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Makgowa, Mahaletsela, and Maburu: traders and travellers before c.1820

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The Setswana word Maburu is obviously derived from "Boer", but the word Makgowa (applied to other Europeans) may be an earlier word applied to some Mahaletsela traders from the east coast. This paper surveys the record of 18th and early 19th century traders and travellers between the east or south coasts, and the area around the upper Limpopo valley.

Preface

Both as a scholar and as an individual, Leonard Ngcongco has frequently crossed the barriers between "us" and "them". Born in a Xhosa-speaking household, he acquired Afrikaans and South Sotho, and then acquired perfectly idiomatic English and Tswana. I recall an incident in 1981 when he and I were together in a Ministry of Education working group, visiting vocational brigade centres in Botswana. Leonard Ngcongco threw himself into the task of interrogating people with his characteristic enthusiasm. At the end of one of these visits, one of the managers drew me aside. "That man," he said, "just who is he? He speaks the most beautiful Setswana, but I can't place where he comes from."

Introduction

The barrier between "us" and "them" (or in postmodern-speak, "the other") in Sotho-Tswana language is said to be most clearly demarcated by the *mo-/ba-* (singular/ plural) distinction in noun prefixes given to "us" people and the *le-/ma-* prefixes given to "them" people. This being a mirror image of Nguni usage, where "us" are *ama-* and "they" are *abe-*.

The late President Seretse Khama successfully campaigned for *Makalaka* (Kalanga) and *Masarwa* (Khoesan or Bushman) citizens of Botswana to be called "Bakalaka" (Bakalanga) and "Basarwa" instead. This courtesy is now generally extended to all the citizen ethnic groups of Botswana, who are also inclusively referred to as *Batswana*, rather than just restricting that term to people of Tswana origin.

Yet no one seems to mind referring to citizens of European origin as *Makgowa* rather than "Bakgowa". Why? Is it because of popular ethnic chauvinism and racial prejudice against such exotic people? Maybe so, but there may be other reasons too. All the other terms cited above are in a sense ethnically specific, while the term *Makgowa* does not specify any particular ethnic group with a single language and culture. The word *Makgowa* is most often used to refer to white or light-coloured people who are not Afrikaans-speaking *Maburu*. It can also be stripped of all racial content and used for any people who exhibit European/ American cultural characteristics in speech and customs, whatever their colour. So far as there is a single *Sekgowa* language, it is obviously English—which is the *lingua franca* among expatriates of many national origins. But the Tswana language has its own specific word for the English language, *Seyesemane*, to distinguish it from *Sefora* (French), *Sejeremane* (German), etc.

This brings us to the term *Maburu*. It is obviously derived from the word "Boer". But are *Maburu* simply a sub-category of *Makgowa* who have come to be seen as ethnically distinct and thus separated from the mixed ethnic category of *Makgowa* in Tswana eyes? Or is there a more fundamental and ancient difference between the two terms? This paper

will argue that while the earliest *Maburu* visitors from the south in the early 19th century may well have been seen as or confused with *Makgowa*, the latter term is more ancient and refers to visitors from the east coast.

Definitions and derivations of *Makgowa*

There is no single agreed etymology for *Makgowa* (spelt *Makgoa* in older orthography). The third edition of the standard Setswana Dictionary published by the London Missionary Society, compiled by John Tom Brown (1939: 177), offers the following definition of *Makgoa*:

European, chiefly English. The derivation of this word is uncertain, but some natives think it comes from *goa*, to shout, from the noise made by the wagon-drivers who first brought the Europeans into the country.

The fourth edition of this dictionary, compiled by Zac Matumo and published on behalf of the Botswana Book Centre (Matumo 1993: 222), contains the following entry for *Makgowa*:

Europeans; individuals with bodily features similar to those of Europeans. Origin of the word is uncertain: some people think it comes from *goa*, shout... oral tradition also says that the word is [derived from] *kgwa*, spit, hence *kgwiwa le lewallê*.

In other words, Europeans were "spat from the ocean". This is certainly the most popular explanation of the word *Makgowa* today, though people are apt to use the word "vomited" rather than "spat" (and might substitute "cultural features" for "physical features" in Matumo's definition). The same dictionary (Matumo 1993: 160) translates *kgwa* as "expectorate; spit out. Used euphemistically to mean vomit."

Matumo offers no provenance for the oral tradition he cites. But the derivation from *go kgowa*, to "cast up", was given to the 19th century German traveller Gustav Fritsch (Ramsay 1991: 51n, citing Fritsch 1868: 299). The image of whites as bleached sea-monsters spewed up by the maw of the ocean, which howls for their return, dates back to the great Xhosa "cattle-killing" of 1857—and is also found in the earlier (possibly Xhosa-inspired) poetry of the Cape settler poet Thomas Pringle. This might suggest that the Tswana tradition is derived from the Xhosa tradition. But the Xhosa do not use any word like *Makgowa* for whites, preferring instead *Abelungu*, a variant on the classic east coast term for exotic traders *Wazungu* (Swahili). It is more likely that the Tswana and Xhosa tropes of white people being spewed from the ocean have a common origin elsewhere, maybe even earlier than the 19th century.

Brown's *goa* obviously derives from the Cape ox-wagon travellers, and can date no earlier than 1801 among the southern Tswana and about the 1770s among the Xhosa. Matumo's derivation from *kgwa*, on the other hand, suggests some knowledge of the sea. The east coast is considerably nearer to Sotho-Tswana country, and has been accessed on foot or in a canoe for at least a thousand years.

Brown and Matumo are by no means the only people to have tackled the possible origins of the word *Makgowa*. I have been able to track down at least nine more suggestions, and believe that there may be more. Many of them point to an east coast, rather than to a south coast, origin.

But let us start with two possible derivations which point to south coast origins. One is that the word is an eponymous term derived from *Kgowe*, the nickname of the first white man among the Bangwato—Coenrad de Buys (Sebina 1962). But it can scarcely be the earliest use of the word, since Buys arrived in Ngwato country in 1820 and the word

was already recorded as being in use among southern Tswana in 1811-15 by the travelling English botanist William Burchell (Burchell 1822: ii, 312).

Burchell's own explanation, revived by the anthropologist Jean Comaroff (1985: 137), is that the word referred to the appearance of early horse-riders. They were said to be *makgoa-mashweu*, meaning "white bush-lice"—because people on horseback looked as if they were part of the four-legged creatures that they rode.

I have two problems with these galloping white lice. As an image it is poetic. The Ndebele of Mosega who were attacked by Boer and Griqua gunmen on horses at night in 1837 referred to their tormentors coming at them like "ostriches spitting lightning". But Tswana people had long been familiar with the sight of human riders sitting on the backs of trotting oxen. Were they not seen as being like galloping lice? The image of men fused onto their horses is very like the Centaur horse-men of ancient Greek myth, with which Burchell would have been familiar—and with which he could have unintentionally acquainted his interlocutors.

The second problem is the use of "white" (*mashweu*). For a start nearly all the horsemen seen among the Tswana, at least up to the mid-1830s, were Griqua who were seen to be "coloured" (*bakgothu*, copper people, or *Masetedi*). The word "white" referring to people was familiar enough English usage to Burchell, but what about in Tswana usage? The usual word for "whites" in Tswana, before the colonial vocabulary of racial segregation took over, seems to have been "red" (*bahibidu*, red people). Thus Gordon Cumming, the famous white hunter of the 1840s, was known among the Tswana simply as *Mohibidu* (Mackenzie 1871: 115-116).

This brings us to another suggested etymology for *Makgowa*, following the derivation from *Kgowe*, the nickname of Coenraad de Buys. The historian Peter M. Sebina derived *Kgowe* from an ancient Tswana verb *go kgowa*, meaning "to peel with a knife"—because the painfully sunburnt Buys had red skin that "was regarded as bare flesh peeled off with a knife" (Sebina 1962).

The question of skin colour—"white" rarely being a true description of European complexions in Africa—takes us on to a further possible etymology. The South African government anthropologist Nicholas van Warmelo, in an article first published in 1927, noted that the word *kgowa* was cognate to the words *ikhuwa* and *ikhiwa* in the Ndebele ("Tebele") dialects of the Transvaal and Zimbabwe respectively (van Warmelo 1927/1993: 243). An article on 'Odds and ends concerning Matabele and their customs', by a Southern Rhodesian colonial writer, published at much the same time, explains further:

Kiwa means fig-coloured or pink. *Amakiwa* means white people. The ripe fig is of a somewhat dirty pink colour, and [the analogy] is applied to Europeans descriptively.' (H.M.G.J. 1926: 82)

The fact that the Ndebele people, with origins among the "Tebele" of Gauteng and Mpumalanga (Eastern Transvaal) provinces, have a cognate term to the Sotho-Tswana *Makgowa*, while their Nguni cousins the Zulu and Xhosa do not, is suggestive. The "Tebele", like neighbouring groups of Sotho-Tswana, lived in trade contact, through the passes of the northern Drakensberg mountain chain, with the east coast.

By 1818 the people of Gauteng were certainly familiar with the people on the east coast that they called *Makgowa*. In that year a former Cape slave called Joseph Arend traded around Gauteng and learned from local Kwena people about the "Macua" who lived some distance away. He was told that *Makgowa* were long-haired people on the far side of a river, most being brown-skinned but with a white woman trader living among them (Campbell 1822: ii, 356-359). Long hair could have included the plaited "dreadlocks" of Tsonga traders. Southern Sotho, by contrast, are said to have a specific term, *Matlabane*, for reddish people with long hair who lived to the north or north-east (Arbousset & Daumas 1846: 278-80).

Arend's description almost certainly referred to Lourenço Marques, the new Portuguese fort founded in 1803 at Delagoa (Maputo) Bay, on the far side of the Nkomati (Espírito Santo) river estuary in the Mfumo chiefdom of the Tsonga. But the description could equally have applied to the much older Portuguese *prazo* estates on the north side of the great Zambezi river, which were ruled over by light-coloured *prazero* queens.

Something like the word *kgowa* had also been picked up four decades earlier than Arends, in 1779, by Colonel Robert Gordon—the first Dutch official (of Scottish origin) from the Cape Colony to reach the river that he called the Orange. Gordon gleaned intelligence of a wide river far to the north, full of canoes, which was called "Koang" (place of Koa). The historian Christopher Saunders has suggested that this could hardly have referred to the Vaal river, known in Sotho as the Lekoa (Lekwa in Tswana), which was not far upstream from the place where Gordon stood. The "place of Koa" much more likely referred to the Limpopo river, or to a river flowing into Delagoa Bay such as the Nkomati (Saunders 1965: 68-69).

Van Warmelo (1927/ 1993: 243) offers an admittedly speculative explanation for the word *makgowa/ makhuwa* which would reinforce this hypothesis: "I can only suggest the derivation Goa (from contact with the Portuguese, cf. Algoa Bay, Delagoa Bay)". He goes on to speculate that the word may even have been originally *Ma-Goa*, denoting traders from the Portuguese colonial centre of Goa on the west coast of India.

This pushes me into offering a further speculation, linking to another chapter in this *festschrift*. It is possible derivation of the word *Makgowa* from Makua. The Makua were the main ethnic group of Afro-Portuguese traders coming south to Delagoa Bay—predating the Tsonga, between the 16th and the mid-18th centuries—from the Portuguese base on Mozambique (Msambiji) island north of the Zambezi

Herman Batibo and others, in this *festschrift*, have argued for ancient ancestral connections between Makua and Sotho-Tswana. Could the long-haired *Makgowa/ Makua* have been seen as *badimo* or ancestral ghosts? Other east coast peoples mixed the imagery of *wazungu* or *abelungu* as being both whites and ghosts. Tswana sometimes referred to early nineteenth century white travellers as *badimo*—because of their ghost-like physical appearance (Campbell 1822: ii).

Last but not least come suggestions that seem to bear the marks of rationalizations—consequences rather than causes of the word *Makgowa*. One is an oral tradition that the word is derived from yet another archaic Tswana verb, *go kgowa*, which was equivalent to *go tshwenya*—to worry or cause trouble (Ramsay 1991: 51n), like the baboons that raided the corn-fields. The other is the suggestion that it is derived from the "koa-koa" stuttering sounds made by foreigners, hence the Tswana verb *go koakoaetse*, meaning "to stutter" (Matumo 1993: 619).

The true etymology of *Makgowa* thus cannot be established with any surety. But, so far as we can derive some consensus from the oldest sources, they seem to refer to long-haired and possibly light-skinned traders and travellers from the east coast.

Mahaletsela from the east coast¹

Makgowa, though now distinguished as a word denoting Europeans, seems to have been one of a number of terms given to traders and travellers from the east coast. The most general word given to such traders and travellers appears to have been *Mahaletsela* (also spelt Mahalaseela, etc.), meaning those from "down the road" (Paver 1933: 609; Wagner 1980: 342-43; A. Smith 1939-40: 193; Knothe 1905: 59).

Oral tradition of the Kwena and Hurutshe groups, dating from what Leonard Ngcongco (1977: *passim*) calls the Phofu confederacy c.1500, even refers to the ancestral god Thobega as having been *Morwa Mogalao-tsela*, i.e. Son of the Traveller (Knothe 1905:11; Breutz 1953-54:68,111,171,182-3; Ramsay 1992: 14). This god being

especially associated with the cave in Kobokwe Hill at Molepolole (Ntsweng), now normally referred to as Livingstone's Cave (Willoughby 1928 & 1930). It is important to notice that Thobega is not normally listed on the dynastic roll of "Phofu" royal ancestors. He was no doubt some kind of priest-doctor or "prophet" come from afar. But we have no further information on Thobega's origins with which to speculate further.

Commerce between ships in the Indian Ocean and the east coast of Africa dates back at least two thousand years. Pre-Muslim trade along the coast, known as the land of Zanj by Persians and South Arabians (and as "Azania" in Greek), can be demonstrated as far south as Tanzania as early as the 1st century AD. During the first millennium AD Persian, South Arabian and possibly Egyptian sailors were joined by Maldivian islanders, West or South Indians, Malagasy people from northern Indonesia, and by naval expeditionary forces from China. By the 6th century AD the trade zone stretched as far south as the port village of Chibueni on the south coast of Mozambique, just north of the Limpopo's coastal delta swamps.

By the 8th century such trade had penetrated the interior as far west as the Tsodilo hills, west of the Okavango delta, where archaeologists have found sea-shells from the Indian Ocean in a village site dated around 750 AD—the most likely trade route being from up the Zambezi valley. (Sea-shells from the Atlantic Ocean found in the Tsodilo hills were found in an even older level, being dated around 550.) (Tlou & Campbell 1997: 42-43, 74-75)

By the year 1000 that we know that there were significant numbers of Muslim (Persian and Arabian) and Gujerati (Indian) ships sailing to the "Sofala" coast of central Mozambique, from Beira as far south as Vilanculos and Inhambane, to trade for gold and ivory coming from the Limpopo valley. It was possibly the Toutswe state, which flourished with great herds of cattle in east-central Botswana between about 800 and 1200 AD, which began trading ivory and gold down the Limpopo valley to the coast. The trade was intensified by the Mapungubwe state, at the confluence of the Limpopo and the Shashe, which probably exploited the alluvial gold deposits of the Shashe and Tati rivers from around 1100—until the new state of Great Zimbabwe took control further north from around 1250. Copper production for export at Phalaborwa, in the north-eastern Transvaal, peaked between about 950 and 1350 (van Warmelo 1940; Evers 1974; Evers & van der Merwe 1987).

After the coming of the Portuguese to the Indian Ocean coast in about 1500, all "Sofala" trade seems to have declined until the early 18th century. From about the 1720s Dutch, French and English ships competed with Portuguese ships in trading ivory on the southern part of the "Sofala" coast, around Delagoa (Maputo) Bay. By the year 1762 at least 164 500 kilograms of ivory were being exported from the whole "Sofala" coast in Portuguese bottoms, as well as quantities of gold and copper, furs, etc. The ivory was traditionally made into marriage bangles in India, and into carvings in China and in Portugal itself. The slaughter of elephants continued into the 19th century to provide ivory cutlery handles, piano keys and billiard (pool) balls for the newly industrialized societies of Europe and North America.

The 18th century undoubtedly saw a great revival in trade, and hunting for trade, up the Limpopo valley and onto the inland plateau north of the Vaal river. Dutch, Austrian and Portuguese (including Goan and Makua) traders tried to settle at Delagoa Bay in the 18th century. But their little colonies were short-lived because they failed to control the sources of supply or penetrate inland. Tsonga-speaking traders around the Bay eagerly took control of the trade in ivory and furs, and refused to share intelligence about the interior with the intruders. The Portuguese fort named Lourenço Marques in the friendly Tsonga chiefdom of Mfumo (today the city of Maputo) was only established in 1803 (A.K. Smith 1969, 1970 & 1983).

Besides the general term *Mahaletsela*, Sotho-speaking people (i.e. Pedi and Tswana) in the interior knew Tsonga traders from the coast by various names—notably *Malukwe*, *Malokwana* ("Malaquini"), *Matleka*, and *Makwapa*. The first three names may refer to facial scarification, or to barbarian language suggesting that the Tsonga stuttered as they spoke. (The word *Malukwe* contains the same root syllable *kwe* as the 20th century term *Makwerekwere* which is applied to Africans from beyond the Zambezi)².

The other name, *Makwapa*, was given to those Gwambe–Tonga rather than Tsonga in general who swore by their ancestor Gwambe, the first man out of the reeds. Venda people called these people *Magwamba*. Nguni-speaking people called Tsonga people *Amahlangana*, translated into Dutch as *Knopneusen*, meaning "knob-noses", because of their custom of tattooing themselves with knobs on their noses by cutting and rolling small pieces of skin (Arbousset & Daumas 1846: 180, 278-80; Campbell 1822: ii, 356-59; Thompson 1827: 209–10).

Tsonga traders had two "main roads" into the interior. The most direct route was up the Olifants river valley through the Drakensberg escarpment onto the plateau. But during the course of the 18th century this route became dominated by the Pedi (i.e. Kgatla–Pedi) kingdom, which taxed or blocked other traders in an attempt to gain monopoly control of trans-Drakensberg trade (Legassick 1969: 108). Tsonga traders therefore preferred the older, longer route that took them slowly westwards up the Limpopo valley and then southwards onto the interior plateau—to the areas of present south-east Botswana and the North West province of South Africa. Tsonga traders were arriving from the Limpopo valley at the Hurutshe capital of Karechuenya ("Kaditshwene"), near modern Zeerust, certainly by 1818-20 and probably much earlier. Some Tsonga traders settled among Venda and Birwa peoples living in the middle Limpopo valley around the Soutpansberg mountains.

Evidence of 18th century trading and raiding, for ivory and cattle, can be seen around the upper Limpopo valley in "Tebele" (Transvaal-Ndebele) hill-fort sites of the Waterberg Hills on the South African side of the Limpopo. On the Botswana side of the valley the hill-fort on Swaneng Hill near Serowe was probably occupied by (also "Tebele") Malete trader-raiders—trying to capture cattle as well as to collect ivory from the eastern Kalahari (Parsons 1973: 90 & 1995: 331-35).

The oral tradition of the Kwenā, who today live at Molepolole in Botswana, records that *Kgosi* Motswasele I (born sometime between 1715 and 1745) was in his youth "a great traveller, and the first that ever told... of the existence of white men." (Livingstone 1857: 12) We do not know if and how Motswasele reached the east coast, but it would have most likely been across Pedi country. 18th century reports received by the Dutch at the Cape of Good Hope indicate that trade from Delagoa Bay became well established among Tswana states and chiefdoms. When Cape travellers eventually reached the southern Tswana at the beginning of the 19th century they found a well-established hunger for glass beads previously met by east coast imports.

By the early 19th century numbers of Kwenā and also Ngwato traders from the area of Botswana were successfully crossing the Pedi kingdom to visit Delagoa Bay. An Ngwato traveller, who talked to the Scottish missionary Robert Moffat in present Gauteng province in 1829-30, was full of stories of his travels including his trip to see the *Makgowa* at Lourenço Marques. By 1835 "Portuguese" (probably Afro-Portuguese) traders from the Limpopo valley were visiting the Kaa, living near Shoshong, up to twice in one month—refusing to accept ivory tusks that were broken or under twenty kilograms in weight (Okiihiro 1976: 187-89 & 211). Another Kwenā oral tradition relating to the early 19th century even refers to a "Portuguese" with oxen coming to south-east Botswana from the direction of Angola across the Kalahari via Ghanzi. (Knobel 1968: 52)

French missionaries travelling in the area of the modern Free State province in 1836 were surprised to find that local people had some geographical knowledge of Africa as far to the north as Lake "Marabai", i.e. Lake Malawi. (Arbousset & Daumas 1846: 183) This would seem to be a good indicator of trade connections overland or via Delagoa Bay.

The demand for ivory, to be traded to Delagoa Bay, helps to explain the mid-18th century expansion of Khurutshe, Ngwato and Tawana groups of Tswana from south-east Botswana to the ivory-rich hunting lands of the Boteti river and Okavango marshes. Similarly the demand for glossy fur pelts (glossy if hunted in early winter), by the Cape trade as well as by Delagoa Bay, may help to explain late 18th century Tlharo expansion westwards to the hunting lands of the middle Molopo river (cf. Okihiro 1976: 159; Matthys 1997).

East coast slave trade?

This brings us to the contentious question of slave trading from the east coast. The export of slaves from the whole Mozambique coast is put at about one thousand a year during the 18th century (Manning 1990: 79-81). But there is no reason to suppose that many were taken from the south part of the coast, in Portuguese ships, before the Dutch colony at Delagoa Bay in 1721-30. The Dutch of course carried "Mozambique" slaves to their other colony at the Cape of Good Hope; and British, French and other European or Muslim privateers made slave-trading forays along the coast. But even small sailing boats could scarcely penetrate inland through the river mouth marshes. All this suggests that slave trading was limited to the coastline.

Tsonga traders undoubtedly became involved in slave trading from the lower and middle Limpopo valley, among Venda and Birwa, by the 1850s—but there seems to be no evidence of earlier involvement. Among the Tswana of the upper Limpopo valley in the early 19th century, Tsonga traders were much admired for their strength—as they bore off the ivory they purchased on their own shoulders. Other reports refer to them using pack-oxen, and probably they used canoes on stretches of the Limpopo. But they do not seem to have been using slaves as ivory carriers.

A case for slave trading from Delagoa Bay deep into the interior, into the area of the present Free State province of South Africa, around the 1820s, has been made by Julian Cobbing (Cobbing 1991: 11 n.31). He quotes the French missionary Thomas Arbousset, writing in 1836, quoting oral sources in the vicinity of later Harrismith. A group of Fokeng people told the missionary that all had been peaceful until twenty years before when the "Matebele" of "the late Chaka" had attacked and killed their chief, Patsa. Patsa's son Sebetwane had then led the Fokeng remnant north-east to the coast between Port Natal and Delagoa Bay, where they were induced by the liquor and honeyed words of 'some white men' to board two ships. And they had never been heard of since. Only a hundred people had refused to join Sebetwane, and they had returned home to tell the tale. Arbousset added:

It seems so painful to me to unveil to these simple people the dreadful facts of the slave trade, that I prefer being silent on the subject when I can. Thus it will be seen that that diabolical trade has spread even to the foot of the Maluti Mountains (Arbousset & Daumas 1846: 107).

Cobbing has rightly drawn attention to a neglected source, but objections can be raised to taking it literally. Firstly, did the original French manuscript use *entendue*, meaning "has been heard about", rather than *étendue* meaning "has been extended"? Secondly, we have to deconstruct what is a pretty good yarn, touchingly told. Is this not a case of the traveller being put off the scent by being given false information? As we

know too well, Sebetwane had gone off north-west in the direction of the Kalahari, not north-east towards Delagoa Bay (Schapera 1960: 18-22).

What the quotation undoubtedly shows, contrary to Arbousset's protestations, is the intimate knowledge, albeit in coded form, shown by highveld people about slave trading on the coast by the 1830s. Arbousset was being sounded out. This suggests, in support of Cobbing's general thesis of slave-raids setting off the Difaqane, that highveld people had good reason to suspect trekkers from the Cape, like Arbousset, of having some association with slave trading—even if, like Arbousset, they proffered honeyed words rather than liquor to their potential victims.

Masetedi and Maburu from the south coast

News of copper and cattle, ivory and hunting for trade in the north induced hunters, traders and raiders from the south in the 18th century. Khoë-speaking chiefdoms of Kora cattle-herders around the Orange river were trading with southern Tswana chiefdoms for metal, beads and goats. The Kora were joined from the Cape Colony by escaped slaves called "Orlam" and fugitives from justice. They began to use firearms and horses to help them in hunting and raiding, and they were the northern fringe of that Cape frontier community that developed the dialect or créole of Dutch called "Afrikaans".

Afrikaans-speaking horsemen and banditti from the south became known as *Masetedi* among Tswana-speaking people. This is believed to be derived from *Basetedi*, i.e. "Bastards", the name by which people of mixed Eurafican descent were happy to call themselves (Isaac Schapera, pers. comm. 1992). Alternatively it may be derived from the name of the later 18th century Kora leader Matsatedi, known in Afrikaans-Dutch as Taaibosch. The name may also be translated as "bright-faces". It was applied to both brown and white: as recently as the 1970s Boer traders in south-eastern Botswana were being referred to as *Masetedi* (Rathari 1998: 7). But after the incoming of large numbers of Boers into the interior, from the 1830s-40s, the term *Maburu*, derived directly from "Boer", gradually became more current to distinguish them from other *Makgowa*.

European desperadoes from the south who joined the Kora and Orlam and Kora in the late 18th and early 19th centuries include the Swedish ex-sailor Hendrik Wikar, the German bandit Jan Bloem (Johannes Blüm), a Polish-Greek preacher and false prophet called Stephanos, and the fugitive Coenrad de Buys—descended from French Protestant (Huguenot) settler stock at the Cape. Only Bloem and de Buys travelled as far north as the area of present Botswana.

Originally a sailor born in Thuringia, Germany, Jan Bloem had jumped ship at the Cape and had fled from Cape Colony after murdering his wife. He settled among Kora north of the frontier, and worked himself up to be the chief of the Springbok-Kora, in succession to Matsatedi or Taaibosch. In 1798-99 Bloem led his men on a major raid on the Ngwaketse kingdom north of the Molopo, in the south-east of present Botswana. The kingdom was rich in copper as well as ivory, but was also led by a brave king and military leader, Makaba II. Makaba got wind of the attack, and fortified Kanye hill with rough stone walls and built up piles of rocks to throw down on the advancing raiders. In the subsequent battle of Mathlababelong, Jan Bloem's raiders were roundly defeated.

Jan Bloem himself died soon afterwards, having drunk from a well poisoned by the Ngwaketse. But his name lives on in places named after him or his family in former Kora territory—notably Bloemfontein the capital of the Free State, and Bloemhof on the Vaal river.

The first official travellers from the Cape Colony to "Booshuana", i.e. southern Tswana territory, followed in the wake of the Cape desperadoes. An official expedition led by a Dutchman and a Briton, Messrs. Trüter and Somerville, arrived at the Tlhaping town of Dithakong, near later Kuruman, in 1801 (Barrow 1806a & 1806b; Borchers

1861; Barlow 1979). It had come to spy out the land and to report on trade possibilities in cattle, for meat to supply beef-eating British sailors at the Cape. Among members of the expedition was the artist Samuel Daniell, whose drawings and water-colours of Kora and Tswana have since become famous for their sensitive portrayal of individuals (Daniell 1831).

A subsequent official expedition from the Cape Colony was sent further north in 1808, to spy out the trade route north of Dithakong and down the Limpopo valley to Delagoa Bay. The expedition was led by Dr. Alexander Cowan and Lieutenant E.D. Donovan. They were joined, for the initial part of their journey from Dithakong by the trader-missionary Rev. Robert Anderson of the London Missionary Society.

At Kanye, Anderson left them and returned south. Cowan and Donovan, together with their wagons and Khoi servants, then went on through the Kwenā chiefdom at Sokwane near Molepolole, where they presented Kgosi Motswasele II, with a gift of pots and pans. From Sokwane they then 'disappeared' down the Ngotwane River into the Limpopo valley.

We now know that Cowan and Donovan perished on the Limpopo in the country of the Laka of chief Mapela, a group of "Tebele" traders and raiders living in the hill-forts of the Waterberg mountains south-east of present Martin's Drift (cf. Huffman 1990). It is believed that they died of malarial fever—hardly surprising as it was now the wet summer period of 1808–1809. One story claims that they were deliberately drowned, thrown into the raging Limpopo river with their wagons, because a Laka rain-doctor claimed that the rotating wagon-wheels were tokens of witchcraft which would stop the rain. The horses of the intruders were eaten, and found to be rather disgusting, just like zebra meat.

Remains of Cowan and Donovan's expedition are said to have been found along the Limpopo river in the 1850s—including regimental buttons of the 83rd regiment of the British Army (from Donovan's tunic), pocket knives and "other trifles".

The Tlhaping spread the story to subsequent Cape travellers that the Ngwaketse had killed Cowan and Donovan. This story achieved the desired effect of diverting Cape traders from visiting the Ngwaketse enemies of the Tlhaping, at Kanye, to visiting the Hurutshe allies of the Tlhaping at Karechuenya (Kaditshwene) on the upper Madikwe (Marico) river instead (Thompson 1827: 210-11; Kay 1833: 219-20; Wallis 1945: 18-19; Livingstone 1857: 12; Brown 1926: 233; Kirby 1939-40: 162; Ngcongco 1977: 93-94).

One historian thinks that the Tlhaping may have been unwittingly confusing Cowan and Donovan with the fate of a cattle-thieving Boer or Xhosa-Boer Frans Krieger (Krüger Danster), killed while attacking Kanye in 1809 (Wagner 1973: 5).

Whatever the truth of this slur on Ngwaketse character, the story of the disappearance of Cowan and Donovan can be seen as a blessing in disguise thirty years later. When the Boers began to trek north from the Cape Colony in great numbers from 1843-35 onwards, they generally followed the "guide books" of travellers who had preceded them and had published their adventures. There were no published descriptions of south-east Botswana to rely on, because the fate of Cowan and Donovan had deterred travellers from following them.

The most famous, and in many ways the most mysterious, of the Cape desperadoes who preceded organized trekking was Coenrad be Buys. Like Cowan and Donovan before him, he was to "disappear" in the Limpopo valley.

Buys was already 54 years old when he became a fugitive from a minor Boer rising in the eastern Cape Colony, suppressed by the British in 1815. Having already raised a family by a Boer wife, he first took up with the mother of the western Xhosa paramount Ngqika; and then progressed northwards—as a hunter and trader in ivory—through a sequence of Khoi and Tswana wives who bore more sons.

By 1818 Buys was at Karechuenya and was finding himself short of gunpowder, which he had previously been importing from the Cape. He had to get supplies now from Delagoa Bay, so he sent his companion hunter-trader Joseph Arend (an escaped slave from the Cape) to try the direct east route across the Drakensberg through later Gauteng and Mpumalanga provinces. But Arend's way forward was blocked by hostile "Tebele", the Malete of Kgosi Poo II (ruled c.1805-20), living in large towns on the plains between later Rustenburg and Pretoria. The Hurutshe attacked Poo aided by Buys's firepower, but failed to dislodge and replace him by their pretender to his throne, named Boikanyo.

Buys was remembered among his Hurutshe friends as *Moro*, derived probably from his habitual morning salutation in Dutch, "More!"—though the word *moro* also came to mean coffee-grounds in Tswana. Among his "Tebele" enemies, such as the Laka and Malete, he was remembered as "Diphafa", apparently in reference to the feathers he wore in his hat, alternatively meaning "big beer pots"—maybe because of his middle-aged bulk and capacity for drinking beer, or maybe because of his booming voice and booming gun (Sillery 1952: 161-62; Ngcongco 1977: 95; Brown 1939: 73,59,246; Knothe 1905: 12; Manson 1995: 354-55).

In 1820 Buys decided to move north down the Madikwe (Marico) river into the Limpopo valley, which was the less direct route to Delagoa Bay. Tsonga and Afro-Portuguese intermediaries in the valley could supply him with gunpowder in exchange for elephant ivory. He may also have been impelled northwards, as a fugitive from Cape justice, by the need to avoid British travellers coming from the Cape to Karechuenya—notably Rev. John Campbell of the London Missionary Society who arrived there in that year.

Buys settled above the *tsetse*-fly and malarial belt in the Tswapong hills east of Palapye, in presentday eastern Botswana. Exactly where in the hills is not known, but it is significant that Buys' progeny subsequently regarded the Birwa (and thus Gananwa) people as their kin. Among the Birwa his praise-name was "Sekgobokgobo" or Sekobakoba, i.e. Mr. Gun or Bang-Bang (van Warmelo 1953: 47).

The Ngwato chiefdom was then living at nearby Serowe—the site of their village at that time today being covered by the Sekgoma Memorial Hospital—and it was actively trying to expand towards the Tswapong hills under its Kgosi Kgari. Ngwato oral tradition relayed by the historian Peter M. Sebina recalls Coenrad de Buys simply as "Kgowe"—the first *mohibidu* or "red person" that the Ngwato had seen. The old missionary-trader Sam Edwards, interviewed in 1913, said simply that Buys died of fever on the Limpopo. Sebina states that Buys both lived and died in the Tswapong hills. Hunting as Buys did in the Limpopo valley, death from malaria or *nagana* (sleeping-sickness from the bite of the *tsetse*) is highly likely (Sebina 1962; Willoughby 1913).

Ngwato tradition adds that the three older sons of Buys—named as Kadise, Toro, and Toronyane—disappeared from the Tswapong hills after the death of their father. They left behind a young brother, in the care of his mother. His name was Mmegale. He must have been a small baby in or soon after 1820. He became a herd-boy among the Ngwato, and was initiated into the Malekantwa age-regiment which is dated around 1834.

Dr. David Livingstone found Mmegale among the Ngwato, now aged about 27, in 1847, working as the servile gardener of an Ngwato master—different in skin colour but no different in status to other "heathen" Tswapong or Birwa underlings of the Ngwato. Mmegale told Livingstone that he had two more brothers "he informed me... in servitude to another tribe" (Schapera 1961: 38-39; Anon. 1902).

Conventional sources on the life of Coenrad de Buys seem to be unaware of the tradition of his death in the Tswapong hills; they have him simply disappearing in the Limpopo valley. Their story only picks up, from the traditions of the Birwa living around the Blouberg hills of the Northern province of South Africa, with the arrival of Buys' elder sons in the Blouberg. The Birwa record the arrival of three "red people", namely

Coenrad de Buys Junior, Michael de Buys, and Doris de Buys, who settled among them as hunter-traders and raiders in close contact with the Tsonga and Afro-Portuguese of the coast (van Warmelo 1953: 47)³.

It was this Buys clan, of mixed Boer-Birwa origins, that proved vital in attracting and accommodating early organised Boer trekkers in the northern reaches of the "Transvaal"—first the scouting party of Scholtz in 1834-35, then the trek party of the elephant hunters Trichardt and Jan van Rensburg in 1835, and then the Soutpansberg colony of Potgieter in 1848.

Conclusion

The conventional view of "Southern Africa" is as a region tied to the south, with a parallelogram of roads and rail lines connecting Katanga and Tanganyika in the north-east all the way down to Cape Town and Port Elizabeth in the south-west. The conventional view of the region's history is also south-north oriented, with its narratives beginning at the Cape of Good Hope and stretching progressively northwards. South and Southern African histories are typically Capocentric.

This south-north orientation may make better sense today than ever before, now that a liberated South Africa has joined the Southern African Development Community and become its dominant power and linchpin. It may also make historical sense as a description of the colonial ties expressed in capital migration northwards and labour migration southwards from the later 19th century onwards. But it is an orientation that has limited utility before the 1870s, and very little utility before the 1830s. The historical ties between south and north were forged in the great military migrations of the 1830s, dubbed variously by historians *Mfecane*, *Difaqane*, and *Groot Trek*.

We should not therefore, as most historians do, privilege our accounts of southern and western Tswana groups over their eastern or northern relatives. Classic Tswana traditional accounts clearly place the emphasis the other way round, regarding eastern Tswana groups as original and more important. For more than a thousand years in the Southern African interior the dominant direction of trade and commerce, and the main cultural orientation of its people, were east-west rather than south-north.

Notes

1. The rest of this paper follows lines previously explored in Parsons (1995).
2. *Makwerekwere* does not appear in dictionaries, and we may assume it is of 20th century coinage. In Botswana, it is used for Africans from the north, excepting the Ndebele and the Lozi. In South Africa the term is used more extensively: it can refer to any black person who does not comprehend *fly-taal* (township argot of Afrikaans-Zulu origin)—thus including most Tswana people from Botswana.
- Two etymologies have been suggested. One is derivation from "Makorekore", the name of a Shona ethnic group in Zimbabwe who constituted many of the mine-workers coming south (Chipasha Luchembe, pers. comm. 1997). The second and more popular etymology is to denote people who speak an incomprehensible language—full of "kwe-kwe" or "kwere-kwere" sounds. Though Matumo (1993: 619) gives *kwakwaetsa*, rather than *kwekweetsa*, as one of his verbs for "to stutter". This second etymology parallels those for the originally Latin word "barbarian"—for foreigners speaking with a "ba-ba" language, like bleating sheep,—and one possible explanation for the Dutch word "hottentot", for people who stutter with clicks.
3. Wagner dates Coenraad de Buys as 1761?–1822, and his sons Gabriel as 1808-55, Theodorus Cornelis as 1810-51?, and Michael as 1812-88 (Wagner 1980: 338-39).

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