

## Batswana *dikgosi* (chiefs) and the incorporation of South West Africa into the Union of South Africa, 1946: What business did they have in the issue?

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### *Abstract*

*The paper recounts the fascinating story of some African chiefs (dikgosi) in what was then Bechuanaland Protectorate (now Botswana) who used their meagre resources in 1946 to block the incorporation of another colonial territory (Namibia) into the Union of South Africa. The paper argues that the action of the Batswana dikgosi was far from being a progressive and selfless act on their part, but a skillful strategy to block the incorporation of their own protectorate. It was in fact part of a long-standing strategy of using anything that would remove the chances of incorporation. The paper further suggests that the campaign may also have been in part the dikgosi's lawyer Douglas Buchanan, who skillfully weaved the dikgosi's fear of the incorporation of their own country into the broader regional and international politics.*

### Introduction

The close of the Second World War in 1945 brought to an end the League of Nations and in its place was established the United Nations Organisation.<sup>1</sup> The government of the Union of South Africa used the collapse of the League of Nations, which had granted it a mandate over South West Africa, as Namibia was then called, as an excuse to request the incorporation of the territory as a fifth province of the Union. The matter had been raised several times before by successive Union governments. In the view of the South African government, the proximity of the territory and the fact that it was within the same economic system, were sufficient reasons that justified Namibia's transfer to the Union. Also, General Jan Smuts, who had gained tremendous respect in Britain, Europe and outside Europe for his role in the war against Nazi Germany, hoped to use that as a trump card to win the support of Britain and her allies in the incorporation

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<sup>1</sup> Part of the research for this paper was carried out at the Macgregor Museum in Kimberley, South Africa, and I wish to thank the staff of the Museum, especially Vida Allen for all the help she gave during my stay there.

issue.<sup>2</sup> However, and much to the surprise and disappointment of the South Africans, the United Nations General Assembly on 14 December 1946 overwhelmingly rejected the request of South Africa to incorporate the territory.<sup>3</sup>

Writing on the subject, Michael Crowder has contended that Tshekedi Khama of Botswana was the only stumbling block to Smuts' efforts to incorporate Namibia into the Union in 1946. Crowder succeeds in demonstrating how Tshekedi with the assistance of his lawyer, Douglas Buchanan, used the press and friends in South Africa and abroad, anti-colonial organisations overseas, and sympathetic members of the British parliament, to shape international opinion against the incorporation of Namibia at the United Nations. In Crowder's view, it was the skilful campaign that Tshekedi conducted during 1946 that ensured that Namibia was never incorporated, and indeed also the High Commission Territories of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland.<sup>4</sup> As he puts it: "As far as the Namibians are concerned, when finally they gain their independence, Tshekedi will deserve their honour as one who made its eventual realisation possible."<sup>5</sup>

The role of Tshekedi Khama and other Batswana *dikgosi* in blocking the incorporation of South West Africa into the Union of South Africa is of course a contested issue. There are those who argue that credit should go to local leaders in Namibia led by Chief Hosea Kutako and his Herero Council of Chiefs and the churches. In fact they contend that Tshekedi and the Reverend Michael Scott were recruited by Kutako and Frederick Maherero, who was in exile in Botswana, as Kutako himself was not allowed to leave the country to petition the United Nations. This followed a referendum between December 1945 and April 1946 orchestrated skilfully by South Africa, which fraudulently concluded that over 80 percent of the Namibian people favoured incorporation.<sup>6</sup> Several decades later when Namibia was finally liberated, the credit for the transfer of power was given to many players including church organisations, labour unions, political parties, regional organisations such as the Frontline States and the Organisation of African Unity, liberation organisations and their armed forces, the UN, Western Contact Group, Cuba, etc. The name of Tshekedi Khama was not heard.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For a deeper and detailed analysis of the efforts of the union government to incorporate Namibia see: Ronald Hyam, *The Failure of South African Expansion, 1908-1948*, London, Macmillan, 1972; Ruth First, *South West Africa*, Gloucester, Mass., Smith, 1970; Laurent C. W. Kaela, *The Question of Namibia*, Houndmills, Macmillan, 1996; Martin Chanock, *Unconstitutional Union: Britain, Rhodesia and South Africa, 1900-1945*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1977.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Katjavivi, *A History of Resistance in Namibia*, London, Currey, 1988: 36.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Crowder, "Tshekedi Khama, Smuts and South Africa", *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 25 (1), 1987: 25-42.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*: 42.

<sup>6</sup> See SWAPO, *To Be Born A Nation: The Liberation Struggle for Namibia*, London, Zed, 1981: 167f.; Marion Wallace with John A. Kinahan, *A History of Namibia from the Beginning to 1990*, London, Hurst, 2011: 244f.

<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, Lionel Cliffe, et.al., *The Transition to Independence in Namibia*, Boulder, Rienner, 1994; Colin Leys and John S. Saul, (eds.), *Namibia's Liberation Struggle: The Two-Edged Sword*, London, Currey, 1995; Peter Katjavivi, Per Frostin, and Kaire Mbuende, (eds.), *Church and Liberation in Namibia*, London,

The skilful manner in which Tshekedi conducted the campaign is mentioned only by some of his several biographers, and only in passing. Mary Benson states that Tshekedi provided leadership to the Batswana *dikgosi* and four eminent black South Africans in championing the cause of Namibia, and that “their petition to the UN expressed their abhorrence of South Africa’s policy of racial discrimination and emphasised that the Mandate of South West Africa was intended to promote the well-being of the inhabitants.”<sup>8</sup> Diana Wylie on her part and in a couple of paragraphs refers to Tshekedi’s role in the campaign, but makes no attempt to relate it to the economic and political developments in Bechuanaland nor does she explain his interest in the matter.<sup>9</sup> But, was Tshekedi’s and other *dikgosi*’s interest in the issue, strictly to save the territory from incorporation into the Union?

This paper discusses the role of Tshekedi Khama and other Batswana *dikgosi* in blocking the efforts of the South African government to obtain the approval of the United Nations for the incorporation of Namibia in 1946. Secondly, it relates their role to the *dikgosi*’s thirty six years of struggle to block the incorporation of their own country of Bechuanaland. The *dikgosi*’had relentlessly pursued that strategy, especially from 1910, when the Union of South Africa was established, by an act that also envisaged the incorporation of the High Commission Territories.<sup>10</sup> The choice of Tshekedi as a representative and spokesperson of the six Batswana *dikgosi* should be no surprise. Tshekedi was one of the few highly educated Batswana *dikgosi* and well informed about colonial politics, and was clearly the natural leader for the *dikgosi* on all matters pertaining to the issue of incorporation. He was not just a “truculent, sulky and capricious” leader or a “self-seeking autocrat” with a violent temper as described by the Secretary of State in 1931, but was a very intelligent and hardworking chief committed to the welfare of his people and the survival of Bechuanaland outside the Union of South Africa.<sup>11</sup>

The paper further examines the specific role played by Tshekedi’s lawyer and friend, Douglas Buchanan. It is possible that his interest in the Namibian incorporation issue went beyond the professional fees he was getting. He was someone who in his own right took special interest in how British colonial policy affected the colonial people.<sup>12</sup> Finally, the paper casts discussion against the wider role of the Batswana *dikgosi* in resisting the incorporation of the Bechuanaland Protectorate into the Union. It is hoped that the discussion will show that the matter was very complex, and had more to do with the

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Pluto Press, 1989; I. William Zartman, *Ripe for Resolution: Conflict and Intervention in Africa*, updated version, New York, Oxford University Press, 1989.

<sup>8</sup> Mary Benson, ‘Tshekedi as I knew him’, *Botswana Notes and Records*, 8, 1976: 121-128 (127).

<sup>9</sup> Diana Wylie, *A Little God: The Twilight of Patriarchy in a Southern African Chieftdom*, Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press, 1990: 93.

<sup>10</sup> William Malcolm Hailey, *Native Administration in the British African Territories: The High Commission Territories: Basutoland, The Bechuanaland and Swaziland*, London, HMSO, 1953: 207.

<sup>11</sup> Benson, “Tshekedi”: 121-123.

<sup>12</sup> Buchanan was in fact a native representative in the Union parliament, and was therefore in his own right interested in the development of ‘native’ policy in the union and the region; see Benson, “Tshekedi”: 123.

preservation of the Bechuanaland Protectorate outside the Union, and that it was as much an agenda for Tshekedi as it was for the *dikgosi* and Douglas Buchanan.

## The spectre of incorporation before the outbreak of the Second World War

While the threat to Batswana's independent existence is a factor with roots in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it gained a renewed momentum in 1910 with the establishment of the Union of South Africa. The South African Act provided for the future incorporation of the administrations of the High Commission Territories and Rhodesia, and not of the territories (land) as has commonly been thought. Successive Union governments however, treated the respective clause as though it meant the future transfer of the territories to the Union, a situation that immediately forced the *dikgosi* in the southern part of the protectorate to petition the British government against a possible transfer. Khama III, of the Bangwato in the central part of the protectorate also joined the opposition to incorporation. Their petitions were even published in Britain to win the support of sympathetic British people.<sup>13</sup> All that the South Africans wanted, was to control labour in the territory necessary for the mines, and initially to obtain land for the white farmers from the Union.<sup>14</sup> Tshekedi would in later years cynically remark that the benefit of closer economic ties with the Union for the Batswana was "the opportunity to work in the mines on a 'cheap labour' basis."<sup>15</sup>

Until the 1930s, the British position on the issue of incorporation of Bechuanaland Protectorate remained one of ambivalence and wait and see. On the one hand they wanted to transfer the protectorate to the Union, and on the other, they felt it would be embarrassing to hand it over to a country that was notoriously known for its racist and repressive policies towards Africans. The consistent protests of the Batswana *dikgosi* could also not be ignored. The British themselves, as explained in 1885 by Sir Hercules Robinson, then governor of the Cape Colony, were not interested in assuming any serious responsibility over the protectorate:

We have no interest in the country to the north of the Molopo River, except as a road to the interior. We might therefore, confine ourselves for the present to preventing that part of the protectorate being occupied by other filibusters or foreign power, doing as little in the way of administration or settlement as possible.<sup>16</sup>

In fact, when the 'Native' (subsequently African) Advisory Council was established in 1920, the *dikgosi* saw it as a forum to assist their campaign against the transfer of the

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<sup>13</sup> Thomas Tlou and Alec Campbell, *History of Botswana*, 2 ed., Gaborone, Macmillan, 1997: 229.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Wylie, *Little God*: 204.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Botswana National Archives and Records Services (henceforward BNARS), BT. Adm. 15/2: T Khama "The Bechuanaland Protectorate and the Question of the Inclusion into the Union of South Africa: Views from within", undated.

Bechuanaland Protectorate.<sup>17</sup> At its inaugural meeting in November, 1920 a Mokgatla councillor, the Rev. Thomas Phiri, argued that the Council should serve the Protectorate and not the interest of the Union.<sup>18</sup> A more spirited discussion of the issue arose in 1925 when the chiefs suggested the repeal of the schedule to the South African Act because it did not provide sufficient protection of the welfare of the Batswana. There appeared to be nothing in place to prevent the South African government from amending the schedule once the transfer had been effected.

Not surprisingly, the matter of transfer of the protectorate was raised by the Barolong, who expressed concern that the Union government was now speaking of annexation. The Barolong were in the Union and knew the policies of the Union very well and how they were likely to affect the rights and powers of the Batswana *dikgosi*. An impassioned support came from Isang Pilane of the Bakgatla, who criticized the colonial government for failing to promote the separate status of the Protectorate:

We think the Government did not act fairly in the past when it advised the chiefs and the people of the Protectorate to contribute to the Union Native Labour contingent during the Great War. It was just the time for the Protectorate to show itself loyal to His Majesty the King of England and we should have had a contingent of our own. We do not see why our High Commissioner should have his heard office in the Union Buildings when we have three territories [Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland] in South Africa directly under the control of His Majesty the King.<sup>19</sup>

The High Commissioner (HC) however, continued to assure the *dikgosi* that His Majesty's Government would continue to protect the rights and interests of the Batswana, consistent with the intent of the schedule to the South African Act<sup>20</sup>, a position, as Reuben Mekenye observed in the case of Lesotho, dictated more by the pressure of the chiefs than Imperial benevolence.<sup>21</sup> The HC further promised them that should the matter of incorporation be discussed in the future, the chiefs and people of Bechuanaland would be "given full opportunity of expressing their views before any proposals for such transfer are considered by His Majesty's Government".<sup>22</sup>

The British government therefore, adopted a position that recognised the eventuality of transfer of the High Commission Territories, but would not commit itself on the date. Successive British governments were to make pledges to the inhabitants of these

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<sup>17</sup> See June B. Rampa, "Euro-African Reaction to Incorporation: The Bechuanaland Protectorate Case ca. 1908-1940", unpubl. BA History Dissertation, Gaborone, University of Botswana and Swaziland, 1978.

<sup>18</sup> BNARS, BNB 233, Minutes of the Native Advisory Council, Gaborone, 2 November 1920. Khama III of the Bangwato did not attend the meeting citing old age as an excuse.

<sup>19</sup> BNARS, S. 14/3, Minutes of the Native Advisory Council, Gaborone, 16-17 March 1925.

<sup>20</sup> BNARS, S. 14/3, Native Advisory Council, Third Meeting: High Commissioner (hereafter HC) to Resident Commissioner (hereafter RC), Cape Town, May 1925.

<sup>21</sup> Reuben O. Mekenye, "The African role in the failure of South African colonialism, 1902-1910: The case of Lesotho", Southeastern Regional Seminar in African Studies, 14-15 April 2000, available at <http://www.ecu.edu/african/sersas/Mekenye400.htm> (accessed February 2, 2013).

<sup>22</sup> BNARS, S. 14/3, Native Advisory Council, Third Meeting: HC to RC, Cape Town, May 1925.

territories that “the wishes of the Natives in these territories will be most carefully considered before any transfer takes place”.<sup>23</sup> And they also repeatedly stated that the British Parliament would “have the fullest opportunity of considering the matter before the transfer of the protectorates”.<sup>24</sup> This position was reiterated in 1925 by the Secretary of State for Dominions when he informed parliament that, “[i]n accordance with the pledges given when the South African bill was before parliament, the House will have the fullest opportunity of discussing, and if they wish, of disapproving any proposed transfer of the territories to the Union.”<sup>25</sup> This position however, never put the minds of the Batswana *dikgosi* to rest. So long as the Protectorate was economically neglected, underdeveloped, and dependent on the Union for employment and markets for its produce, the justification for transfer remained very strong.<sup>26</sup>

The campaign of the Batswana *dikgosi* intensified in the mid-1930s with the passing of the South African Status Bill of 1931. What worried the *dikgosi* was that the status bill established the Union as the sovereign legislative power in the land and categorically stated that,

no act of parliament of the United Kingdom and Northern Island passed after the eleventh day of December 1931, shall extend, or be deemed, to the Union as part of the law of the Union, unless extended thereto by an act of the parliament of the Union.<sup>27</sup>

The possible effect of this bill, if the Bechuanaland Protectorate was to be incorporated into the Union, was that the Union government could pass any law whether or not detrimental to the interests or rights of Africans, without interference from the British government. Whatever law the British government passed affecting African interests would have no legal effect in the Union, unless endorsed by the Union parliament. The Batswana *dikgosi* therefore, felt extremely vulnerable, should incorporation go ahead. The result was an intensive campaign by the Batswana *dikgosi*, as well as the Africans in the Union who saw a link between the campaign and their struggle in South Africa. As shown below, other African leaders inside South Africa supported the Batswana *dikgosi* because they saw their struggle as an extension of their own struggle against white rule in South Africa.

The campaign gathered quite some momentum in 1934 when General Hertzog declared that the Union government would make a case for immediate incorporation of the High

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<sup>23</sup> BNARS, BT. Adm. 7/11, “Memorandum handed to General Smuts by the Secretary of State for Dominions”, 21 July 1933.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> See for example: Quill Hermans, “Towards budgetary independence: A review of Botswana’s financial history, 1900 to 1973”, *Botswana Notes and Records*, 6, 1974: 89-116 (90-93); J. E. Spence, “British policy towards the High Commission Territories”, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 2 (2), 1964: 221-246; Ellen Hillbom, “Diamonds or development? A structural assessment of Botswana’s forty years of success”, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 46 (2), 2008: 191-214 (207f.).

<sup>27</sup> BNARS, BT. Adm. 15/2, “The Bechuanaland Protectorate and the Question of Incorporation into Union of South Africa: Views from within”.

Commission Territories.<sup>28</sup> Urgency to the cause of the dikgosi was added by rumours of a visit to England by Field Marshall Smuts, during which he was to plead for incorporation. And, as one Rev. Albert Jennings, a missionary sympathiser of the African cause, put it:

It is a pity that Smuts should have gone over before the protectorates have sent over their deputations as suggested by Sir Herbert Stanley, as he is an artful man, and is in great favour at present in England owing to the fusion of the two parties in the South African parliament.<sup>29</sup>

Understandably, the Batswana *dikgosi*, especially those closer to the border with the Union, were deeply concerned with such developments.

In May 1934, *kgosi* Molefhi Pilane of the Bakgatla, began a campaign to mobilise the Batswana *dikgosi* as a group, to oppose any transfer of the territory. Molefhi sent his emissary Isang Pilane to the capitals of the southern Batswana, mainly Kanye, Molepolole and Serowe to lobby the *dikgosi* for a joint campaign against incorporation.<sup>30</sup> Molefhi proposed a joint meeting of *dikgosi* to consider the best form of action, and went even further to suggest sending a deputation to England. The High Commissioner, Sir Herbert Stanley, was originally not opposed to this suggestion. Unlike his superiors in the United Kingdom, Sir Herbert had not seriously considered the possible embarrassment the presence of the *dikgosi* in London could cause the British Government, especially so soon after the war. However, when Tshekedi Khama was asked about the plan of the *dikgosi*, he distanced himself from what he called the Bakgatla project.<sup>31</sup> He stated that his people had no intention of raising any money for a deputation to the United Kingdom. In spite of the lack of cooperation by Tshekesdi, other *dikgosi* met in August 1934 in Mafeking and decided to act collectively in the matter.

Tshekedi's refusal to cooperate with other *dikgosi* on the incorporation issue was rooted in his reservations about the African Advisory Council. Following his appointment as regent of the Bangwato, Tshekedi refused to become a full member of the Council. Much to the annoyance of the Resident Commissioner Col. Rey, he frequently turned down invitations to the meetings of the Council either because he was too busy or because he wanted to confine his political activities to his own people.<sup>32</sup> Whenever he chose to

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<sup>28</sup> BNARS, BT. Adm. 15/2, T Khama to Molefhi Pilane, Bathoen II and Lotlaamoreng, Serowe, 3 September 1934; BNARS, BT. Adm. 15/3, T Khama to Resident Magistrate (Serowe), Serowe, 23 May 1934; Bathoen II to T Khama, Kanye, 19 May 1934 and 9 May 1934; Kgosi ya Barolong to T Khama, Mafeking, 14 May 1934 and Isang Pilane to T Khama, Mochudi, 12 May 1934.

<sup>29</sup> BNARS, BT. Adm. 15/2, Rev Albert Jennings to Tshekedi Khama, Vryburg, 22 October 1934.

<sup>30</sup> BNARS, BT. Adm. 15/2, T Khama to Molefhi Pilane, Bathoen II and Lotlaamoreng, Serowe, 3 September 1934; BNARS, BT. Adm. 15/3, T Khama to Resident Magistrate (Serowe), Serowe, 23 May 1934; Bathoen II to T Khama, Kanye, 19 May 1934 and 9 May 1934; Kgosi ya Barolong to T Khama, Mafeking, 14 May 1934 and Isang Pilane to T Khama, Mochudi, 12 May 1934.

<sup>31</sup> BNARS, BT. Adm. 15/3, T Khama to Resident Magistrate (Serowe), Serowe, 23 May 1934.

<sup>32</sup> BNARS, S. 420/12, African Advisory Council (AAC), Chief Tshekedi's Refusal to Cooperate with Chiefs of Southern Protectorate and Attitude re- Attendance of the African Advisory Council: RC to HC, Mafeking, 11 March 1932.

attend, he always made it clear that he did so not as a member, but observer.<sup>33</sup> It later became clear that his and his people's concerns were the issue of equality of representation in the Council, given the size of his constituency, and the fear that the concept of Council was foreign and likely to change the customs of his people in undesirable ways.<sup>34</sup> In July 1939 however, the Bangwato decided to become full members of the Council and from then on Tshekedi played his part in the matter of incorporation.<sup>35</sup> For what appeared to be a control strategy on the part of Tshekedi, the Bangwato were to be represented by different people at each meeting with the chief being the only permanent representative, euphemistically formulated in these words, "to give as many people as possible, especially from outside districts, an insight into the working of the Council."<sup>36</sup>

What worried the *dikgosi* most was that the real benefits of incorporation were not explained to them. What was clear to them was that the Union would benefit by incorporating the Bechuanaland Protectorate and other High Commission Territories. This state of affairs would later compel Tshekedi Khama to complain that

we would further state that the Protectorate Natives were no parties to the Act of the Union, nor were they ever consulted in regard thereto, nor have they ever acquiesced in the view that they must of necessity at any time be incorporated in the Union.<sup>37</sup>

In another long document, Tshekedi Khama speculated that the reason behind the sustained campaign of the Union government to incorporate Bechuanaland protectorate, was the general belief that the interests of the Batswana could be served better through association with the Union because the protectorate was economically dependent on the Union for markets and employment. Should the Union close these markets to the protectorate, then its fate would be sealed.<sup>38</sup>

No one argued strongly and persistently for the advantages to be derived from closer union with South Africa than Lionel Curtis, a prominent South African liberal. Curtis contended that the financial and economic interests of Bechuanaland and indeed of the

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> BNARS, S. 420/12, Resident Magistrate to Government Secretary, Serowe, 7 February 1934.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., District Commissioner (hereafter DC) to Government Secretary, Serowe, 19 July 1939.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> BNARS, BT. Adm. 15/4, T Khama to Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, Serowe, 11 April 1938.

<sup>38</sup> BNARS, BT. Adm. 15/2, "The Bechuanaland Protectorate and the Question of the Inclusion into the Union of South Africa". In this document T Khama provides a comprehensive analysis of British policy in the Bechuanaland from its inception in 1885. He analyses all the important agreements in order to demonstrate that no land was ever alienated through the protection agreement. The document also casts doubt on the right of Britain to transfer the protectorate, and argued that the only threat to it was economic neglect by the colonial power. Tshekedi's views were further elaborated in a confidential memorandum of the London Missionary Society which saw the position of the South African government as a design to have "fuller control of the labour supply in the protectorate" (BNARS, BT. Adm. 15/2, London Missionary Society, "Memorandum on the Incorporation of the Bechuanaland Protectorate into the Union of South Africa", London, 25 April 1935 (confidential)).



other two High Commission Territories were so entangled with that of the Union that they were unlikely to survive for long, unless incorporated.<sup>39</sup> In his view the regular restrictions on cattle exports imposed by the Union government, and the inability of the protectorate to balance its budget, all pointed to the desirability of incorporation.<sup>40</sup> As he argued, the transfer of the administration of the Bechuanaland Protectorate from the Colonial to the Dominions Office simultaneously with that of the Union of South Africa was clear testimony of the fact that they operated within a single economic system.<sup>41</sup> He therefore, proposed immediate transfer as opposed to postponement pending the economic development of the protectorate proposed by Mary Perham.<sup>42</sup>

The concerns of the Batswana *dikgosi* were shared by other people outside the borders of the protectorate. No one represented this body of opinion better than Sir Clarkson Tredgold, formerly Chief Justice of Southern Rhodesia. In an address in Cape Town in July 1935, Sir Clarkson argued that the British government at no time recognised the transfer of the Bechuanaland Protectorate to the Union, but only “empowered the Union to extend its sphere of activities should appropriate circumstances arise”.<sup>43</sup> Further, that the British government did not have any authority under section 151 of the Union Act, which was used by the South African government as justification to determine the future of the High Commission territories. The section, according to Sir Clarkson, only referred to the transfer of the governments of the territories and not to land.<sup>44</sup> In his view, Hertzog’s declaration was motivated not by the desire to help the inhabitants of the protectorate, but by land greed and labour requirements. Because of the above, Tredgold emphasised the need to consult the inhabitants of Bechuanaland before any incorporation could be effected. As he put it:

A perfectly reasonable deduction from this fact is that the Imperial Government did not want to spend more money than necessary. The report [Sir Alan Pim’s, my addition] refers to diminishing revenue and increasing expenditure as a problem, and one of the conclusions is that £25 000 should be immediately provided, and £150 000 spent on water development over a considerable period [ . . . ] If the Imperial Government could pass liability on to someone who was ready to undertake it so much the better for them. There are in the British parliament a substantial body who do not want the protectorates handed over to the Union. They are met by two alternatives, either the protectorates must be handed over or the British taxpayer must provide sufficient funds for efficient services and necessary development. Up to the present the Imperial Government has done so little that it has little claim to retain the protectorates

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<sup>39</sup> Margery Perham and Lionel Curtis, *The Protectorates of South Africa: The Question of their Transfer to South Africa*, London, Oxford University, 1935: 36-55.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*: 51.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*: 52.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*: 22.

<sup>43</sup> BNARS, BT. Adm. 15/3, Sir Clarkson Tredgold, “The South African Protectorates”, Cape Town, July 1935, p. 3.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

as the Union has to receive [them]. This is the problem with which we are faced.<sup>45</sup>

Support for the *dikgosi* also came from prominent black South Africans and Batswana living in the Union. These included among others John Dube, Z.K. Mathews and D.D.T. Jabavu, then president of the All African Convention. In an address to the convention in 1937, Jabavu argued that the fear of the Bechuanaland Africans, that transfer was intended to alienate Batswana's land, was justified in the sense that the Union parliament was consistently passing laws that were detrimental to the rights of Africans in the Union, which made it unfit to rule Africans. In his view, the Africans from the protectorates would be greatly disadvantaged by incorporation into the Union. They were likely to see themselves, like their fellows in South Africa, denied equality of citizenship purely on the grounds of colour and race.<sup>46</sup> John Dube on the other hand went to the extent of drafting a joint petition to the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs; this he then submitted to kings Griffith Lerothodi, Sobhuza II, and Tshekedi Khama to sign on behalf of their countries of Basutoland, Swaziland and Bechuanaland respectively. Understandably, Tshekedi would not sign because there were "other chiefs in the Bechuanaland Protectorate who are directly concerned in this matter and whose opinions are of vital importance before one can safely make any suggestions".<sup>47</sup>

Support for incorporation of the protectorate came from a predictable source, the white farmers, many of whom were of Afrikaner descent. Many of these preferred to be under the racist regime in the Union. However, their spokesmen in arguing their case preferred to use the economic factors to justify incorporation.<sup>48</sup> In 1935, the Settlers Protection Association, formed specifically to champion the interests of white settler farmers in the Bechuanaland Protectorate, hired the law firm Mosenthal Sons and Co. of London to represent their interests in the United Kingdom. It would appear that the decision to employ the services of Mosenthal Sons was designed to coincide with the visit of the Union Prime Minister, who was expected to raise the question of the future of the High Commission Territories during his stay.<sup>49</sup> In a memorandum to the Secretary of State, Mosenthal Sons argued that in establishing farms in the protectorate, the settlers relied on the schedule of the Act of Union (151), which in their view guaranteed the future incorporation of the territory into the Union. They therefore, invested heavily with the hope of continued access to markets, which existed only in the Union. But, as a result of being outside the Union they suffered severely from regular restrictions imposed by the

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.: 10.

<sup>46</sup> BNARS, BT. Adm. 15/3, DDT Jabavu, "Presidential Address to the All African Convention", Cape Town, 13 December 1937. Also see C Doyle Modiakgotla to T Khama, Bloemfontein, 20 July 1937; BNARS, BT. Adm. 15/5, T D Mweli Skota to T Khama, Johannesburg, 6 April 1935.

<sup>47</sup> BNARS, BT. Adm. 15/2, T. Khama to John Dube, Serowe, 27 September 1937; BNARS, BT. Adm. 15/4, Z.K. Mathews to T. Khama, Fort Hare, Alice, 14 April 1938.

<sup>48</sup> See, for instance, BNARS, BT. Adm. 15/4, L Glover to T. Khama, Broadhurst – Gaborone, 28 May 1934.

<sup>49</sup> BNARS, BT. Adm. 15/5, Mosenthal Sons and Co. to Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, London, May 1935.

Union government to protect its own citizens.<sup>50</sup> They further argued that the protectorate was in any case economically a “portion of the Union of South Africa”.<sup>51</sup> The above situation, according to the law firm impoverished the farmers and pushed many into bankruptcy. As a solution they proposed:<sup>52</sup>

- 1) The transfer of the administration of the protectorate as a whole or of the European settlements separately to the Union Government, or
- 2) The purchase by the colonial government of the land and stock owned by white farmers and its return to the inhabitants of the Bechuanaland Protectorate.

None of the proposals were granted. The outbreak of the war also interrupted all discussion of the issue. The settlers, however, continued to make the same arguments up to the 1960s, when the Bechuanaland Protectorate was finally granted independence.

The outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 put on hold all discussions on the transfer of the protectorate. The war was a European affair, which affected the Batswana only in so far as Bechuanaland was a protectorate of Britain. The Batswana *dikgosi* immediately offered to assist with men, an offer that was turned down. Instead they were encouraged to enlist as part of the Native Military Corps of South Africa, an arrangement which was flatly rejected by the *dikgosi*.<sup>53</sup> The Batswana *dikgosi* however, persisted in their offer of men, a gesture that has at times been explained as a show of loyalty to the British crown.<sup>54</sup> The offer to assist in men, as David Kiyaga-Mulindwa has argued, was not an act of collaboration with the colonial administration, but was a tactful strategy on the part of the Batswana *dikgosi* to “defuse the issue of incorporation”.<sup>55</sup> They hoped that by providing assistance as a separate territory they would persuade Britain not to destroy such a separate identity through the transfer of their territory to the Union.

The preceding section has highlighted three factors, important to understand the next section. Firstly, it has established that the campaign against the incorporation of the Bechuanaland Protectorate was a matter that concerned all the *dikgosi* especially those in the southern part. While Tshekedi Khama, followed by Bathoen II articulated the problem more eloquently, the initiative was not always their preserve. Secondly, it has revealed greater diversity in the strategy of the *dikgosi*, ranging from collective

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> See Brian Mokopakgosi, “The impact of the Second World War: The case of Kweneng in the then Bechuanaland Protectorate, 1939-1950”, in: David Killingray and Richard Rathbone, (eds.), *Africa and the Second World War*, Houndsmills et al., Macmillan, 1986: 160-180 (163f.).

<sup>54</sup> See, for instance, Rowland Alan Bent, *Ten Thousand Men of Africa: The Story of the Bechuanaland Pioneers and Gunners, 1941-1946*, London, HMSO, 1952.

<sup>55</sup> David Kiyaga-Mulindwa, “The Bechuanaland Protectorate and the Second World War”, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 12 (3), 1984: 33-53 (49). Also see Hoyini H. K. Bhila, “The impact of the Second World War on the development of peasant agriculture in Botswana, 1939-1956”, *Botswana Notes and Records*, 16, 1984: 63-71.

petitioning of the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, deputations to the United Kingdom, to participation in the war in order to win Britain over to the idea of preserving the separate identity of the protectorate. Lastly, we could conclude that the issue of incorporation was maintained as a matter of high politics throughout, and was kept out of the domain of public discussion. It is against this broader background that we propose to examine the South West African case of 1946.

## The campaign of 1946

The South African mandate over South West Africa had been granted by the League of Nations at the end of the First World War. When the League was dissolved in 1945, so too was its Permanent Mandates Commission, which had been given supervisory responsibility over the exercise of mandatory powers. Ironically, and probably with the hope that the mandates would be considered to have lapsed with the dissolution of the league, General Smuts warned the United Nations that he would in due course of time request the termination of the South West Africa mandate and the incorporation of the territory into the Union of South Africa. What the South Africans deliberately omitted or chose to ignore, was the fact that the League was an embodiment of the international community, which did not disappear with its dissolution. It is however, an argument that they would continue to use long after 1946, as a device to avoid supervision by the structures of the United Nations Organisation, the successor organisation of the League of Nations, embodying the international community.

It was against these intentions of South Africa, that on 30 January 1946 Tshekedi Khama requested the British High Commissioner to South Africa to forward a telegram to the United Nations Trusteeship Committee, arguing for the separation of South West Africa from the Union of South Africa.<sup>56</sup> In the letter, Tshekedi raised three important issues that he proposed the United Nations should address, should the case of Namibia come before it. He proposed that Namibia should be kept separate from the Union; that the Gamangwato (now central district) had given sanctuary to the Ovaherero who fled Namibia during the German period and therefore he had a *locus standi* on the matter; and that the economic future of Bechuanaland would be guaranteed with a free access to a port in Namibia.<sup>57</sup>

At this stage, it is not entirely clear if Tshekedi Khama was acting on his own or on a mandate from the *dikgosi* or some of them. What is clearer, however, is that by February, the campaign to block the incorporation of the territory had become a matter involving all the major *dikgosi* except those of the Barolong and Bakgatla. As for the Barolong it is not difficult to establish why they would opt to stay out, over 50 per cent of them lived across the border in South Africa. For the Bakgatla it would appear that refusal to take part was essentially because of a personal grudge between Tshekedi

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<sup>56</sup> Crowder, "Tshekedi": 26f.

<sup>57</sup> Macgregor Museum, Kimberley (henceforth MMK), TK 17 (1946), Tshekedi Khama – Buchanan, 1946, Tshekedi Khama to High Commissioner, Serowe, 30 January 1946.

Khama and Molefi Pilane. When Molefi initiated collective action against the incorporation of Bechuanaland in 1934, Tshekedi had not participated.

It would appear that the concerns about the possible incorporation of Namibia into the Union did not originate with Tshekedi Khama, but with Douglas Buchanan, who was able to weave them neatly into the long-standing campaign of the Protectorate *dikgosi* against incorporation. What set the ball rolling was an article that appeared in *The Union Review* of October 1945 on the future of Namibia and how British interests would be injured by its incorporation into the Union. The article expressed hope that

when the legal status and future of South West Africa are under discussion, the United Kingdom will remember that and ensure that its rights are entrenched against any possibility of interference or encroachment by subsequent Union Government of a different complexion to the present.<sup>58</sup>

Upon reading the article, Buchanan immediately wrote to Sir Evelyn Baring, the British High Commissioner to South Africa, cautioning against the incorporation of the territory as that could hurt British imperial interests in the region. Buchanan stated that:

Historically, this is only fit and proper, but practically and commercially, if this is true, it is of outstanding importance to the future prosperity of Bechuanaland and, probably the Rhodesias, as a railway line from somewhere in the north of Bechuanaland to Walvis Bay would provide a ready means of egress and access for Bechuanaland products and imports.<sup>59</sup>

Exaggerating somewhat, as there was no such information at the time, Buchanan referred to the large resources of high grade coal in the central district, which would be commercially good for the United Kingdom. Even the Pim Report of 1933 on the financial and economic situation of the protectorate raised doubts on its future prospects.<sup>60</sup> Buchanan proposed to discuss the matter privately with the High Commissioner before sharing with Tshekedi, a proposal that the latter readily agreed to.<sup>61</sup>

The article in *The Union Review* provoked sufficient excitement among those familiar with the Bechuanaland Protectorate, albeit it only served to demonstrate the importance of access to overseas markets through the port of Walvis Bay. Even before Buchanan had an opportunity to confer with Tshekedi on the matter, interviews and letters were exchanged. In an interview with a certain Col. John Rose in December 1945, he advised that the interests of Bechuanaland, Britain and the Rhodesias should be paramount in any future transfer of Namibia to the Union. Col. Rose revealed that the Bechuanaland had extensive coal deposits which could be exploited to meet shortages in the United

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<sup>58</sup> MMK, TK 16, Correspondence – Khama – Buchanan 1945: Extract from *The Union Review* (October 1945).

<sup>59</sup> MMK, TK 16, Correspondence – Khama – Buchanan 1945: Buchanan to Evelyn Baring, (30 October 1945).

<sup>60</sup> Alan Pim, *Financial and Economic Position of the Bechuanaland Protectorate: Report of the Commission Appointed by the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs*, London, HMSO, 1933. Also see Hermans, "Budgetary independence": 89-93.

<sup>61</sup> MMK, TK 16, Correspondence – Khama – Buchanan 1945: Evelyn Baring (HC) to D. Buchanan, Pretoria, 20 November 1945.

Kingdom.<sup>62</sup> Later that month, in a letter to Buchanan, Col. Rose added that the coal deposits could be exploited together with the copper deposits, and that a railway to transport them to Walvis Bay could be constructed very cheaply because of the flatness of the terrain.<sup>63</sup> The same theme was taken to another level over a month later by a certain James Venning when he stated that:

I have been thinking a lot of late about the improvement in West Coast Railway communication as the only means to bring in North and South Rhodesias, and to enlarge the sphere of British influence south of the Equator. The idea should be to prevent the Portuguese from securing a big hold upon the trade of those British possessions which can with proper approach be knit into a British Commonwealth of Federated African States.<sup>64</sup>

From the above, it is obvious that the primary motivation for opposing the incorporation of Namibia into the Union was the economic survival of Bechuanaland and its neighbours to the north.

More revealing was a letter to Buchanan early in February 1946 in which Tshekedi informed him of his meeting with Frederick Maherero, chief of the Ovaherero of Botswana. Maherero had agreed to send secret emissaries to Namibia to gauge the feelings of its inhabitants about incorporation into the Union. In his usual frank disposition when communicating with Buchanan, Tshekedi intimated to him that,

I informed Frederick Maherero that my concern about the incorporation of South West Africa originates from my fear for my own country realising as I do that if South West Africa is wholly incorporated into the Union of South Africa then it would only be a matter of time before Bechuanaland goes the same way.<sup>65</sup>

This position was further clarified by Buchanan in March when he argued for a free corridor and port for Bechuanaland and Rhodesia, and concluded that with those, Bechuanaland and Rhodesia “would probably have no objection to the rest of South West Africa being incorporated into the Union.”<sup>66</sup> It would seem that the matter was pursued more out of self-interest than selflessness.

As the developments of 1946 on the proposed incorporation of Namibia have been elaborately narrated by Michael Crowder, it is not necessary to restate them here.<sup>67</sup> Still I would like to state the points made by him, briefly: In the first instance, the campaign against incorporation that ensued between January and December 1946, was conducted

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<sup>62</sup> MMK, TK 16, Correspondence – Khama – Buchanan 1945: Memorandum of Interview with Col. John Rose, 6 December 1945. Although titled memorandum this was simply a detailed letter summarizing the interview.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., John Rose to Douglas Buchanan, 19 December 1945.

<sup>64</sup> MMK, TK 17, Correspondence – Khama – Buchanan 1946: James Venning to Col. John Rose, Pretoria, 1 February 1946.

<sup>65</sup> MMK, TK 17, Correspondence – Khama – Buchanan 1946: Tshekedi Khama to Douglas Buchanan, Serowe, 1 February 1946.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., D. Buchanan to G. Hall (Member of British Parliament), Cape Town, 12 March 1946.

<sup>67</sup> Crowder, “Tshekedi”.

on behalf of the Batswana *dikgosi* by Tshekedi Khama and Douglas Buchanan. Secondly, when it became clear that the British government was not going to play the role of a protecting power honourably by passing on the petition of the Batswana *dikgosi* to the United Nations Trusteeship Committee, Tshekedi and Buchanan resorted to requesting a delegation to the United Kingdom in order to sensitise the British public and influential people and organisations on the matter. This was strenuously resisted by the United Kingdom government, and as a strategy was not anything new. Tshekedi and Buchanan also skilfully used newspapers to champion their cause. However, in December 1946 the United Nations General Assembly rejected the South African request partly as a result of the efforts of the Indian delegation at the UNO, which persistently questioned the record of successive Union governments in the treatment of African inhabitants, and partly also due to the campaign of the Batswana *dikgosi*.

The crucial questions that this section proposes to address are whether the campaign was first and foremost designed to assist the people of Namibia within and without the Bechuanaland Protectorate, and the extent to which the contention that the campaign was a Tshekedi project can be sustained. A closer examination of a petition prepared by the Batswana *dikgosi* in April 1946, for onward passage to the British government on the subject of the incorporation of South West Africa, and of the correspondence between Tshekedi Khama and the other *dikgosi* provides an interesting insight into the matter.<sup>68</sup>

The petition of the *dikgosi* raised several important points that argued against the transfer of Namibia. Interestingly, the petition began with a long exposition of the struggle of the *dikgosi* against the incorporation of Bechuanaland Protectorate itself. Its main focus was not how Namibia would suffer through incorporation, but the economic potential of Bechuanaland (industrial and agricultural), and how that would be harmed by Namibia's incorporation into the Union. The *dikgosi* argued that Bechuanaland had vast mineral resources and important agricultural potential, which were not yet explored. In addition, it had the very rich ecosystem of the Okavango area, which could bring into the country revenue from tourism. These arguments were to reappear in many of Tshekedi's and Buchanan's subsequent correspondence and publications.<sup>69</sup> Such bright economic prospect for the protectorate they argued, was threatened by the lack of an alternative railway linking the protectorate and Southern Rhodesia to the Namibia coast. The control of rail transport by Southern Rhodesia and the Union of South Africa was therefore, seen as an obstacle to the future economic development of the Bechuanaland

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<sup>68</sup> BNARS, DCS 32/9, "Petition by Chiefs against Incorporation of South West Africa into the Union of South Africa", Mafeking, 29 April 1946. It was signed by Tshekedi Khama of the Bangwato, Bathoen II of the Bangwaketse, Kgari Sechele II of the Bakwena, Mokgosi S Mokgosi of the Balete, Sedumedi Gaborone of the Batlokwa and Moremi III of the Batawana. In fact the same *dikgosi* had written to the High Commissioner three days earlier giving Tshekedi Khama and Douglas Buchanan full authority to pursue the matter on their behalf. Many of Tshekedi's earlier letters were as a result signed on their behalf, and he regularly briefed them on action to be taken, and often sought their advice and consent on cause of action necessary. See BNARS, BT. Adm. 7/8, Chiefs to High Commissioner, Mafeking, 26 April 1946.

<sup>69</sup> See, for instance, BNARS, BT. Adm. 7/9, Douglas Buchanan to Lord Courthope, Cape Town, 2 April 1947.

Protectorate. This was the main argument for interest in the Namibian case. As they contended,

[i]f South West Africa is to become part and parcel of the Union of South Africa, we as a territory, would then be barred in not only from the south, east and west, but from the west, and our only hope for a free and open route would be lost to us, and the economic development of the territory strangled at its birth.<sup>70</sup>

What is more revealing is the fact that the *dikgosi* were ready to accept a mandate

at least over the northern portion thereof from 25 degrees latitude south so as to provide the Bechuanaland Protectorate, and incidentally Rhodesia, with free access to, and a free port on the west coast of Africa and an opportunity for the displaced persons to return to their homeland.<sup>71</sup>

Of importance to this discussion is the fact that 25 degrees latitude south coincides approximately with the southernmost extension of the Bechuanaland Protectorate and Namibia, and would have left the ports of Walvis Bay and Swakopmund under mandate control. While it can be argued that such an arrangement would have left the Ovaherero under the UNO trusteeship framework, it is difficult to account for what was to happen to people of Nama descent, who were also displaced and some of whom also lived in Bechuanaland. The only plausible argument is that the interests of Bechuanaland rather than those of Namibia were primary in the campaign.<sup>72</sup> Throughout the campaign, and as reflected also in the petition, there was deep trust and respect for the British justice system. As one of the solutions to the case, the Batswana *dikgosi* proposed handing back the mandate over South West Africa to Britain.<sup>73</sup> Having experienced British protection for six decades they were convinced that it was far more tolerable than Union rule.

Also, interactions with African leaders in the Union showed what was likely to happen if Bechuanaland was to be placed under South African rule. Although the *dikgosi* also justified their interest in the Namibian case by referring to the fact that there were Namibian people living in the Bechuanaland Protectorate who had been forced out by the Germans during the 1904-07 war against German imperialism, and who desired to return to their homeland, it appears that the latter were only brought into the picture much later, as an afterthought to lend more legitimacy to the cause? It was not until

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<sup>70</sup> See BNARS, DCS 32/9, "Petition by Chiefs against Incorporation of South West Africa into the Union of South Africa", Mafeking, 29 April 1946. Ironically when the Trans-Kalahari road connecting Botswana and Namibia was officially opened in March 1998, there was no mention of the Batswana *dikgosi*, who saw the economic importance of such a link 52 years ago. The road was only used as a showpiece to crown Sir Ketumile Masire's development efforts at the end of his 18 years in office. And 67 years later the political leaders of Botswana and Namibia are only now discussing the feasibility of the trans-Kalahari railway link.

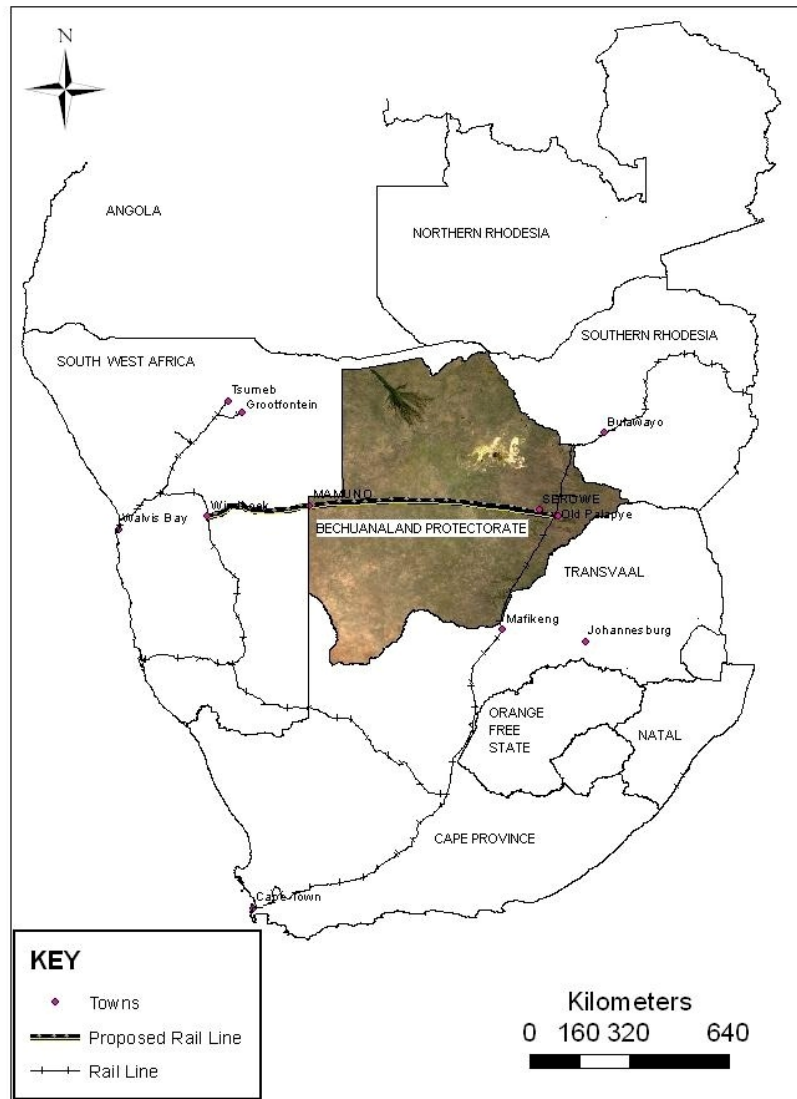
<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> The plight of the Nama, and that of other Namibian people were clearly not woven into the *dikgosi's* campaign strategy.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.



Figure 1: Map of Southern Africa ca. 1940



Source: Brian Mokopakgosi, based on a hand-drawn draft in: BNARS, DCS 32/9, "Petition by Chiefs against Incorporation of South West Africa into the Union of South Africa", Mafeking, 29 April 1946.

August 1946 that Ovaherero started to figure in the discussions, when Frederick Maherero requested an interview with the Resident Commissioner. Clearly, the involvement of the Ovaherero was not so much a result of deliberate efforts by the

*dikgosi* to get them involved, but was much rather a response to an approach of the Ovaherero of Namibia, who wanted Frederick Maherero to play some part.<sup>74</sup> The approach followed statements by the Union government at the UNO that the people of South West Africa had agreed to the transfer of their territory, a position that was far from the truth.

Interestingly, what emerged from the involvement of Namibians in Bechuanaland is that only the Ovaherero who recognised Frederick as their rightful chief were involved. The vast number of Ovambanderu scattered all over the protectorate, as well as those of Nama and Damara descent were not consulted at all. Also of interest, is the fact that Frederick was towing a line that was far more moderate than that of the Batswana *dikgosi*. While the Batswana *dikgosi* proposed granting of mandate to the British government, Frederick would even have returned to his homeland under the South African mandate if the economic conditions of his people were changed. As the District Commissioner for Serowe, Mackenzie, reported to the government secretary,

he would not be prepared to return while present conditions exist, i.e., shortage of land and dispersal of the Ovaherero over numerous small reserves. If the position of the Ovaherero was the same as that of the Ovambo who live in one homogenous community in the tribal as opposed to a general native reserve, then Frederick would be willing to return even if *South West Africa remained a territory mandated to the Union*, but would not be willing to do so if it was transferred.<sup>75</sup>

From July onwards, all those involved in the matter began to lose hope that the British government would ever grant Tshekedi passage to the UK. Their hopes were shattered further when the High Commissioner finally delivered the message that the British government had decided that there was no need for the *kgosi* (chief) to travel to the UK, and that the extent of the iron and coal resources did not justify the construction of a railway to Walvis Bay.<sup>76</sup> At this time, Tshekedi and Buchanan were writing to just anybody who cared to listen and could assist their cause. For instance, Buchanan wrote to Field Marshall Viscount Montgomery that:

Some local military experts, who are au fait with the terrain and transport possibilities and requirements, consider the securing of a port (Walvis Bay) with a corridor to Bechuanaland and the Rhodesias as a vital necessity to the security of the Empire. Bechuanaland itself would not only provide an ideal airbase, but the Makarikari Pan would be a suitable place for atomic and other secret military experiments.<sup>77</sup>

This again served to highlight the primacy of Bechuanaland in the issue of incorporation of Namibia.

The above therefore, casts further doubt on the supposition that the campaign of the *dikgosi* was executed purely in the interest of the Namibian people. In fact as Tshekedi

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<sup>74</sup> BNARS, BT. Adm. 7/11, Tshekedi Khama to High Commissioner, Serowe, 24 September 1947.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., W. F. Mackenzie (DC Serowe) to Government Secretary, Serowe, 8 August 1947, my emphasis.

<sup>76</sup> MMK, TK 17, Correspondence – Khama – Buchanan 1946: E. Baring to *Dikgosi*, Pretoria, 3 July 1946.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., D. Buchanan to Field Marshall Viscount Montgomery, Cape Town, 24 September 1946.

was to firmly state in a letter to H. W. Forster of the Anti-Slavery Protection Society justifying the interest of Bechuanaland in the Namibian issue, it was

unreasonable for any suggestion to be made to us (chiefs) that we must have peace in our minds because our country is not being threatened by any means. For the last 20 years or so Bechuanaland has been involved in uncertainty about its political future, and any action taken to alter the position of South West Africa inevitably affects the Bechuanaland Protectorate.<sup>78</sup>

Clearly, the concern was more about what would happen to Bechuanaland, should Namibia be transferred.

It is also interesting to observe that kgosi Moremi's fascination about the incorporation issue went far beyond the threatened economic interests of the Bechuanaland Protectorate and the plight of the displaced people of Namibia, who were scattered throughout the protectorate. Of all the *dikgosi* involved in the campaign, Moremi enjoyed the comfort of being far away in the north-western part of the protectorate, and should in reality have been less concerned about the designs of the South African government. Moremi's concern too had very little to do with the numerous Ovaherero and Ovambanderu who had settled in his territory and were not only fighting amongst themselves, but were persistently refusing to recognise his authority.<sup>79</sup> What appears to have compelled the Batawana *kgosi* to pool himself behind his fellow *dikgosi* was the dispute over land claims in the Caprivi area, which dated to the period of German occupation of Namibia. One area that the Batawana consistently mentioned was Nxae Nxae, which they considered to be their cattle posts, a claim that the Germans had ignored.<sup>80</sup> This dispute was never resolved. It would appear that *kgosi* Moremi was worried that the absorption of Namibia into the Union of South Africa would establish in that territory a regime that was unlikely to be more tolerant than the Germans. Granting a mandate to Britain however, was likely to improve conditions for the resolution of the dispute.

Part of the opposition of the *dikgosi* to incorporation of Namibia, and therefore of Bechuanaland, stemmed from the fear that the racist and oppressive laws of the Union would be extended to the protectorate as well. As in the period before the war support

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<sup>78</sup> BNARS, BT. Adm. 7/10, Tshekedi Khama to H. W. Forster, Serowe, 15 July 1967.

<sup>79</sup> Ovaherero and Ovambanderu settled in the Ngamiland, north-western Botswana during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. They were both formerly refugees from Namibia, although the Ovambanderu had arrived earlier in the 1890s. While they spoke the same language they were not the same people and did not even share leadership. The Ovaherero recognised their hosts, the Batawana, but the Ovambanderu did not. The claim to independence by especially the Ovambanderu and competition over grazing areas resulted in significant conflict between the two groups and between the Ovambanderu and the Batawana with the latter refusing to be tried in the Batawana courts. See, for instance, Christian J. Makgala, "The dimension of justice in the tribal areas of colonial Botswana", *Crime and Justice*, 19 (73), May 2003: 1-3; Kaendee Kandapaera, "War, flight and asylum: A brief history of the Ovambanderu of Ngamiland, Botswana, 1896-1961", unpubl. BA Dissertation, University of Botswana, 1992: passim; Jeff Ramsay, Part Themba Mgadla, and Barry Morton, *Building a Nation: A History of Botswana from 1800 to 1910*, Gaborone, Longman, 1996: 238f.

<sup>80</sup> BNARS, BT. Adm. 7/9, Chief Moremi to Tshekedi Khama, Maun, 25 June 1946.

from prominent black South Africans was tremendous. Not surprisingly, these included among others the likes of R.T. Bokwe, Z.K. Mathews, A.B. Xuma and D.D.T. Jabavu. These agreed with the Batswana *dikgosi* that the only way to ensure that the case was put up for discussion at the UNO was for them to make representations to Britain, and they condemned the British government for denying Tshekedi assistance to sail to England. To these men, the continued existence of the High Commission Territories outside the Union provided a ray of hope for the numerous black people of South Africa. As Bokwe was to state in a letter to Tshekedi,

I know that I am expressing the firm conviction of many of my fellow countrymen in the Union when I say our doom is sealed for many generations to come if ever the protectorates of Swaziland, Basutoland and Bechuanaland are handed over to the Union of South Africa. God forbid that this should ever happen in our time or that of our children's children.<sup>81</sup>

Until December 1946, when the UN General Assembly ruled against the Union government, the British government refused to grant Tshekedi passage to the United Kingdom, or to instruct their delegates at the UNO to present the petition of the *dikgosi*. The Dominions Affairs Office argued that the Bechuanaland *dikgosi* had no *locus standi* in the South West African case, and therefore, considered their actions as a way of creating trouble.<sup>82</sup> It would appear however, that the interests of the Batswana *dikgosi* and those of the Namibian people were relegated to the background in a bid to please General Smuts. Jack Buchanan put it more succinctly when he argued that:

As you know better than I do, Smuts only just had a majority with which to bring the Union on to our side in the war [...] The British government likewise, in view of the very difficult position it is in both with America and Russia, is very anxious to avoid any suggestion of disagreement with any of the Dominions. They are therefore, almost bound to support Smuts [...] I gathered from Addison [Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs – my addition] that Smuts has no intention at this time of raising the question of Bechuanaland being brought into the Union, and Addison as good as said that the matter would not be raised in the near future unless the issue was forced by you and Tshekedi, but that if it was so forced it was pretty clear that the result would be exactly the opposite of what you wanted.<sup>83</sup>

The British government was therefore, using every weapon available including threats, to discourage the Batswana *dikgosi* from pursuing the campaign.

That the campaign against incorporation was a joint project on the part of the six most prominent *dikgosi* is not difficult to establish beyond doubt. In all their correspondence

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<sup>81</sup> BNARS, BT. Adm. 7/8, R T Bokwe to Tshekedi Khama, Middlesdrift, 20 May 1946. Also see *ibid.*, Z.K. Mathews to Tshekedi Khama, Alice (undated); A.B. Xuma to Tshekedi Khama, Johannesburg, 23 May 1946 and BNARS, BT. Adm. 7/10, D. D. T. Jabavu to Tshekedi Khama, Middlesdrift, 23 May 1946.

<sup>82</sup> BNARS, BT. Adm. 7/8, Confidential letter from Jack Buchanan to Douglas Buchanan, London, 26 June 1946.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.* This threatening position of the British government was also to be adopted by the London Missionary Society, which had all along supported the campaign of the Batswana *dikgosi*. See BNARS, BT. Adm. 7/11, R. K. Orchard (Foreign Secretary of the London Missionary Society) to Douglas Buchanan, London, 14 August 1946.

with one another, they constantly referred to the matter as *kgang ya rona*, or our case. More importantly, all the six *dikgosi* paid for the cost of the case and the maintenance of Tshekedi while in Cape Town trying to persuade the British government to issue him with a sailing pass to the United Kingdom. The *dikgosi* did not only make pledges, but they sent the money directly to an account in Cape Town to be debited by their accountants for disbursements to Tshekedi and Buchanan.<sup>84</sup> Also observable in their correspondence was the persistent reminder of the need to stand together or risk falling into the designs of General Smuts.<sup>85</sup> What is equally interesting is the fact that throughout this protracted campaign the ordinary people were kept out of the picture. The campaign became like before the war, a matter of high state politics.

## Conclusion

The campaign to block the incorporation of Namibia into the Union of South Africa before, during and after December 1946, was conducted in many different ways and by different actors, who included Tshekedi Khama, Batswana *dikgosi*, Michael Scott, prominent black South African leaders, member states of the United Nations Organisation and nationalist organisations in Namibia itself.<sup>86</sup> The role of the Batswana *dikgosi* in frustrating the efforts of General Smuts and the Union government in 1946 however, cannot be glossed over simply as a minor episode in the county's search for an independent identity. Their campaign, competently executed on their behalf by Tshekedi Khama and Douglas Buchanan, contributed in no small way to the decision of the UN General Assembly not to grant the wishes of the South African government. This article, we hope, has demonstrated that the campaign was fought largely to save Bechuanaland from being transferred to the Union of South Africa. Namibia was saved largely because it provided an important dynamic in the grand strategy of the Batswana *dikgosi* to resist the incorporation of Bechuanaland into the Union, a strategy that they had pursued since the establishment of the Union in 1910. We can therefore, confidently conclude that the thesis proposed by David Kiyaga-Mulindwa in explaining the participation of the Batswana in the Second World War also applies in this case. The campaign was essentially a strategy to block the incorporation of Bechuanaland itself.

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<sup>84</sup> Details of the contributions of each of the six *dikgosi* are contained in file BNARS, BT. Adm. 7/9. It appears that the size of the contribution was in accordance with the size of the 'tribe'. In this way the Bangwato paid more, followed by the Bangwaketse. The other factor appears to have been the extent to which the *dikgosi* could draw money from their treasuries without making unnecessary suspicions. Also see *ibid.*, Chief Matlala Gaborone to Tshekedi Khama, Gaborone, 16 October 1946.

<sup>85</sup> See, for instance, BNARS, BT. Adm. 7/9, Chief Mokgosi to Tshekedi Khama, Ramotswa, 11 November, 1946; Chief Moremi to Tshekedi Khama, Maun, 26 June 1946.

<sup>86</sup> See Cliffe, et.al., *Transition*; Leys and Saul, *Namibia's Liberation Struggle*.

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