

A note on place names, historical terms, etc.

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There are a number of confusing changes of place name to be aware of in Botswana history. In much of Southern Africa, place names have changed when settler-given names are replaced by African ones; as for example when Salisbury, the capital of Southern Rhodesia, became Harare, the capital of Zimbabwe. In Botswana, however, this sort of change is less common: changes are more subtle and more confusing.

An example can be found outside Botswana, in the place once known as **Mafeking**. Although outside Botswana, Mafeking was the capital of the Bechuanaland Protectorate, and is thus very much part of Botswana's history. (It is, incidentally, much more interesting for the historically-minded visitor than most of the guide-books suggest: start with the Mafikeng Museum which sells an excellent map of historic sites.)

The original settlement was the capital of the Barolong, known as **Mafikeng** (Setswana, = "place of stones") - note the order of "i" and "e". In 1885 Warren established a settler town nearby, which was known as **Mafeking**. In some sources (e.g. Sol Plaatje, *Mafeking Diary*, ed. J. Comaroff, 3rd ed., 1999) **Mafeking** is used for the settler town and **Mafikeng** for the Barolong capital. However, contemporary written sources more often use "Montsioa's town" or "the Barolong Stadt". When I visited in 1999, I found that in the kgotla, an old sign on the Barolong administrative building reads "The Mafeking Stad".

In the apartheid era, a "Tswana homeland" called Bophuthatswana (generally shortened to "Bop") was established. South Africa described it as an independent state, but no-one else did. Its capital was a new town, near Mafeking, named **Mmabatho**. In 1980 the settler town of Mafeking was transferred to Bophuthatswana, and renamed Mafikeng as a sign of its new Tswana-homeland identity.

In 1994, the Bophuthatswana homeland came to a rather violent end and was reincorporated into South Africa in time for the elections. Mmabatho, with its extensive government buildings, became the capital of the new North-West Province. The name Mmabatho, however, had unhappy connotations by now, and so the entire conurbation became **Mafikeng**.

Perhaps because of the use of Mafikeng for the settler town, the Barolong town is now often referred to as **Mahikeng** - the same word, but written according to the SeRolong dialect.

A basic point to note is that Setswana, like other Bantu (now sometimes "Sintu") languages, uses *prefixes* to indicate singular and plural nouns. Nouns belong to a *noun class* which Indo-European speakers can think of as rather like a grammatical gender, but with prefixes instead of suffixes. Whereas Indo-European genders are "masculine", "feminine" etc., however, Bantu noun-classes have no relation to sex. Instead they relate to conceptual categories. Thus kinship terms tend to belong to one noun class, inanimate objects to another, abstract concepts to another, etc. This correspondence is not however always consistent (just as in Indo-European languages gender does not necessarily equate to sex).

Noun classes are indicated by prefixes which are added to a noun stem. Sometimes with proper nouns the

stem is written with a capital initial to clarify the construction; thus:

- **MoNgwato**: member of the Ngwato morafe
- **BaNgwato**: plural of MoNgwato
- **SeNgwato**: Ngwato dialect

It is useful to have some idea of these even without knowing Setswana. The noun classes in Setswana are as follows:

[\[Click here for alternative non-TABLE format.\]](#)

The main Setswana noun classes

Singular prefix	Plural prefix	Singular example	Plural example
mo-	ba-	motho person	batho people
-	bo-		borra sirs (lit. fathers)
mo-	me-	motse village	metse villages
le-	ma-	lekgoa white person	makgoa
se-	di-	seatla hand	diatla
[null prefix]	di	kgosi chief, king	dikgosi
lo-	di-	loso death	dintsho
bo-	ma-	bogiso night	magiso
go		goja to eat, eating	

Often you will recognize stems recurring with different prefixes: the noun classes often have particular connotations which indicate the meaning, e.g.

- kgosi (king) -> bogosi (kingship)
- lekgoa (white person) -> Sekgoa (English language)
- leburu (Boer) -> Seburu (Afrikaans language)

In these examples, bo- tends to indicate abstraction; while se- can indicate a language.

Generally, the mo/ba- class includes terms for people, and kinship terms for the "in" group. Thus Tswana merafe are BaNgwato, BaKwena etc. The le/ma- noun class tends to include terms for people who are not thus accepted, and in modern Setswana often sounds less polite. Thus the forms "Lesarwa" and "Masarwa" (Bushman) sound uncomplimentary, and are in modern usage replaced by "Mosarwa" and "Basarwa".

Note on "Mafikeng": having seen how Setswana noun classes work, its formation as meaning "place of rocks" can now be understood. "Rock" is *lefika*, le- being the prefix (singular) and -fika the root. In the plural it becomes *mafika*. (See table above). The suffix -ng indicates a location, and causes the final vowel to change to "e", hence: Mafikeng. Incidentally, "Lefika" was used to translate "Peter" in the New Testament and is thus now a common personal name in Setswana.

Some historical place names and terms which give problems:

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Bamalete

Old form of BaLete (the polity with capital now at Ramotswa). See **Bamangwato** for discussion of this form of the name. The form Bamalete is still found on signs in Ramotswa.

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Bamangwato

The Ngwato state which the British encountered in the 19th century was a multi-ethnic one. Its core group was the Ngwato clan whose totem was *phuti* (duiker). However it also included a variety of other groups, including other Tswana groups, Kalanga, BaKgalagari, and Basarwa. Perhaps about one-fifth of the population were Ngwato in the strict sense. (The 1942 census counted 17,850 Ngwato in a total African population of 100,987 in the Bamangwato Reserve: Schapera *Ethnic Composition of Tswana Tribes* (1952) p. 65.) According to the linguist Desmond Cole, writing in 1955, the simple form *BaNgwato* is more recent than the forms which became *Bamangwato*:

... in some of the cases where the tribal name derives from the name of a former chief, as most of them do, possessive forms are used, thus: (*batho*) *bagammaNgwato* ((people) of the mother of Ngwato), (*batho*) *bagaMalete* ((people) of Malete), (*batho*) *bagaMotlhware* ((people) of Motlhware. {Footnote 2: Sometimes, but less typically, *bammaNgwato* (hence the popular "Bamangwato"), *baMalete* and *baMotlhware*. Why *bagammaNgwato* should incorporate *mma-* (mother of) is not clear, though this occurs often in names of men in the Eastern dialects...} Even in these cases, nevertheless, the modern tendency is to follow the practice elsewhere and to use the simple nouns *Bangwato*, *Balete*, *Batlhware*...

[Desmond T. Cole, *An Introduction to Tswana Grammar* (Cape Town: Longman Penguin Southern Africa, 1992) [first published 1955] p. xx.]

(As regards the *-ga-* particle, Cole notes:

In typical Tswana dialects, possessives formed from singular personal nouns of class 1a require the insertion of the element *-ga-* between the possessive concord and the stem. However, this *-ga-* is omitted by many speakers, particularly in the eastern dialects.

[*Ibid.*, p. 161, section 9.4]

The term 'Bamangwato' seems to have been used, in the 19th and early 20th century, for the *morafe* as a whole, including Tswana of other totems and non-Tswana. It is unclear what usage was before this; the core group may possibly originally have been known as BaPhuti. Some writers have used the terms Bamangwato and Ngwato to make a distinction:

Without its prefix, 'Ngwato' implies a stricter ethnic distinction - the nuclear group which can trace its descent back to its founder called Ngwato. The term 'Bamangwato', on the other hand, is used by groups of other descent to identify themselves as nationals of the Ngwato state. We are faced with the paradox that only one-fifth of the 'BamaNgwato' are in fact 'Ngwato'.

[Q. N. Parsons, "Khama III, the Bamangwato, and the British, with Special Reference to 1895-1923", (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1973), Note on spelling and abbreviations.]

By this usage, the term *Bamangwato* was used for the people as a whole. Hence the "Bamangwato tribe" was the kingdom ruled by Sekgoma I and Khama III. The term "Bamangwato" is no longer current, having been replaced by the shorter "BaNgwato", and younger Batswana often do not even understand it. Some have the impression that it was an inaccurate colonial form like "Gaberones". (However, the form *GammaNgwato* has survived as a term for the Ngwato state or territory.) "BaNgwato" has the effect of replacing MmaNgwato with Ngwato as the eponym. BaNgwato is now the only current form. Many of the people who would in the old days have been "Bamangwato", however, do not identify as BaNgwato, but as Kalanga (etc.) who live in the Central District (the local government district which replaced the old Bamangwato Reserve). The probable cause of this development is that, after Independence, the chiefs lost most (though not all) of their former direct authority and the concept of a polity subject to a chief is no longer applicable. Instead, BaNgwato identity tends to be now more ethnic in nature.

The traditional origin of the *phuti* totem is that Ngwato, the founder of the *morafe*, escaped his pursuers thanks to the unusual behaviour of a duiker which misled them. This story has parallels in the traditions of some other *merafe* and it has been suggested that the phuti totem may in fact be much older than Ngwato. On the other hand it should be noted that there are definite historical examples of totems being changed to mark some major change such as a split. Interestingly, in current oral tradition Ngwato is sometimes replaced by a more recent figure, Khama I, with the pursuers becoming Matebele.

As with *Bamalete*, the form *Bamagwato* still survives in a few places, such as in "Bamangwato Toyota" and "[Bamangwato Concessions Ltd](#)" (a mining company).

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Bangwato

See Bamangwato above.

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Bantu

The "Bantu" languages are the members of a very large language-family stretching across central, Eastern and Southern Africa. (It is a part of the larger Niger-Congo group.) The name is taken from the word for "people" which appears (in various forms) in most. (In Setswana the word is "batho".) The term was sometimes used to refer to a supposed cultural group who spoke these languages, but academic opinion is that this is a mistake, and that the term should be restricted to languages. In the

apartheid era, the South African government used "Bantu" as a racial term, postulating a supposed Bantu *racial* group. The term "Sintu" has been proposed as an alternative - using the "Si-" (in Setswana, "Se-") prefix which indicates languages rather than groups of people, to avoid the confusing implication of the "Ba-" in "Bantu". However, this is not yet established as common.

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Basarwa

Setswana term used in Botswana to refer to members of the Khoisan-speaking communities. Singular: Mosarwa; language: Sesarwa. In an earlier draft of this page, I wrote "The terms Mosarwa and Basarwa are of recent origin, and were formed by the modification of the older terms Lesarwa (singular) and Masarwa (plural). The le/ma- prefixes are often considered to be derogatory in modern Setswana, whereas the mo/ba- prefixes are used for Tswana groups and sound more polite." Since then, Dr Jeff Ramsay has pointed out to me that the form "Basarwa" in fact appears to be older than "Masarwa", at least in SeKgalagari. This would seem to indicate that the "Basarwa" were demoted to "Masarwa" as their subjugation progressed.

Anthropologists generally use the terms San and Khoe (the latter in several variants), and Khoesan for the language group as a whole. "Khoe" is a more accurate representation of pronunciation and is thus increasingly replacing the older "Khoi" etc. Khoe and San are linguistic terms, not ethnic terms, and hence "Khoe-speaking" is sometimes preferred as more precise.

Neil Parsons comments: (H-SAFRICA, 13 May 2005)

Khoe [is] one of three major linguistic divisions of the Khoesan languages: Khoe in and around the Kalahari middle (though later also spread to the Cape), with Northern San to the north and Southern San to the south.

The great majority of so-called "Bushman" or "Basarwa" in Botswana and probably Namibia are Khoe-speakers. The word *khoe* meaning "person" in Khoe languages, while San means something like "them others" or worse in Khoe languages. Hence Khoe people who are told that they are sometimes called San in the outside world can be quite virulent in their rejection of the term.

The people themselves have not as yet agreed on a single terminology. Some activists and organizations prefer "San", which is probably the most "politically correct" usage. However, in many places this term is not recognized (or is actively disliked, see above) by the people concerned, who often use either "Basarwa" or "Bushman". Unfortunately both of these are also disliked by some. "Basarwa" seems to some merely a euphemism for "Masarwa", a name given by the oppressors. "Bushman" sounds somewhat derogatory to many Southern Africans, though to western ears its connotations seem more positive. (This may be connected with the fact that while to westerners "bush" evokes nature in a positive/romantic sense, to Southern Africans "bush" indicates the opposite of civilized.)

An example: the Dqae Qare project, a venture in cultural tourism owned and operated by the Ncoakhoe people near Ghanzi (see [page on historical/cultural tourism](#)) is described on the publicity leaflet as "A community based tourism project of the Bushmen of D'Kar, Ghanzi District, Botswana". Inside a note reads: "We are called San, or Bushmen. We call ourselves Ncoakhoe, the 'red people'."

In summary, therefore, it will be seen that no universally acceptable usage is yet available. In the present situation, the main thing is to be sensitive to the problem, and to respect the wishes of the

people concerned in particular cases.

Term	Present usage	Acceptability	Advantages	Disadvantages
San	Normal in anthropology; favoured by many organizations and activists	Politically correct, used by some communities but not recognized by others, can be understood as offensive by some Khoe-speakers	Least likely to be seen as offensive in public debate; most acceptable in international academic use	Not well-known in general public debate outside the region, not used by many actual groups, potential to annoy some Khoe-speakers
Masarwa	Used in older sources	Now seen as derogatory and unacceptable	None	Universally seen as derogatory
Basarwa	Normal term in Botswana; used by Botswana media and government; used by some groups	Generally acceptable in Botswana but with some dissent	Widely recognized in Botswana, seen as polite by most Batswana	Disliked by some groups and activists; not recognized outside Botswana
Bushmen	Best-known term internationally, used by some groups	Often attracts criticism; widely used but may be seen as politically incorrect	World-wide recognition; positive associations in west; used by some groups	Seen as derogatory by many Southern Africans; may be criticized by academics; no gender-neutral form

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Batswana

Plural of Motswana, i.e. Tswana people (plural). However, in modern use the words Motswana and Batswana are also used to mean "citizen(s) of Botswana". A Kalanga-speaking citizen of Botswana is not a Tswana person, but is a Motswana in the sense of citizen. This leads to some confusion; for example in a recent local newspaper report a writer expressed puzzlement about a statement in which San were distinguished from "Batswana". To avoid this confusion, it is useful to use the form "Tswana" (even when [prefixes](#) are being used for other Bantu names) to indicate Tswana ethnicity, since "Tswana" is only used in the ethnic sense and not in the sense of "citizen of Botswana".

This usage is supported to some extent by Oxford's *A Dictionary of South African English* (Oxford: OUP, 1996), which notes under "Tswana" that "'Bechuana' has been replaced in *S. Afr. Eng.* by 'Tswana' (usually meaning a seTswana-speaking South African) and 'Batswana' (often meaning the citizens of Botswana, but see MOTSWANA." (p. 749). Under "Motswana" it gives (1) a member of the western Sotho [Tswana] ethnic/linguistic group (2) citizen of Botswana. (p. 479).

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Bechuana

Old spelling of Batswana, i.e. the Tswana people. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, the term was often used in English without regard to the plural implication of the Ba- prefix: e.g. "He was a Bechuana man"; "They were Bechuanas".

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Bechuanaland

The country of the Bechuana. Pronounced "betch-WAH-na-land". Note that (as used in early written accounts) this was not exactly the same area as modern Botswana. In the 20th century, however, it tended to mean the [Bechuanaland Protectorate](#). (See also [British Bechuanaland](#).) Some early travellers used instead terms such as "Boochuana", representing the word now spelt Botswana (country of the Tswana).

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Bechuanaland Protectorate

The British Protectorate established initially in 1885 and later extended: this colony became independent in 1966 as Botswana. Sometimes abbreviated BP. Not to be confused with [British Bechuanaland](#).

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Boleswa

Abbreviation of "Botswana-Lesotho-Swaziland". The three colonies' shared status as "High Commission Territories" (q.v.) gave them a number of common interests, especially in the period of apartheid. The three initially shared a common university, founded as the University of Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland (UBBS) in 1964; later the University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland (UBLS). See the [historical note](#) on the main UB web-site. The three now have separate universities, which however continue to maintain special Boleswa links, notably the long-running series of Boleswa conferences in Theology and Religious Studies.

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Bop

See Bophuthatswana.

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Bophuthatswana

The Tswana "homeland" established in the apartheid period, ruled by President Lucas Mangope until its collapse in 1994 shortly before the South African elections. The name was familiarly shortened to "Bop". Its territory was a bizarre patchwork of enclaves, and, as with the other "homelands", its supposed independence from South Africa was not recognized by the rest of the world. South Africa and Bophuthatswana seem to have hoped to pressure Botswana into some sort of recognition, and the name certainly succeeded in confusing many people not familiar with Southern Africa.

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Botswana

In Setswana, "the country of the Batswana". In modern use, the Republic of Botswana which was founded in 1966. During the colonial period the word was not normally used in English (see "Bechuanaland") but it is found in some early pre-colonial sources, written as (e.g.) "Boochuana", meaning the wider Tswana-dominated area known in late pre-colonial sources as "Bechuanaland" rather than the present (more limited) territory of the Republic of Botswana.



The flag of the Republic of Botswana

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Botswanan

This adjective from Botswana is commonly seen in foreign newspapers etc., but is not favoured within Botswana. Use "Motswana/Batswana" for people, and "Botswana" for reference to the state, e.g. "the Botswana government" or "the Botswana economy".

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B.P.

Abbreviation for "[Bechuanaland Protectorate](#)".

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British Bechuanaland

The southern part of "Bechuanaland", which became a British colony separate from the Bechuanaland Protectorate, with which it is often confused. After a brief period in which this area was a protectorate, British Bechuanaland (the area including Mafikeng) was annexed as a colony, while the northern area was its hinterland protectorate. Such arrangements were found in other parts of the Empire, but in 1895 British Bechuanaland was transferred to the Cape Colony, leaving the Bechuanaland Protectorate separated.

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"British South Africa" & compounds thereof

In the 19th century the term "**British South Africa**" meant a much wider area than the modern Republic of South Africa. Firstly, "South Africa" meant "Southern Africa" until the creation of the Union of South Africa in 1910 gave the term a more limited sense. Secondly, the term "British South Africa" meant not only the territory directly controlled by the British government, but also the whole region under its dominance to a greater or lesser degree, with the High Commissioner for South Africa as regional overlord.

Compounds:

British South Africa Company

Chartered Company of Cecil Rhodes which Britain empowered to settle the area which

Chartered Company of South Africa, which Britain empowered to settle the area which became "Rhodesia". (Northern Rhodesia = Zambia, Southern Rhodesia = Zimbabwe). Initially the Company administered the colonies.

British South Africa Police

Originally the police of the British South Africa Company; this remained the title of the police of Southern Rhodesia until liberation in 1980 (even after the Unilateral Declaration of Independence by the Smith regime).

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Bushmen

See Basarwa.

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Colony

This term is slightly ambiguous. In the technical sense, a Colony in the British Empire was a territory which had become British soil (in Africa, usually by annexation), with its inhabitants being British subjects, as opposed to a [Protectorate](#), which was theoretically "foreign" land under British control. In this sense, Basutoland (Lesotho) was a Colony while the B.P. and Northern Rhodesia (after 1924) were Protectorates. However, the term "colony" is also used in a generic sense for all colonized dependent territories; in this sense all three would be "colonies". The technical difference in status was not usually of great importance in how colonies were treated. (There were also other types of British dependency which would mostly be "colonies" in this sense.)

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Gaberones

In nineteenth-century practice, Tswana capitals were often referred to by Europeans by the name of the *kgosi* (king or chief). This was partly because of the fact that these settlements relocated fairly frequently (see Neil Parsons, ["The Abandonment of Phalatswe"](#)) and so place names were less stable than names of *dikgosi*. Thus, the BaNgwato capital, at Soshong, Phalatswe or Serowe, could be referred to as "Khama's village" or simply "Khama's". The village of the BaTlokwa was in the late 19th and early 20th centuries therefore known as "Gaberone's" after the wily and extraordinarily long-lived Kgosi Gaborone. Just across the Notwane from this village was a major colonial base (or "Camp"): this became known as Gaberones, the apostrophe somehow being lost. At Independence, Gaberones was selected as the site for a new capital to replace Mafeking (which was not even in the country). This was named **Gaborone**, the correct spelling of the late kgosi's name. The traditional village of the BaTlokwa is now known as Tlokweng.

A fairly common convention in Botswana historical writing is to use "Gaberones" for the government base, and "Gaborone" for the modern city. As well as avoiding anachronism, this has the advantage of reminding the reader of the difference between a government Camp and a city.

"Gaborone", incidentally, means "It [chieftainship] is not unbecoming".

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Gaborone

The capital city of the Republic of Botswana, built just before Independence (as the capital could hardly remain in Mafeking, and Lobatse, the earlier favourite, had been rejected for various reasons). Gaborone was built next to the old Gaberones (q.v.) government camp, the area of which

is now known in Gaborone as "the village" - a rather pleasant area in which many UB staff live.

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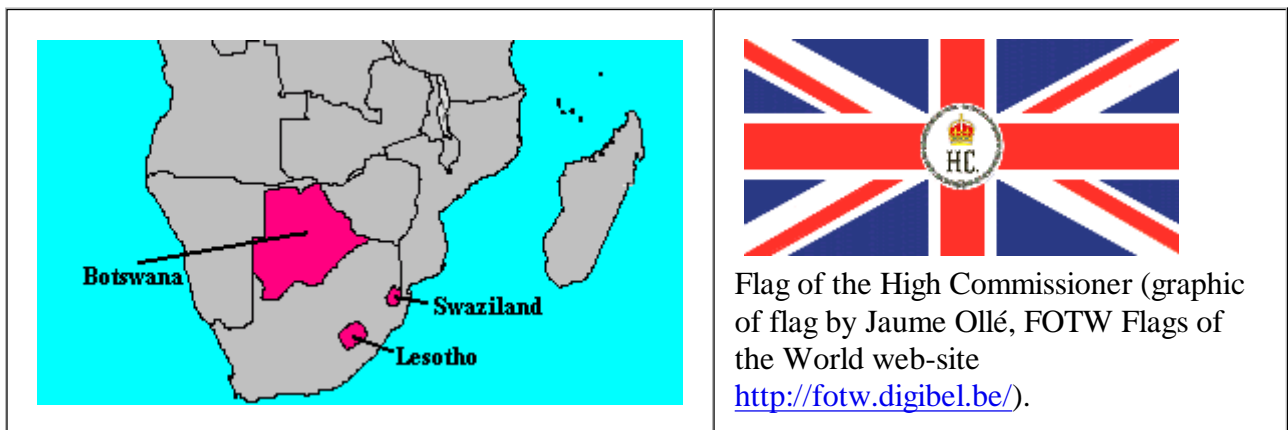
Gabs

Abbreviation of "Gaberones", still used locally for Gaborone. (For example, it appears in the Botswana telephone directory.)

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High Commission Territories

The three territories of Basutoland (Lesotho), Swaziland, and the Bechuanaland Protectorate. The name refers to the peculiar system of colonial administration. Whereas most British African colonies had a governor who reported to London, the HC Territories had a Resident Commissioner who came under the High Commissioner for South Africa. This was a somewhat accidental hang-over from the nineteenth century; the three being the remnants of an originally more extensive system of regional supervision by the High Commissioner as a sort of super-governor. It led to "Boleswa" (q.v.) links which still continue.



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Kalahari

The "Kalahari desert" in the centre and west of Botswana is not a true sand desert, and is sometimes called a "thirstland". The original significance of the word is disputed. In modern Setswana the word is "Kgalagadi", and this has sometimes been described as "more correct". However, the older (Sotho-Tswana) populations of the area are not Setswana speakers, but a group known as BaKgalagari (or BaKgalagadi, or BaKalahari), and in their language the word is closer to "Kalahari" than to "Kgalagadi". The BaKgalagari have remained a marginalized group, and the language is not yet well-established in a written form. I have seen "SheKgalagari" in a recent multi-lingual church publication. The Setswana forms "BaKgalagadi" and "SeKgalagadi" are probably still the most common in academic use.

It is notable that early European visitors (even in areas now regarded as Setswana) recorded a number of words in forms which look more like modern SeKgalagari than modern Setswana. (E.g. *Morimo* = modern Setswana *Modimo*, God.)

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Kanya

Old spelling of Kanye

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Kgalagadi

See "Kalahari".

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Khoesan

See [Basarwa](#)

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Lobatsi

Old spelling of Lobatse, still found on road-signs in South Africa.

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Mafeking

See [notes at start of page](#) for full discussion. Now **Mafikeng**.

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Masarwa

See **Basarwa** above.

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Matebele, Matabele

Setswana form of Ndebele; it became established in English as the first European travellers to the region came through Tswana territory. Hence "Matebeleland" etc. in Zimbabwe. However, in Botswana, the term "Matebele" has often been used in a loose sense for foreigners who might or might not actually be Ndebele. Hence references to "Matebele" should not necessarily be automatically "corrected" to Ndebele.

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Monare

Setswana term for missionary, from Afrikaans *meneer* ("sir"). Often given untranslated in 19th century texts in English.

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Morafe

Setswana word often translated "tribe" or "nation". Plural *merafe*. Pre-colonial Batswana were organized in a number of relatively small independent kingdoms or chiefdoms, showing a definite fissiparous tendency, but also showing an ability to absorb and reconstitute. Refugees etc. joined as junior partners. This pattern assisted the merafe in the north and west to successfully integrate large numbers of non-Tswana during the 19th C. in conditions of varying levels of subordination. By the

numbers of non-Tswana during the 19th C. in conditions of varying levels of subordination. By the later 19th C. the largest *merafe*, such as GammaNgwato under Khama III were emerging as multi-ethnic but Tswana-dominated states. Thus as applied to the Tswana-ruled precolonial states of the Bamangwato, BaTawana etc. and their colonial-era successors "*morafe*" is perhaps better rendered "*polity*" since they were essentially political rather than ethnic units.

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Motswana

See "[Batswana](#)".

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Prefixes

The grammatical difference between English and the Bantu/Sintu languages has led to a variety of practices.

- i. Prefix omitted: This style is the most common in English writing world-wide, and is favoured by anthropologists. Thus "Sotho" is used without prefixes. "They spoke Sotho." "They were Sotho." This is probably the style most often used in most historical work published in the west. However, it is sometimes disliked by speakers of the languages, on the grounds that the form is spurious - that is, there is no word "Sotho" as such in the Sesotho language, only the words "Basotho", "Sesotho" etc. Hence "Sotho" is like talking about the "Engl" people and language.
- ii. Prefix included, word capitalized as a single English word. E.g. "Setswana", "Motswana". This is the most common style in Botswana (used in both official and journalistic writing in English), and is used in T.Tlou and A. Campbell, *A History of Botswana*.
- iii. Prefix included but not capitalized, stem capitalized. E.g. "He spoke seTswana." This is found (e.g.) in some articles in *Botswana Notes and Records*.
- iv. Prefix included, both prefix and stem capitalized. E.g. "They spoke SeTswana" This is used in *The Birth of Botswana*.

All these have advantages. Writing in Botswana, Lesotho etc. has long been especially likely to retain prefixes, including prefixes of non-Sotho-Tswana languages (e.g. "the Wayeyi"). The fourth option, "SeTswana", has the advantage that it fits in with both the logic of English grammar (by capitalizing the first letter of a name) and the logic of Bantu grammar (by capitalizing the stem). The author of these notes favours using this style but with the option to vary it when convenient (as in "Sotho-Tswana" etc. etc.)

Some special problems:

- i. Including the prefix can present problems when less familiar Bantu languages are being referred to, as the prefixes will vary from language to language. Hence prefixes are least likely to be retained when writing about a wide range of languages.
- ii. "Batswana" has the dual meaning of "Tswana-speaking people" and "citizens of Botswana". Hence the trend to use "Tswana" for the former meaning (even if the writer is using prefixes otherwise) in order to avoid ambiguity. See [Batswana](#).

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Protectorate

The concept of a Protectorate, an arrangement by which one state had some sort of oversight or control over another state or territory, developed over time. The earliest type was that of the control of states which continued to exist as subordinate entities, but in the 19th century Britain increasingly used Protectorates in Africa as a form of control which avoided the responsibilities

increasingly used Protectorates in Africa as a form of control which avoided the responsibilities which went with actual annexation (see [Colony](#)). At the end of the 19th century, partly as a result of the takeover of Bechuanaland, the distinction became increasingly blurred, and in the 20th century protectorates differed little from colonies in law. Its inhabitants were British Protected Persons rather than subjects, and in an important case (*The King v. Earl of Crewe: Ex parte Sekhome*[1910] 2 K.B. 576) it was ruled that (at least in the B.P.) they lacked certain rights they would have had in a colony.

The fact of the B.P. having been a Protectorate rather than a colony is frequently but mistakenly given as the reason for the relatively low level of British interference. That the key really lies in the circumstances of the territory can be seen from the fact that Basutoland (Lesotho) was an annexed Colony, yet treated similarly to the B.P., whereas Northern Rhodesia (Zambia), a colony with powerful settler influence, was a protectorate.

The history of protectorate status is a very difficult subject which requires study of both historical and legal technicalities, and caution is advised. The classic work is W. Ross Johnston, *Sovereignty and Protection: A Study of British Jurisdictional Imperialism in the Late Nineteenth Century* (1973). For the B.P. see A.J.G.M. Sanders, *Bechuanaland and the Law in Politicians' Hands* (Botswana Society 1992).

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Sechuana

Old spelling of [Setswana](#).

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Setswana

Usually, the language of the Tswana, one of the Sotho-Tswana language group. However "Setswana" can also mean "of Tswana culture", as in "ngaka ya Setswana", traditional doctor, or "in our Setswana culture".

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Sichuana

Alternative old spelling of [Setswana](#); i.e. = Sechuana.

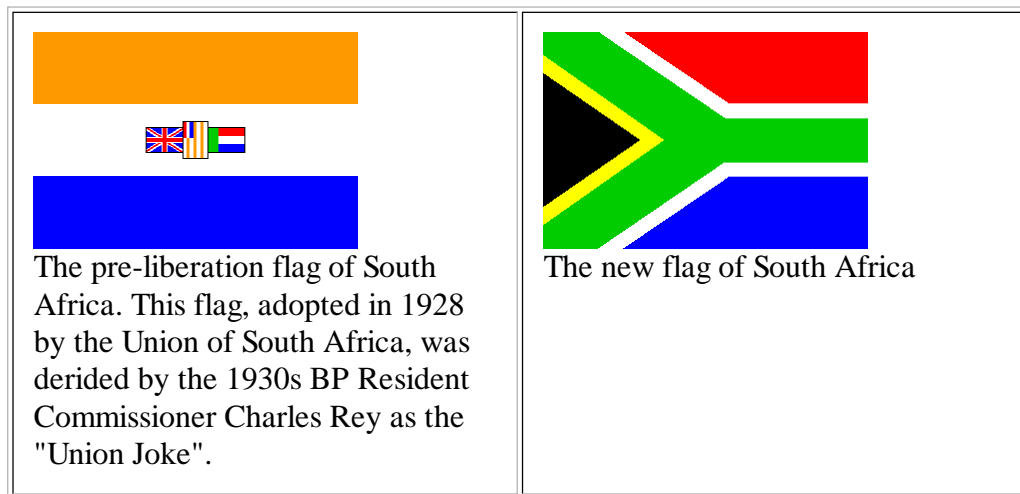
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South Africa

Until 1910 "South Africa" was a general term for the region, like "West Africa" today. Britain tried to manage the region as a whole through the "High Commissioner for South Africa". In 1910 four British colonies - the Cape Colony, Natal, the Orange River Colony and the Transvaal - were combined as a new Dominion, the Union of South Africa. From this point "South Africa" began to be restricted to this state, but the process took a long time. Doris Lessing's characters, living in Southern Rhodesia, talk in the 1930s of being in "South Africa". The ambiguity was significant in the case of the three High Commission Territories, as the Union of South Africa hoped and expected to "incorporate" them as the 1909 South Africa Act had envisaged).

In 1961 South Africa became a republic and left the Commonwealth. The Union became the "Republic of South Africa" (RSA), which should *not* be written "South African Republic", as the South African Republic (q.v.) was one of the 19th century Boer republics. The RSA was readmitted to the Commonwealth after the end of apartheid.

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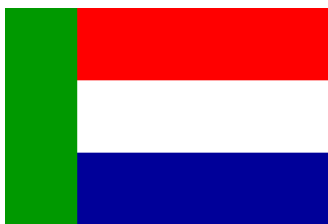


The Orange River Colony and the Transvaal were the former Boer republics, the Orange Free State and the South African Republic.

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South African Republic

The official title of the Boer republic in the Transvaal. The name is abbreviated "ZAR" (Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek - the spelling is Dutch rather than Afrikaans, which did not become an official language until the twentieth century). "ZAR" is also the abbreviation for "South African Rands".



Flag of the ZAR.

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Totem

In Tswana (and many other African) societies, each individual has a totem, which is usually an animal. In Tswana society totems are inherited from the father and thus pass like English surnames. The totem animal had traditionally a status of veneration and avoidance: in particular, it was important not to eat one's totem. In modern Tswana society this is not as strictly observed.

Merafe have their totems, which are the totems of the core group, but not all members of the *morafe* will necessarily share this. This reflects largely the way in which the larger Tswana *merafe* were built up out of various groups in a complex multi-ethnic system. It tends to be assumed that groups with the same totem are related, though this is not necessarily true. Totems have occasionally been changed to mark some major change: a traditional example is the adoption of the duiker (*phuti*) by the BaNgwato (see above), but there are other examples within historical record.

The older Tswana group names tend to refer to the totem: e.g. BaKwena, they of the crocodile (Kwena).

The word "go bina" (usually translated "dance") is used in connection with totems, as Livingstone noted.

.....

They also use the word "bina", to dance, in reference to the custom of thus naming themselves, so that, when you wish to ascertain what tribe they belong to, you say, "What do you dance?" It would seem as if that had been a part of the worship of old. [David Livingstone, *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa*, chapter 1.]

No direct evidence of such a dance ceremony, however, has been found in Tswana culture, and other writers have argued that the word may never have meant "dance" in this context. It is interesting to note that among the Khoesan peoples of Botswana there are indeed important animal dances in which, for example, a dancer dances the eland, the lion, etc.

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Tribe

This term causes a great deal of confusion. In the pre-colonial and colonial periods, there was a general idea among Europeans that African society was "tribal", without, however, a clearly agreed definition of what this meant. Most commonly "tribe" has been used to denote ethnic groups, such as Hutu and Tutsi in Rwanda, and it is in this sense that the pejorative term "tribalism" is understood. (Modern Africans are often ambivalent about the term, pointing out that in Europe the Serbs are "ethnic" whereas in Africa groups are "tribal". Europeans use "tribal" for their own conflicts only when wishing to harshly condemn the participants, as in some impatient British comment on Northern Ireland.)

However, in the Bechuanaland Protectorate *tribe* was used to translate *morafe*. While "morafe" does have a general sense of "nation", the 19th C. and colonial-era *merafe* had become polities of multi-ethnic composition. (See [merafe](#)). Hence the "Bamangwato Tribe" was the *multi-ethnic* polity ruled by Khama III and Tshekedi Khama. Official post-independence Botswana usage has continued this meaning of "tribe". However, the term has also been used in Botswana (both before and after Independence) to denote *ethnicity*, as in for example "the Kalanga tribe" or "the Wayei tribe" - ethnic groups which in colonial times were part of multi-ethnic Tswana-ruled polities. Discussions, such as the recent debates in Botswana over the proposal to extend the membership of the House of Chiefs, has often been seriously confused by failure to distinguish the two quite different senses.

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Tswana

See "Batswana".

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Villages

Early European visitors to pre-colonial Botswana described the settlements as "towns", on the basis that they were very large and well-ordered, in some cases larger than most Cape Colony "towns". However, it later became customary to refer to them as "villages". This may have been because they were, despite their size, agricultural settlements (whereas European "towns" were settlements whose inhabitants did not themselves generally practise agriculture but lived by trade etc.) One must however note a general pattern: in pre-colonial times Tswana society was often described by words suggesting importance in European terms - "town", "king", "house" etc. - whereas in colonial times these tended to be reduced to "village", "chief", "hut" etc. This usage resulted in the description of Serowe as "the largest village in Sub-Saharan Africa", which often puzzled European readers, who wondered how this differed from being the smallest town.

Nevertheless, the term "village" has become established as making a useful distinction. between the traditional Tswana settlement, built probably on tribal land, and the new "town" built on alienated land. Connected with this is the way in which Batswana conceptualize "urban" and "rural". "Rural" is wherever you live according to kinship patterns; "urban" is wherever you do not. Thus, Serowe is a village, while Jwaneng is a town.

Some historians have suggested the term "agri-town" for the traditional settlement.

Suggestions, additional or better information, and requests for explanations of further names or words would be welcome. Please email Dr Bruce Bennett at bennett@mopipi... [\[Click here for full email address\]](#).

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Main Setswana noun classes:
(Alternative non-`<TABLE>` format)

Sing. prefix	Pl. prefix	Sing. example	Pl. example
mo-	ba-	motho (person)	batho
-	bo-		borra

	oo		ooia (fathers)
mo-	me-	motse (village)	metse
le-	ma-	lekgoa (white person)	makgoa
se-	di-	seatla (hand)	diatla
[null prefix]	di	kgosi (chief)	dikgosi
lo-	di-		
bo-	ma-		
go-			

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