ask. While the Chinese Embassy put the number of Chinese in Botswana at around 10,000, some members of the Chinese community estimate the number to be thirty to forty thousand (Zi, personal communication, 20 November, 2014). However, in a recent article Nkani, reporting on Botswana Parliamentary debates, states that the number of Chinese nationals resident in Botswana as of 19 November, 2014 stood at 1606 (*Botswana Guardian*, 28 November, 2014).

iv The Batlokwa and the Bakalanga are two tribes within Botswana.

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