

**Omhedi: Displacement and Legitimacy in Oukwanyama politics,
Namibia, 1915-2010**

By

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Dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Doctoral Degree

in History in the

Department of History, University of the Western Cape

The logo of the University of the Western Cape, featuring a classical building facade with columns and a pediment.
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WESTERN CAPE

Supervisor: Professor Patricia Hayes

November, 2011

DECLARATION

I declare that *Omheddi: Displacement and Legitimacy in Oukwanyama Politics, Namibia, 1915-2010* is my work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other University, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.



Full Name: Napandulwe T. Shiweda Date 18 November 2011

Signed.....

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all, this whole compilation of my dissertation would not have been possible without the backing of the Almighty God, so my first and foremost sincere gratitude goes to Him. He has been my guiding light, He has protected me in all my travelling and has availed me this wonderful opportunity.

Secondary, I acknowledge here my greatest thanks to my sponsor, the Volkswagen Foundation in Germany for granting me the scholarship to do my Doctoral Degree under the *Knowledge for Tomorrow – Cooperative Research Projects in Sub-Saharan Africa*. I would also like to thank my colleagues on the Project entitled *Reconciliation and Social Conflict in the Aftermath of Large-scale Violence in Southern Africa: The Cases of Angola and Namibia*, for the support and helpful comments on some of the draft chapters of this thesis. I specifically thank the Project's Country Coordinator, Prof Andre du Pisani and the colleagues in Germany, particularly, Reinhart Kossler and Heribert Weiland for their generous understanding and patience. My heartfelt gratitude goes to my supervisor, Prof. Patricia Hayes, for the endless insights and knowledge she shared with me in formulating my research questions and writing this thesis. She has been my greatest mentor with her patient, encouraging, enthusiastic, valuable and sensitive criticisms. I would not have done this without her support, suggestions and encouragement.

I would like to thank the staff at the National Archives of Namibia as they have always treated me with kindness and they have always availed me access to the collections. Werner Hillebrecht particularly assisted me in many cases. Martha Nakanyala and the rest of the staff happily assisted with making copies and scans of documents, many of which I incorporated in my thesis. I thank Regula Iselin and Dag Henrichsen at the Basler Afrika Bibliographien in Basel, Switzerland for their help with the C.H.L. Hahn photo collection. Robert Hart of the McGregor Museum in Kimberley gave me access to the Duggan-Cronin Collection and helped with information about the photographer Alfred Duggan-Cronin. Antjie Otto of the National Museum of Namibia also assisted with

valuable information on the Duggan-Cronin photographs. Staff and students of the Department of History at the University of the Western Cape offered useful guidance and suggestions at seminars on some chapters of this dissertation.

I hope I have not offended the Shoovaleka family with any misinterpretations they may find in my assumptions about their father, grandfather and great grandfather. I acknowledge here my gratitude to Lydia Hamutumwa for introducing me to Foibe Shoovaleka who gave me insights into her father's life. I would like to thank my friends and family members for providing a support system, whether emotional or monetary. I particularly have to thank my mom, Rauna Shiweda for her generosity and enthusiasm in undertaking many research trips with me in northern Namibia. I dearly thank Meameno, Beata and Aksel Nangolo, Ndahafa, Helena and my brothers Ananias and Warotwa as well as my dear aunt Peneyambeko for their unending support that they have been giving me during this entire process. Support and encouragement also came from my cherished friends, Elton Afrikaner, Martha Nakawa, Immanuel Mushaandja, Selma Nasheya, Josaphat Kashindy, Memory Biwa, Ndalyatelao Kayofa-Uusiku, and Anna Kashinyenga among others. It is thanks to Nancy Robson that I have been able to formulate and express certain ideas of this dissertation as she gave me access to her home and archives at Odibo. Her archives provided contextual information about the public floggings in the 1970s in Oukwanyama and assisted in my attempts to make sense of certain Kwanyama headmen's lives. I thank her for taking the time to help me. I also thank Hangula Vatilifa, George Nelulu and Erasmus Stephanus for assisting me during my research trips in Oukwanyama and introducing me to prospective interviewees.

Last but not least, I convey my gratitude to all my informants who made time for interviews; His Excellency, President Hifikepunye Pohamba, Ohamba Meekulu Martha Mwadinomho Kristian Nelumbu, Hinananye and Ndaiponhofi Nehova, Kaupa ka Mwatotele, Sipora Weyulu Dan, Vilho Tshilongo, Foibe Shoovaleka, Ndahafa Kakonda, Elia la Haikali, Julia Mbida, Lucas Shinedima, Lucia Kamonde ka Nangolo, Foibe Haitembu, Ndawapeka Victoria Mungonena and all those who have supplied me the necessary and required information. I would also like to warmly acknowledge my mentor

and colleague Jeremy Silvester for his professional assistance in all stages of the development of this thesis. Lastly, I would like to thank my colleague and friend Naitikile Izyenda for assisting with the map. Those whose names do not appear here, I am deeply grateful for your gracious generosity.



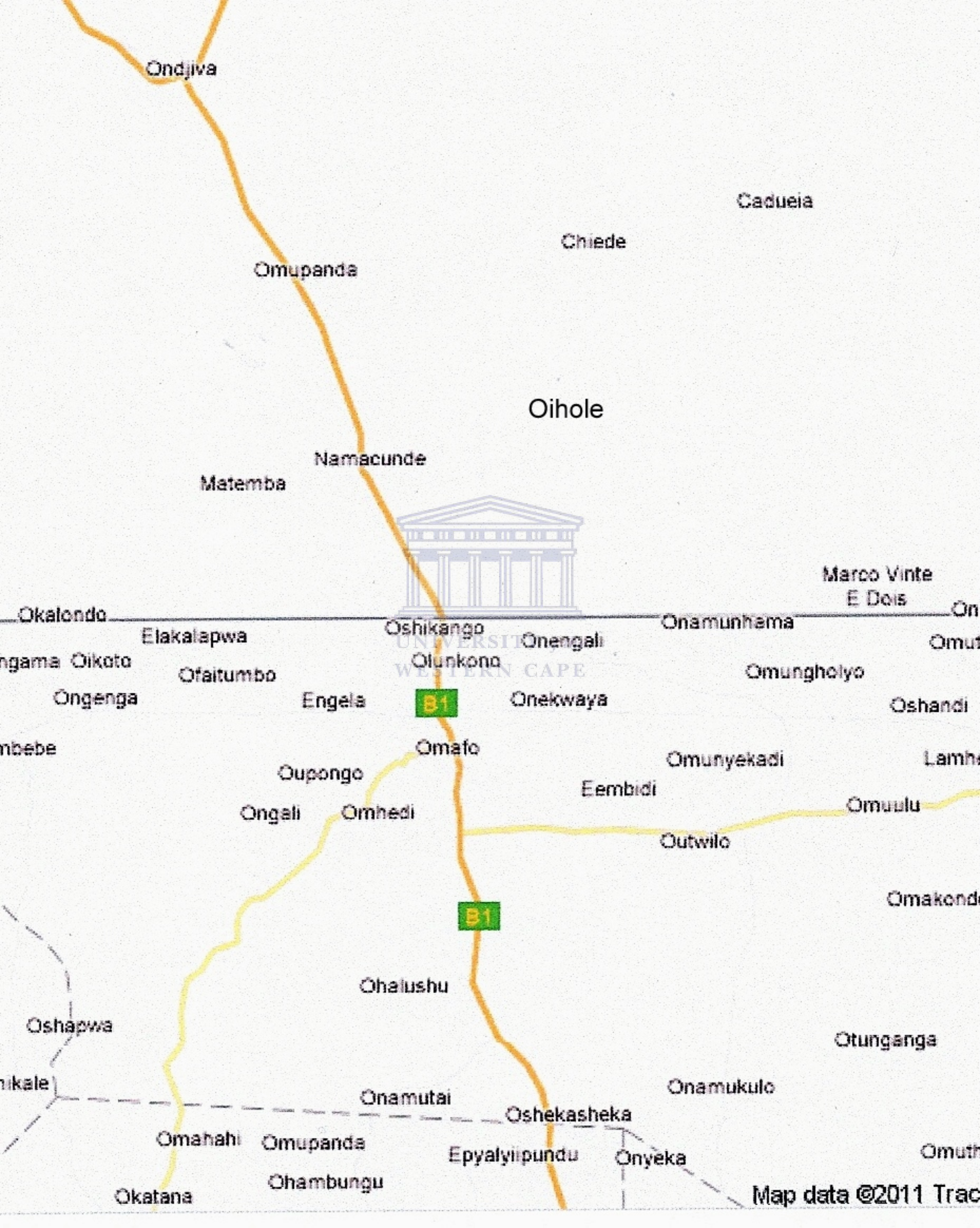
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Ondjiva

Cadueia

Chiede

Omupanda

Oihole

Namacunde

Matemba

Marco Vinte
E Dois

Okalondo

Oshikango

Onamunhema

Elakalapwa

Onengali

ngama Oikoto

Olunkona

Omungholyo

Ongenga

Engela

B1

Onekwaya

Oshandi

nbebe

Omafo

Omunyekadi

Oupongo

Eembidi

Ongali

Omhedi

Outwilo

Omuulu

Omakond

B1

Ohalushu

Otunganga

Oshapwa

Onamukulo

nikale

Onamutai

Oshekasheka

Omahahi

Omupanda

Epyalyipundu

Onyeka

Omuth

Okatana

Ohambungu

Map data ©2011 Trac

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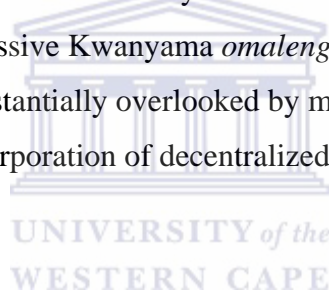
ABSTRACT

This is a study of the contest over political and social legitimacy in a former precolonial kingdom, Oukwanyama, in northern Namibia, from 1915 to the present. It tracks the historical shifts in this long time frame through the history of one place, a site of important local power, Omhedi. The research begins with the colonial occupation of the kingdom by Portugal and South Africa during World War 1, which resulted in the displacement of the kingship to the southern half of the territory which was now bifurcated by an international boundary between Angola and South West Africa. Following resistance by the last king Mandume, the institution of kingship was abolished and a Council of Headmen installed in its place. Omhedi emerged as a site of important opposition to Mandume by a leading headman, Ndjukuma, and he became one of the senior headman elevated to new levels of authority by colonial rule. The thesis tracks the establishment and consolidation of the policy of Indirect Rule under South Africa, whose aim was the efficient supply of migrant labour to the south, and the selective preservation of traditional customs in Oukwanyama in order to maintain stability in a time of rapid change. The main contribution of the research however is to follow this story into the second half of the 20th century, when Ndjukuma was succeeded by Nehemia Shoovaleka and then Gabriel Kautwima, at a time when nationalist opposition to South African rule was growing and old political legitimacies were tested. Omhedi became a site of the enforcement of headmen's authority over both striking workers and the educated elite in the early 1970s when Ovamboland became a Bantustan homeland under apartheid. After Independence in 1990 and the demise of Kautwima, Omhedi remained empty until the restoration of the Kwanyama kingship occurred under postcolonial legislation on Traditional Authorities. The question becomes one of how political legitimacy can be reactivated at such a contradictory site of 'traditional' power like Omhedi, now the seat of the new Kwanyama Queen. The thesis engages with notions of gender, history, landscape and memory, as well as theories of space developed by Lefebvre and de Certeau, in order to understand the local reconceptualisation of Omhedi as different things over different times. It also analyses the textual, visual and cultural representations of the place, most notably under colonial rule, and the impact of this archive (or its limits) on postcolonial political developments.

Chapter 1

Introduction

This is a study of the pivotal role played by collaborating African headmen from the former precolonial Oukwanyama kingdom in northern Namibia in the construction of indirect rule, who mediated between colonial officials and ordinary subjects. Their role is analyzed through the history of one place, a site of important local power, Omhedi. This thesis tracks the historical shifts in a long time frame from the beginning of colonial rule in 1915 to the present. Previous studies on ‘Ovamboland’,¹ particularly Kwanyama history, have only looked at the system or concept of indirect rule exercised by the colonial administration and its co-option of local intermediaries in a very preliminary way. Indeed, the comparable background of indirect rule with other types of rule in South Africa and even other African colonial experiences, make it imperative to analyze it in detail.² Therefore, this is a narrative of history, focussed around successive Kwanyama *omalenga* or headmen, who represented a layer of power that has been substantially overlooked by many scholars as they have explored indirect rule and its incorporation of decentralized and centralized Ovambo powers into the colonial state.



Most studies focus on the conflict between local power structures and colonial rule, or between lineages and central royal power (indicative of a crack in the power structure) and almost uniformly overlook the stratum of men who played a significant role in shaping colonial rule.³ This does not mean that the question of colonial intermediaries is one of silence. But at the same time, the significance of local intermediaries in a case such as the Kwanyama Council of Headmen in the years of colonial elaboration and later political repression has been given little specialized attention. Thus, the originality of this analysis is that it permits these important Kwanyama intermediary men to become more salient in the

¹ The term Ovamboland was used by colonial officials to designate the northern border area populated by groups speaking related languages, including the Kwanyama. In this thesis I shall use the term ‘Ovambo’ to signify both people and area.

² See Lawrence, B. N, Osborn, E. L, Roberts, R. L. (eds) *Intermediaries, interpreters and clerks: African employees on the making of colonial Africa* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2006).

³ Hayes, P, ‘A History of the Ovambo of Namibia, 1880-1930’ (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 1992), McKittrick, M. *To dwell secure: generation, Christianity, and colonialism in Ovamboland* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, c2002). Hartmann, W, Hayes, P, Silvester, J. (eds), *The Colonising Camera: Photographs in the making of Namibian history* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 1998).

history of Ovamboland more broadly, but puts the spotlight on one space over the period of a century, in order to get a sense of the genesis of this intermediate stratum.

The research begins with the colonial occupation of the Kwanyama kingdom by Portugal and South Africa during World War 1, which resulted in the displacement of the kingship to the southern half of the territory which was now bifurcated by an international boundary between Angola and South West Africa/Namibia. On September 3, 1915, King Mandume acknowledged that the intensive battle with the Portuguese at Omongwa was lost, abandoned his palace at Ondjiva and retreated south. Consequently, the Portuguese forces occupied the Kwanyama heartland, including King Mandume's palace near Ondjiva on September 4, 1915.⁴ Mandume placed himself reluctantly under the protection of the British South African forces that had entered Ovamboland and subsequently effected a takeover of the territory after conquering German South-West Africa during the early stages of World War I (see fig. 1).⁵

The northern Namibian border region with Angola had never been subjugated by the Germans, and it was only under South African rule that an effective occupation and administration began in this region. Martial law during the war was succeeded by South African mandatory rule under the supervision of the League of Nations. Following resistance by the last Kwanyama king Mandume ya Ndemufayo, the institution of kingship in this area was abolished and a Council of Headmen installed in its place. The thesis therefore tracks the establishment and consolidation of the policy of indirect rule under South Africa, whose aim was the efficient supply of migrant labour to the south, and the selective preservation of traditional customs in Oukwanyama in order to maintain stability in a time of rapid change.

The main contribution of the research, however, is to follow this history into the second half of the 20th century, when the first headman of Omhedi Ndjukuma ya Shilengifa was succeeded by Nehemia Shoovaleka and then Gabriel Kautwima, at a time when nationalist opposition to South African rule was growing and old political legitimacies were tested. Omhedi became a site of the enforcement of headmen's authority over both striking workers and the educated elite in the early 1970s when Ovamboland became a Bantustan homeland under apartheid. Apart from reconstructing the tribulations associated with the role played by

⁴ Kreike, E, *Recreating Eden: Agro-ecological change, food security and environment diversity in southern Angola and northern Namibia, 1890-1960* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2004), p 53.

⁵ Hayes, P, 'A History of the Owambo of Namibia, 1880-1930', pp 196 -199 and Kreike, E, *Recreating Eden*, pp 52-53.

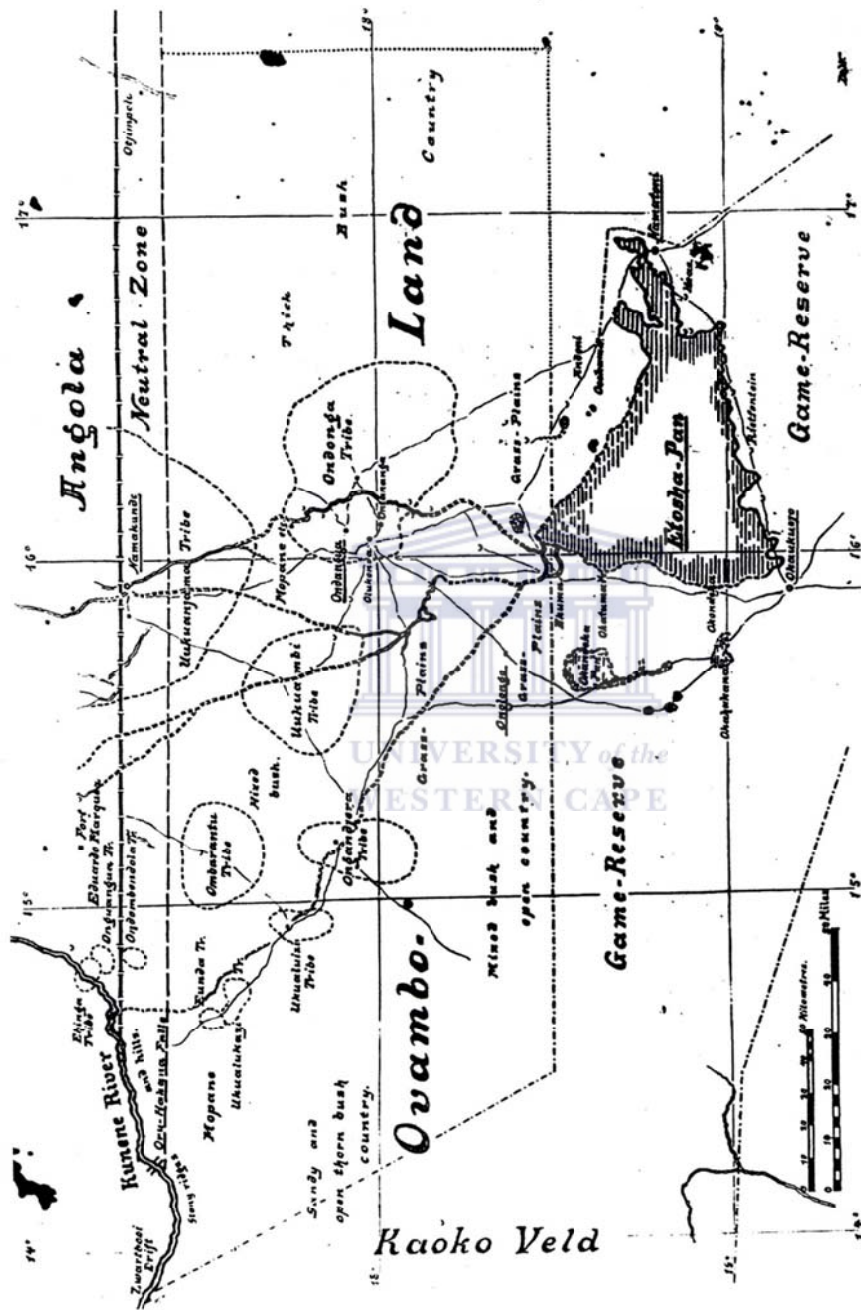


Fig: 1. Map of Ovamboland, 1915, showing Neutral Zone between South West Africa and Angola, sketched during early South African occupation. Source: National Archives of Namibia, A450, C.H.L. Hahn Collection.

the colonial-created 'Council of Headmen' and the restoration of past kingdoms in an independent Namibia, this research also aims to contribute to the questions associated with the rise of re-enactments of traditional communities. Therefore, a key question of this research is to look at the changes in what is now called traditional authority, from kingship prior to colonial occupation, to the headmen's council under South African administration, to current attempts to legitimize the current restored Kingship in postcolonial Namibia. This latter set of issues emerges because after independence in 1990 and the demise of the headman Kautwima, Omhedi remained empty until the restoration of the Kwanyama kingship occurred under postcolonial legislation on Traditional Authorities. Thus, there was a reconfiguration of Omhedi as a place since the palace of the restored Kwanyama kingship became located there. The question becomes one of how political legitimacy can be reactivated at such a contradictory site of 'traditional' power like Omhedi, now the seat of the new Kwanyama queen Martha Mwadinomho ya Christian ya Nelumbu.

This study illuminates issues of gender in politics and society, as the analysis of women's roles and status in the colonial and postcolonial period are discussed throughout the thesis. It explores major aspects of men's and women's lives, specifically illustrating the ways in which Ovambo women were positioned as bearers of culture in staged ethnographic activities at Omhedi. It also examines the conflicts concerning women's perceptions of modernity and mobility under the dominance of colonial officials and traditional headmen in Ovamboland. This study also contributes to locating Namibia in Africa's historiography within the discussion of indirect rule. The establishment of colonial rule in British colonies under the principle of indirect rule form the basis of many classical works in countries such as Uganda, Kenya and Nigeria where the construction and implementation of indirect rule have been studied more substantially.⁶ Thus, my research ought to be located not only within the Namibian framework, but also within a comparative history of other African countries who also underwent indirect rule.

⁶ See Pratt, C, "The Politics of Indirect Rule: Uganda 1900-1955." in Low, D.A. and Pratt, R.C (eds.), *Buganda and British Overrule, 1900-1955* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1960); Mamdani, M, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the legacy of late colonialism*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996); and Afeadie, P, *Brokering Colonial Rule: Political Agents in Northern Nigeria, 1886-1914* (VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, 2008).

This study also contributes to the question of colonial borders, as communities that feel connected by kinship, culture, history, and geography were divided by these borders. An example of this is the Namibia/Angola border which divides Oukwanyama in half. The current Ovakwanyama Queen was born in Angola, but grew up and now lives in Namibia. This shows how fluid the border is, with an ethnic group such as the Kwanyama residing across national and regional boundaries, and Kwanyama people on both sides sharing similar cultural features, languages, that allow them to think of themselves as one. There is however deep concern in Namibia as well as Angola, because after both nations became independent, some people called for the re-unification of the whole of Oukwanyama. This increased the paranoia of the national leaders as unification of ethnic groups that reside in states firmly located in the principle of nation-building is likely to set them against each other. Thus, national borders are treated as sacrosanct and this is a very sensitive issue.

Omheddi is an important place to study as it highlights how meanings are projected on to landscapes. Despite this, its meaning is paradoxical because it had already emerged as a site of important opposition to the anti-colonial figure of Mandume by a leading headman, Ndjukuma ya Shilengifa, and he became one of the senior headman elevated to new levels of authority by colonial rule. But again, Omheddi is considered important today because it belonged to Ndjukuma who made space for King Mandume when he was forced to leave Angola. Oral testimonies maintain that there are a number of features at Omheddi that people identify with Mandume's memory and the Kwanyama precolonial kingship. One of these items is *omwoongo wa Mandume* (Mandume's marula tree) at Omheddi, named after the king because he used to saddle his horse to this tree when he visited Omheddi. Central to this thesis is the unusual feature that Omheddi can be described ultimately as the site where people tried to stop change from taking place – not only the colonial officials and their local intermediaries, but also the current Oukwanyama Traditional Authority and the new government that has allowed the restoration of the kingship to be situated at this site.

State of the debate: Ovambo and African history

The aim here is not to attempt a detailed discussion of relevant literature to this study, the intention is to give a highly selective overview of the main conceptual themes that are most pertinent. I subdivide the literature concerned into different categories. Firstly, there is the historiography of northern Namibia, especially during Mandume's reign and years after his

rule. Patricia Hayes in a number of works⁷ has dealt with the pre-colonial history of the Kwanyama specifically and the Ovambo more generally and their transition as they finally came under colonial rule. Hayes' work gives the history of the origin of the Ovambo people as a cluster of kingdoms and polities on the Cuvelai floodplain, and covers the Kwanyama kingdom with particular emphasis on Mandume's rule, colonization and the struggle against it.

Of most interest here is Hayes's PhD thesis as it also covers developments under South African rule. She states that the sharpest political change brought by colonialism was the 'levelling' process of eliminating kings who were too independent and backed by armed supporters and the up-grading of headmen as substitutes where kings were removed. Cooperative kings and senior headmen then held authority in a system of indirect control by a few colonial officials that was later held up as a model of indirect rule.⁸ In this work, Hayes explores ways in which South African administrators with the help of headmen sought to enhance their authority towards the people they governed. She foregrounds the value of analyzing oral data as well as textual evidence as sources of historical knowledge as she has used oral testimonies and archival sources in her study. This work serves as starting point for this research which looks at how traditional authority was adapted starting from 1915. Hayes' account ends in 1930, but Allan Cooper's work on the change in traditional authority after 1930 then takes a number of these issues into a later period.⁹

Other scholars such as Kreike,¹⁰ McKittrick,¹¹ and Salokoski¹² also deal with the environment, Christianity and rituals respectively in relation to Ovambo history. Kreike analyzes the interconnections between society and the environment in the pre-colonial and colonial periods of the Ovambo floodplain in southern Angola and northern Namibia. In

⁷ Hayes, P, 'Order out of chaos', p 91; idem, *Healing of the land, Kaulinge's history of Kwanyama* (Duisburg: Rudige Koppe Verlag, 1997), pp 8-9; idem, *The Colonizing Camera, Photographs in making of Namibian history* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 1998); Hartmann, W, Hayes, P, Silvester, J, Wallace, M, *Namibia under South African Rule, Mobility and containment* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1998).

⁸ Hayes, P. 'A History of the Owambo of Namibia', pp 240-41.

⁹ See Cooper, D. A. *Ovambo Politics in the Twentieth Century* (University Press of America Inc. Lanham, New York, 2001).

¹⁰ Kreike, E. *Recreating Eden*.

¹¹ McKittrick, M, *To dwell secure: generation, Christianity, and colonialism in Ovamboland* (Portsworth, NH: Heinemann, c2002).

¹² Salokoski, M, *How Kings Are Made - How Kingship Changes : A Study of Rituals and Ritual Change in Pre-Colonial and Colonial Owamboland, Namibia* (Helsinki: Helsingin yliopisto, 2006).

contrast to many environmental histories that focus on the destruction or conservation of supposedly pristine environments, Kreike establishes *oshilongo*, environments created for humans, as the standard baseline for his work and stresses the role of human agency in the destruction and creation of *oshilongo* and *ofuka* (wilderness). The central events in the narrative are the colonial violence and massive refugee crisis of the conquest period around 1915 and the consequent breakdown of environmentally-managed systems; and the refugees' subsequent re-creation of the *oshilongo* in their new middle floodplain environments. His work is helpful to this research because he elaborates on the issue of the displacement of King Mandume from Ondjiva to Oihole which is part of the bigger movement of the displaced Kwanyama people and their cattle and also the environmental impact on the Oukwanyama part on the Namibian side. McKittrick's work is useful to this study because it analyzes the spread of Christianity in Ovambo and shows emerging tensions between headmen, migrant workers and local converts. The church represented a rival base of authority to traditional leaders. Salokoski's work is relevant for its anthropological analysis of changes in the institution of kingship and might have suggestive points for the issues of headmen's legitimacy. Her research is focused on Ondonga, the kingdom neighbouring Oukwanyama.

The second category of literature addresses colonial rule, customary law and traditional authority more generally. Mahmood Mamdani's *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the legacy of late colonialism*¹³ is considered when looking at the postcolonial issues and those of colonial state and the involvement of chiefs in colonial supremacy through indirect rule. This book is a qualitative study of the past and present of African nation-states as well as a reflective projection into what the future holds. According to Mamdani, the colonial governments in Africa actively promoted ethnic allegiances in subject peoples in order to reinforce putatively 'primordial' identifications tied to tribe and clan. He further claims that to do this, these governments supported the native authorities they found in the different communities, and sometimes gave them more powers than those native institutions had within the prior traditional social order. In doing this, the claim was that the colonial administrators were 'respecting' native institutions, but the motive was to rule from a distance and with the complicity of local chiefs. He further draws the obvious resemblances between the 'Bantustan' policies of South Africa (and to an extent Namibia) and indirect rule.

¹³ Mamdani, M, *Citizen and Subject*.

Additionally, of great interest to this study is Mamdani's discussion of codified 'customary law' as an instrument of colonial rule and he also stresses the colonial nature of such an 'invention of tradition'. Mamdani here looks at the form of rule that colonialism introduced in Africa, also in view of the South Africa situation which was in many ways similar to Namibia – where tribal-based homeland policies were also implemented from 1971. He also suggests that South Africa's apartheid system is not a unique case. Thus, apartheid far from being unique was actually the generic form of the colonial state in Africa, tying it to the history of indirect rule.¹⁴ Since this study focuses on the very basis of colonial chiefship – the 'Council of Headmen' in the Oukwanyama case - Mamdani's work is helpful in understanding the whole 'native' question and how the colonial government used direct/indirect rule to control the people under their governance.

Martin Chanock also treats the emergence of customary law as an aspect of the social and economic transformation of African societies under colonial rule.¹⁵ He argues that African presentations of 'customary' law were one of the ways Africans tried to control the disrupting effects of the changes they experienced as a consequence of colonial impositions. He further indicates how African ideas, aspirations, and activities regarding law, and the rudiments of customary law, were shaped by interaction with the legal ideas of the British colonizers, their understandings of African societies, and the judicial institutions of the colonial state. Chanock also makes a place for African law in mainstream legal history, saying that Roman-Dutch law and African customary law cannot be properly understood except in relation to each other. Kreike talks of the influence based on of a mixture of Roman Dutch law and English law for example which allows for the assumption that its main features influences on Ovambo communal law. Thus, to understand the institutional, substantive, and spatial complexities of the Ovambo modern communal law, it is essential to place it in its historical context.

On Namibia itself, Reinhart Koessler reconstructs the problems associated with two groups called Gibeon and Berseba who see themselves as traditional communities and their incorporation into the national nexus of Namibia today. He also looks at the debates

¹⁴ Mamdani, M, *Citizen and Subject*, p 8.

¹⁵ See, Chanock, M, *Law, Custom and Social Order: The colonial experience in Malawi and Zambia* (Portsworth: NH Heinemann 1998).

associated with ethnicity and collective localized identities.¹⁶ He analyses concerns raised by the Traditional Authorities Act which stipulates that traditional leaders are to be loyal to the incumbent government and receive a small stipend in exchange. He argues that these provisions cast Traditional Authorities in a role very similar to the colonial dispensation.¹⁷ He further looks at the period under South African rule and role of southern Namibia (in general) in the independence struggle. Thus, this study will consider Koessler's views and arguments in the period under South African rule up to the time after independence. This will provide a relative analysis on the role of traditional authorities in the south of Namibia during the colonial rule, thus placing the debate/question of the Kwanyama Council of Headmen's role in political repression within a wider context.

Allan D. Cooper's *Ovambo Politics in the Twentieth Century* deliberates on the same issue of traditional authorities. He analyzes a century of Namibian ethno-politics focusing on the responses of different Ovambo communities to changing circumstances of influence and power. He argues that from 1850 through the 20th century, Ovambo Traditional Authorities were actively engaged in competitive politics with colonial authorities and groups inside their communities, and especially with each other.¹⁸ Cooper defines and assesses the nature and degree of collaboration between indigenous leaders and the colonial administrators. Although he does not go into much detail, this provides some compass points for my analysis of colonial intermediaries. He also looks at the enactment of the Traditional Authorities Act after independence and the conflicts that arose with that. Cooper further claims that the revival of traditional authorities was done to provide an administrative layer to the distributive network that linked the national government with the individual homestead throughout the country.¹⁹ He offers another explanation, noting that one of the consequences of utilizing traditional authorities as agents of development in Namibia is that failures of state, whether perceived or real, can more easily be blamed on traditional authorities rather than on government officials.²⁰

¹⁶Koessler, R, *In search of Survival and dignity: Two traditional communities in southern Namibia under South Africa rule* (Windhoek: Gamsberg Macmillan (Pty) Ltd, 2005), p 2.

¹⁷ Ibid, p 15.

¹⁸ Cooper, A, *Ovambo Politics in the Twentieth Century* (Lanham, New York: University Press of America Inc. , 2001), p 5.

¹⁹ Ibid, pp 313-314.

²⁰ Ibid, p 314.

This study will ask how this argument is justified now, because different political parties are contesting the increased official attention devoted to responding to demands and complaints being generated by ethnic interests throughout the country. This is pertinent to why independent Namibia advocated the revival of traditional authorities. This line of thinking also helps to interrogate the arguments that the SWAPO – led government has used or is using the traditional chiefs to build a new alliance of power. This thesis critically investigates Cooper’s claim that ethnic groups are given power to rule themselves and appoint their own leaders. The question remains, is this really the case?

Concepts of Place

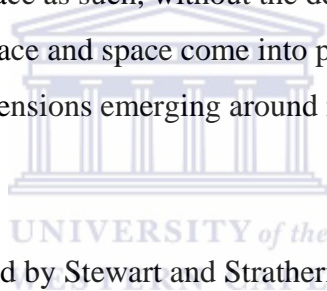
On a more conceptual level, Michel de Certeau’s work has suggestive possibilities that enormously enrich the studies of history and place. Here I choose to examine concepts of place and space by focusing specifically on the processes of producing meaning. The use of a narrative to inform the anthropological understanding of place focuses on details on how local populations construct perceptions and experience place. De Certeau claims that “place is associated with ‘stability’, ‘the law of the proper’, and the specific, definite location”. The notion of space by contrast can become a “metaphor for displacement and disorientation”.²¹ Hence, I ask here how Omhedi is perceived and experienced by the Ovakwanyama, and why is it important to them? Oral histories claim that some interrogation was carried out to see which place is best suited for the restored kingship, looking at places like Omhedi, Oihole and Ondjiva. Ondjiva and Oihole were the two places where Mandume’s palaces were situated originally.

Indeed, Mitchell quoting Henri Lefebvre on the dyadic approach to the analysis of space and place, insists on a relentlessly triadic conceptual organization, based in the differences between what he calls perceived, conceived and lived space.²² He argues according to Lefebvre, that perceived space corresponds roughly to what he calls “spatial practices”, the daily activities and performances that “secrete” a society’s space. Conceived space is the planned, administered, and consciously constructed terrain of engineers, city planners, and architects, as expressed in “numbers” and “intellectually worked out” verbal signs. Lived

²¹ De Certeau, M. cited in Mitchell, W.J.T, *Landscape and Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), p viii and p ix.

²² *Ibid*, p ix.

space is mediated through “images and symbols” addressed to the imagination.²³ Of course, as the preceding discussion suggests, Omhedi can also be looked at as a place/space/landscape that is conceived, perceived and lived as it is marked by dynamisms and is mediated through images and symbols. As indicated earlier, Omhedi gained prominence firstly because Ndjukuma was relocated there by Mandume, thus marking the displacement of the Oukwanyama kingship. Secondly, after the colonial occupation Omhedi became a space where prominent headmen lived and exercised power through the activities that took place there. Thus, meaning attached to the Omhedi landscape unfolds in images, stories, rituals and the current Oukwanyama kingship that is based there. These meanings come together in shared symbols and ultimately link people to a sense of common history and individual identity. I further examine ideas about place and space in relation to the Ovakwanyama people and Omhedi as a landscape that resounds with narratives of collective history and individual experiences. “A place, however, is basically the same thing as ‘a’ definite, bounded space, while space as such, without the definite article, becomes abstract and absolute”.²⁴ These ideas of place and space come into play when I deal with questions of restoration, and prior to that, the tensions emerging around notions of ‘modern’ as opposed to ethnographic space at Omhedi.



Similar positions have been argued by Stewart and Strathern, who deal with issues regarding landscape, memory and history which are interlinked with place and space. They analyze how perceptions of and values attached to landscape encode values and fix memories to places that become sites of historical identity.²⁵ They maintain that such perceptions shift, either gradually or dramatically, over time, so that landscape becomes a form of codification of history itself, seen from the viewpoints of personal expression and experience.²⁶ This could apply to Omhedi’s landscape as it consists of features of historical importance and people relate their personal experiences and expression from the time of residence at this place. In Stewart and Strathern’s view, landscape refers to the perceived settings that frame people’s senses of place and community. However, a place is a socially meaningful and

²³ Ibid, p ix-x.

²⁴ Mitchell, W.J.T, *Landscape and Power*, p ix.

²⁵ Stewart, P.J. & Strathern, A, *Landscape, Memory and History: Anthropological perspectives* (London: Pluto Press, 2003), p 1.

²⁶ Ibid, p 1.

identifiable space to which a historical dimension is attributed.²⁷ Also, through an employment of the tropes – landscape, memory and history – it becomes possible to examine more closely the significance and meanings attached to Omhedi. I use these ideas in my analysis of Omhedi as I believe landscape is one of the means of conceptualizing history, identity and legitimacy for the Oukwanyama kingship, which shifted its centre from Ondjiva to Oihole and then later and currently to Omhedi.

Methodology and notes on sources

I outline here the methods and processes used to collect information for this thesis by looking at the various sources employed. I am aware that memory politics play a role in oral interviews. Many critiques of oral history sensitise us to the relative positionality of oral sources, because people will have different accounts and will try to give their specific views regarding what happened in the past.²⁸ The construction of individual memories always employs different types of understanding of the past, each with different claims to the truth and authenticity. Nevertheless, this research relies on oral interviews to elicit the experiences of people on the ground. I am however aware of the fact that there are no single truths, there are probably only partial and multiple ‘truths’ and one should employ layered interpretations. Before I began with the interviews I had to make preliminary contacts with the local Oukwanyama Traditional Authority so that permission could be granted in order for me to begin with my research.²⁹ Since then, 26 people closely associated with the history of Oukwanyama and Omhedi more particularly, were interviewed between June 2008 and December 2010. This study also used existing interviews that were carried out by Patricia Hayes with the late Gabriel Kautwima, the late Victory Weyulu, Selma Tweumuna (the late Ndjukuma’s grandchild) and Leonard Nghipandulwa. Apart from the interviews, I have used information derived from personal communication and informal conversations. I conducted all 25 interviews in Oshiwambo and only one in English.³⁰

²⁷ Ibid, p 4. See also, Feld, S and Basso, K, H. (eds), *Senses of Place* (New Mexico: School of American Research Press, 1997).

²⁸ See, Thompson, P. *The Voice of The Past, Oral History, 3rd Edition* (Oxford University Press, 2000); and Portelli, A. ‘What makes Oral history different’ in Perks, R. and Thomson, A. (eds), *The Oral History Reader* (London & New York: Routledge, 1998).

²⁹ I met with the Oukwanyama Senior Headman, Mr. George Nelulu in early June 2008 who informed me that I needed a written document that could attest to my enrolment with the University of the Western Cape and verification of my studies. This was to enable me to get my informants to talk to me.

³⁰ All interviews were recorded with a digital voice recorder and ranged from 30 minutes to 2 and half hours.

Interviews were also conducted with people who remember the 1950s and the 1960s when the Kwanyama council of headmen was operating. Practices that used to happen at Omhedi or elsewhere such as cultural events formed basis for interview questions. Interviews regarding the significance of Omhedi were pointedly carried out. In addition, questions on the role played by the local intermediaries in this case the Kwanyama 'Council of Headmen' in the years of political repression were also included in the interviews. This study carried out interviews with leaders from the current Oukwanyama kingdom, several headmen, one headwoman and the Queen Martha Mwadinomho Christian Nelumbu herself. Additionally, community leaders and other people involved in organizing the current kingdom and where it is situated, especially those elders of my acquaintance who have been involved in the restoration process, were also included in the research.

I have dealt with analyses of gender dimensions and women's testimonies throughout this thesis, and have combined women studies and oral history as I confront questions of what/how/why women narrate stories they tell. Bozzoli³¹, Hofmeyr³², and especially Gluck raise questions as to: who is the appropriate interviewer for oral history projects on women – someone of the same gender? Same age? The same class? Are interviewing projects which dramatize and perhaps glorify women's domestic achievements perpetuating stereotypes of women's work? Gluck and others have synthesised feminist concerns from fields related to oral history, such as gender based styles in language, collaboration and authority.³³ I was aware that I needed to approach women in my study with sensitivity to difficult topics, because at times interviews were emotionally laden with traumatic events, for example abuse and in this case, a public humiliation of public flogging. These were maybe silenced both by others and by the self as too dangerous to even think about.

However, their reluctance to talk, or mere silence, also provides me with valuable information and it also suggests something of importance about how one should interpret what women do or do not say. Many feminists scholars argue that the reason for embracing oral history emerged from a recognition that conventional sources have often neglected the

³¹ Bozzoli, B. with the assistance of Mmantho Nkotswe, *Women of Phokeng: Consciousness, Life Strategy, and Migrancy in South Africa, 1900-1983* (Heinemann Educational Books Inc., 1991).

³² Hofmeyr, I, "*We spend Our Years as a Tales That is Told*": *Oral Historical Narrative in a South African Chieftdom* (South Africa: Witwatersrand University Press, 1993).

³³ Gluck, S. and Patai, D. (eds), *Women's Words: the Feminist Practice of Oral History* (New York & London: Routledge, 1991).

lives of women, and that oral history offered a means of integrating women into historical scholarship, even contesting the reigning definitions of social, economic and political importance that obscured women's lives.³⁴ Even though this thesis does not claim to redress the question of underrepresentation of women's narratives, by dealing with their testimonies closely, the intention of the thesis is to show the extent to which women featured at Omhedi especially when dealing with the question of *efundula* (female initiation), polygamy and colonial photography. This is because women and their role in production at Omhedi were underrepresented in the written archival documents, but they were represented as an important subject matter of the photographic activities at Omhedi. It therefore enables the silences and the relegation of women's narratives and experiences to the margins of discourses to come out in a particular way.

The main body of archival material that this research used is located at the National Archives of Namibia in Windhoek. There is a rich seam of textuality dealing with the South African transition and the build-up to military intervention, a dense archive of reports, intelligence diaries, telegrams and the crossing of much correspondence and dispatches. These are documents compiled and filed during the South African colonial period. Following Lorena Rizzo's sentiment with regards to the National Archives of Namibia, she argues that the way particular written documents have been collected, organised and filed, reflects the organisational pattern and working of the former colonial state.³⁵ I concur with her and a growing body of work by historians cautioning that one needs to think about how history is produced or created.³⁶ I am conscious that historical production is a process, as is narrative. It is constructed, so one should be aware of the complexities of our sources. It is also important to always take into consideration, the context in which our sources were written, who they were written for, why they were written, what were the meanings, how can we understand them and how one can read them now? In considering especially the press reports, which I also use for this thesis, I am aware that one needs to ask how the document came into existence in the first place, who exactly was the author, that is, apart from his/her name, what

³⁴ Sangster, J, 'Feminist Debates and the use of Oral History' in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds), *The Oral History Reader* (London & New York: Routledge, 1998).

³⁵ Rizzo, L. *Gender & Colonialism: A history of Kaoko (north-western Namibia) between the 1870s and 1950s* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Basel, 2009).

³⁶ See Hamilton, C. *Refiguring the Archive* (Springer, 2002); Stoler, A. L. *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009). See also Trouillot, M-R. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Beacon Press, 1995).

role in society did he/she play, what was his purpose in writing it? Thus I try to contextualise and problematize media reports that I use in this thesis.

The William Cullen Archives at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg offers documentation on the South African presence in northern Namibia, Ovamboland, especially the years of the liberation struggle. The University of the Western Cape, Robben Islands Museum, Mayibuye Archives also holds a mass of newspaper clippings which deals with Namibian history in the 1970s, particularly on the issue of public floggings in Ovamboland. Different newspapers in Namibia especially the *Windhoek Observer* and *The Namibian* were also explored in this regard. In addition to the institutional archives, a personal archive that belongs to Mrs. Nancy Robson at Odibo in the north was also consulted. This is important because her archive consists of mostly photographs that date from the times of headmen Nehemia and Kautwima and this complements the oral interviews. Dense documentation about Ndjukuma and Nehemia in particular were also traced to the annual reports that the Native Commissioner to Ovamboland compiled. These annual reports are found at the National Archives of Namibia in Windhoek.

Apart from oral and archival sources, this thesis also draws on photographs in investigating colonial perceptions and ideas about Omhedi and the ways that these interacted and changed in the course of colonial appropriations of the place. Thus, research was also carried out at the McGregor Museum in Kimberley as photographs taken by Alfred Martin Duggan-Cronin are housed there. Duggan-Cronin's ethnographic studies as well as Native Commissioner for Ovamboland (1920-1946) C.H.L. Hahn's photographs provide a critical inventory of the ways in which they were involved in the production of the spectacle at Omhedi. There has been an enormous expansion of visual studies and visual culture in recent decades, and for this thesis concerned with ethnographic photography at Omhedi, it is important to consider the body of work that analyses ethnographic photography in Africa as it belongs to the larger framework of a colonial discourse about the 'other'.

Special issues of the journal on photography, *African Arts*, highlighted particular historic collections. Authors such as C.M. Geary, David Prochaska, John Mack, Enid Schildkrout focus on photographers and the contexts in which they worked, the conventions and motifs

that influenced them and the forms of display adopted by Africans who were photographed.³⁷ In Namibia, a volume of fourteen essays materialised from *The Colonizing Camera* exhibition, which explores the potential of visual history in Namibia. The material discussed ranges from the photography of colonial administrators such as ‘Cocky’ Hahn and René Dickman, and advertising brochures for Denver businessmen, to the funeral of Samuel Maherero in 1923 and a contemporary community photographic project. The analysis of the photographs comes together around different spaces, ‘natural’ spaces, African spaces, colonial, urban and political spaces, and spaces of the ethnographic, the scientific and that of the hunter. The centrality of imaging in colonial discourse emerges more strongly and is relevant to this study here. This is not a homogenised colonial photography circumscribed by a desiring gaze and hegemonic inscription, but the site of multiple and contested experiences encompassing the various indigenous peoples and the complexity and instability of colonial society itself.³⁸

Likewise, Elizabeth Edwards’ essay entitled ‘Photographs, Orality and History’ argues that there is a sense in which we should consider photographs not only as visual history but a form of oral history, and, by extension, the way in which the oral constitutes an embodied vocalisation.³⁹ She further argues, “[t]he oral penetrates all levels of historical relations with photographs to the extent that spoken and seen cease to be separate modalities. Orality is not simply the verbalising of content, a playing back of the forensic reading but the processes and styles in which photographs have dynamic and shifting stories woven around and through them imprinting themselves and being played back repeatedly through different telling.”⁴⁰ Edwards’ analysis of the ways in which photographs should be seen, forms a crucial background to my own analysis of Hahn’s and Duggan-Cronin’s photographs here as when I showed these photographs to men and women in OuKwanyama, they provoked stories about them.

³⁷ *Journal of African Arts*, ‘Historical photographs of Africa’ (The James Coleman African Studies Centre, University of California Los Angeles: Oct. 1991, Vol XXIV).

³⁸ Edwards, E. (Review: Images and History *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (2000), pp. 519-520.

³⁹ Edwards, E. ‘Photographs, Orality and History’ in Elizabeth Edwards and Kaushik Bhaumik (eds), *Visual Sense: A Cultural Reader* (Oxford & New York: Berg, 2008), p 241.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p 241. On a similar discourse, see Poignant, R. with Poignant, A’s *Encounter at Nagalarramba* (Craberra: National Library of Australia, 1996).

Older people reminisced about their youth and deplored the fact that many of the old ways of dress and skills shown in the pictures had vanished. Most viewers tried their best to recognise the people in the pictures, and in many instances those depicted were indeed identified. Thus, in this sense, the argument that we should look at photographs as visual history but as a form of oral history became increasingly apparent. My thesis contributes to this very important narrative of visual history in Namibia because photographs that were produced with colonial connotations of objectification aroused different feelings from the ones they were previously meant to. These photographs were produced for a particular audience, seeing that the state had the power to control how and where such photographs were seen. Therefore taking the photographs from the archives to the field allowed them to speak back from the past in a non-objectified or non-colonial way.

Thesis Structure

The arrangement of the chapters generally follows the order of residents at Omhedi in time. Their composition and sequence reveal an unfolding process of analysis as the chapters move chronologically from precolonial, colonial, to postcolonial times. They provide points of entry into wider, deeper and more complex workings of Ovamboland's colonial occupation in 1915 and its impact thereafter, looking at issues of migrant labour and local economy and society.

Chapter 2 provides a preliminary chronological account that will help to situate different themes as they unfold in the thesis. Omhedi is bound up with particular people, who constitute important personages in its colonial history, thus an account of Omhedi necessarily weaves together certain life histories and the sequences of history through which the story of Omhedi emerges. A chronological framework is provided through an exploration of the series of important figures who occupied Omhedi. This is done through a series of short social biographies of the main headmen, and some of the colonial administrators concerned.

Chapter 3 engages with the history of visual construction in the making of Omhedi, by way of analyzing photographs taken at this place since the early 1930s and later. It contributes to issues of methodological, historiographical and theoretical possibilities of visual history, drawing from oral, archival sources and photographs. This is done by doing a comparative analysis of Native Commissioner, Major Carl Hahn Linsingen (C.H.L.) Hahn and Alfred

Duggan-Cronin's photographs of the Oukwanyama at Omhedi and elsewhere. In this way, the chapter investigates colonial perceptions and ideas about Omhedi with reference to the displays of ethnography and headmen's power at this place and the landscape promoted through it. It attempts to explain the purposes of legitimating colonial power and the establishment and strengthening of the policy of indirect rule under South Africa by selectively preserving traditional customs in Oukwanyama. Thus, this chapter highlights colonial authorities' celebration of aspects of the Kwanyama 'native' culture.

Chapter 4 continues certain themes from the previous chapter dealing with indirect rule and its purpose to legitimize existing structures through photography and exhibitions, with polygamy an important subject matter of the photographic activities at Omhedi. This chapter analyses the productive and symbolic aspects of polygamy and pastoralism in Oukwanyama and Omhedi. Pastoralism is analysed through the biography of Ndjukuma ya Shilengifa, in relation to his wealth in cattle and the *omaludi eengobe* cattle dances that he hosted at Omhedi. By contrast, aspects of polygyny and the many staged *efundula* female initiation ceremonies that were hosted at Omhedi are examined in relation to Nehemia Shoovaleka. Thus, this chapter explores the labour of women and production by looking at related colonial texts on polygamy, and by studying particular genealogies of Nehemia's many wives at Omhedi and elsewhere in Oukwanyama. This is because women's productive work and the symbolic features surrounding them were re-enacted and displayed in the photographs taken at Omhedi as Native Commissioner Carl Hugo 'Cocky' Hahn and South African colonial policy supported polygamy as a healthy 'tribal' tradition. Thus, this chapter explores the role of women in the construction of tradition at Omhedi and how they were represented by the colonial administration. This chapter offers a critique of these colonial texts on polygamy and the influence of missionaries on the Kwanyama way of life that embodies a series of assumptions about them. This chapter also looks at the analysis of social and class formations in Ovamboland, which is linked to the loss of cattle and consequently to stratification and impoverishment, to show how these relate to polygamy at Omhedi and Oukwanyama more generally. It also looks at the migrant labour analyses focusing on the complex process of impoverishment or pauperization and the response to it. This is because one of the most crucial initiatives of Indirect Rule in Ovambo was to encourage and develop the efficient supply of migrant labour to what was then referred to as the Police Zone.

Chapter 5 examines the origins and effects of a repressive contract labour system, as experienced by the Ovambo migrant workers who gradually became radicalized. This chapter frames its questions around why Ovambo migrant workers became so militant and grew to contest colonial power. It looks at the contract workers' distinct position in the political economy of colonial Namibia, under, firstly Germany and later South African rule, and at their specific economic and social conditions. This chapter also looks at the South African colonial model that provided for stricter control over the influx of black workers into urban areas. The model embodied the view that the urban areas were the white man's creation and blacks should be allowed to enter them only insofar as their labour was needed. Similarly, control over Ovambo workers entering the Police Zone (modernization) was taken over by colonial officials, while the rest of Ovamboland (which was considered 'tribalized') was left to the ruling chiefs and headmen. This chapter includes the longer history of the Ovambo's early kingdoms; the disintegration of pre-colonial political and economic structures, and the development of the labour system discussed briefly in the previous chapter. Thus, the central theme of this chapter is to examine Omhedi as a place where repressive migrant labour processes were put in place through structures of indirect rule which extensively used indigenous political institutions such as the council of headmen. This brings to mind Tony Emmett's argument that: "the Ovambo kings and other rulers were essentially perceived as 'tyrants' who ruled Ovamboland without consideration for the interests or desires of their subjects and under colonial rule this pre-conception became a reality".⁴¹ It also examines mainly the period when formation of political organizations like OPO and later SWAPO took place. In the concluding section, I recap the relevance of these analyses to the General Contract Worker's Strike of 1971-72, which became a starting point of the protests and public floggings that came in its wake.

Chapter 6 analyzes the desires and dreams of migrant labourers by focusing on how and why many Ovambo people, particularly migrant contract labourers, embraced modernity with such distinctive enthusiasm. Modernity here is referred to the desire for western commodities – that could only be obtained through waged labour and from which the enduring need for labour migration resulted – and also through Christianity and from being educated. This chapter looks at a broader cultural change - not just at political consciousness – to understand the complex disillusionment with traditional leaders. This chapter is also about commodities,

⁴¹ Emmett, T. *Popular Resistance and the Roots of Nationalism in Namibia, 1915-1966* (Switzerland: P. Schlettwein Publishing, 1999), p 210.

as the colonial process introduced the Ovambo people not merely to waged labour, but also to other features of commodity production most notably, consumer goods, clothing and money. This chapter addresses the reasons why especially Ovambo men went into contract waged labour, and the struggles that went on over the environment of that work and the different ways in which waged labour was integrated into their lives. For this, the chapter uses elements of former migrant labourer's biographies, to get an idea of why they went to the south.

This chapter also looks at the influence of long-distance traders and Christianity as their impact in Ovamboland was symbolic and material. The traders and missions nurtured a desire for 'modern' goods and thus actually prepared the Ovambo for waged labour. For they instilled in them 'wants' that could only be satisfied through entry into the colonial economy, and made them thoroughly familiar with the symbols and values of the modernity of Europeans. But most importantly, the chapter looks at the reasons why Ovambo people adopted European goods especially clothing in the face of colonialism. This is key because there was a sense of a shift in the way these young Ovambo men and women turned to the modern, owing to the forces of colonialism that influenced the social, economic and political space of Ovambo society. Ovambo men sought to use wages from migrant labour in order to build up herds or to set up a household independent of 'patriarchal' restraints. This was because the wages earned from migrant labour allowed young men to challenge the authority of their elders, by building up status and wealth on their own. And it brought the Ovambo men and women to adopt and appropriate new attitudes in their own economic, social and political consciousness. Thus, this chapter also looks at gender dynamics and aspirations for political freedom.

Chapter 7 analyzes the general contract workers strike of 1971-72, the opposition to South Africa's policy of separate development, the Ovambo 'bantu' elections of 1973 and the public floggings and court hearings that came with it. The central question for this chapter is the role of the Oukwanyama 'traditional' authorities in the public floggings. But, most importantly, this chapter looks at the condemnation of public floggings by both domestic and international audiences. The South African government claimed that the public floggings were an old 'tribal' custom while as, the 'traditional' authorities argued that the floggings were an internal concern based on traditional forms of discipline and punishment. It is in a sense a culmination of decades of tension over indirect rule. This chapter looks at the forms of punishment in pre-colonial Ovambo particularly Oukwanyama, as it focuses on questions

of the ‘spectacle’ of public torture to assert power by the Oukwanyama council of headmen. This chapter shows that colonial officials’ alliance with Kwanyama headmen in publicly flogging individuals associated with SWAPO or opposed to South African colonial rule, was linked to issues of legitimacy and the promotion of authority through claims of customary law. Ultimately, however, all these events and the significant role played by headmen proved to be the turning point in the internal politics of Oukwanyama and Ovamboland as a whole. The chapter took shape as I delved into how cattle inoculations and *mangas* were more deeply contested in areas around Omhedi and Ohangwena; into how these different patterns of resistance and different patterns of connection to the liberation movement, and the labour strike. This chapter also gives glimpses into how gender dynamics played out into contexts of struggles over modernisation and tradition.

Chapter 8 deals with an analysis of South Africa’s strategy to establish a structure of self-governing Bantustans that tried to legitimise their authority through indigenous chiefs and headmen, but failed to gain much support amongst many African people. I specifically look at the Ovambo Legislative Council, which was opened and had its first session on the 17th of October 1968, in Oshakati, when Ovamboland was officially declared a self-governing homeland. As indicated briefly in the last chapter, Ovamboland became a homeland following South Africa’s pursuance of its policy of separate development for the country’s indigenous peoples. This chapter shows how the South African regime used native control to rule the African population through their own ethnic institutions by pushing them back into the confines of traditional institutions, therefore restricting their independence. Thus, the role of Ovambo chiefs and headmen is analysed to show the sentiments towards ‘traditional’ leaders and headmen. As discussed earlier in the previous chapter, many local people displayed much disillusionment and discontent with their traditional leaders, which led to an exodus of many young people into exile to join the liberation struggle in 1974. This chapter investigates processes employed by South Africa and Ovambo Council to curtail SWAPO and other political parties from expanding their movements on a national level. This chapter also analyzes the implications of the Ovambo Council from its inception in 1968 to its demise as Namibia prepared for independence in May, 1989, given that it was based on the continuity of Indirect Rule and that its legacy continues to exist in post-independent Namibia.

Chapter 9 examines the enthusiasm towards the restoration of old kingships that were abolished upon South African colonial occupation in Ovamboland. The collapse of apartheid and the attainment of independence for the Namibian people in 1990 has triggered a seeming

resuscitation of old identities and renewed emphasis on the reinstatement of past kingships. This chapter analyses the newly reinstated Oukwanyama kingship at Omhedi highlighting the postcolonial question of how the regime of differentiation as fashioned in colonial Africa is again reformed after independence. This chapter argues that there are quite fundamental similarities between the colonial and the postcolonial states in the governing practices on which these regimes were based. The South African ethnic segregation policy in Namibia, inherently focused on dividing people along ethnic lines resulting in ethnic destabilisation which still characterizes Namibian society today. This chapter problematizes postcolonial attempts to reform the ethnic question in the context of broader politics in the face of the centralized Namibian state committed to nation-building, as the bid for ethnic recognition is simultaneously unifying and fragmenting. This chapter will analyse how the restored Kwanyama kingship has influenced political debates in contemporary Namibian politics, considering concerns towards government's recognition of the kingship. This was linked to alleged anxieties and common perceptions regarding Kwanyama's dominance over other ethnic groups in the country, in terms of political influence and populace. This chapter deals with the question of the border and the fragmentation of the Kwanyama country. It will examine the issue of Mandume's body – a particular history of the body politic – as there is a belief that his decapitated head is buried under a monument in Windhoek Namibia, while the rest of his body is buried at Oihole in southern Angola. Linked to the recent event in the ongoing retraditionalization of regional politics and power, this chapter looks at the Oukwanyama kingship restoration process inside postcolonial Namibia where Kwanyama interests were questioned, and how this influenced and still influences current political debate in Namibia. In 2005, *Ohamba* Meekulu Martha Mwadinomho ya Christian ya Nelumbu made history as she was declared *Ohamba* (Queen) of Oukwanyama after her uncle, becoming the first female ruler of Oukwanyama. This chapter links the debates about gender, authority, and social change covered in preceding chapters which are shaped into an opposition between custom and modernity.

Focusing on *Ohamba* Martha Nelumbu as a sign of Kwanyama female authority, this chapter explores her role from the perspective of the dynamics of the Kwanyama kinship system which is matrilineal. Thus, this chapter foregrounds how female power – in postcolonial Namibia - can be located in opportunistic ways, by questioning how the politics of this restored kingship are gendered. This chapter also analyses why Omhedi was chosen as a seat of the new kingship. Since Gabriel Kautwima's death in February 1995, Omhedi had not

been occupied. This chapter thus asks if this was a redefinition of Omhedi as a place in terms of it being a symbolic site for the previously displaced Kwanyama kingdom? This is because previously the royal palace was located at Ondjiva and later Oihole in southern Angola. Hence, debates associated with the re-enactment of past kingdoms and motivations will also be explored here, bringing the substance of Omhedi as a place into deeper historical context.



Chapter 2

Personages of Omhedi

Introduction

The history of Omhedi is not simply about place. A special feature of Omhedi is that it is bound up with particular people who constitute important personages in the colonial history of northern Namibia, and Omhedi in particular. Thus an account of Omhedi necessarily weaves together certain life histories and the sequences of history through which the story of Omhedi emerges. Writing a history of a place involves many themes, and this thesis moves through issues of photography, polygyny, gender, production, labour, cattle, Bantustan politics, resistance and liberation struggle and postcolonial politics of restoration of precolonial kingships. It has therefore not been possible to write the history of a place – a ‘historical portrait’ of an African village such as that produced by Landeg White nearly 25 years ago – through a straightforward narrative account.¹ Except for 1915-17, the earlier phases of Omhedi’s history in the 20th century are less important in terms of events, but raise issues that are central to the entire history of the Ovambo region. These require both theoretical and empirical exploration of diverse themes and this does not provide easy narrative formation in terms of one site. Unlike White’s portrait of Magomero, the first part of this thesis is less chronologically-driven in its approach.

Because of this, in structuring the thesis, it is in a sense necessary to provide a preliminary chronological overview for the century in question that will help to situate those themes as they unfold in the next chapters. Because the place is very bound up with intermediary figures who are crucial to indirect rule during colonialism, a chronological framework is here provided through an exploration of the series of important figures who occupied the place. I do so through a series of short social biographies of the main headmen, and some of the colonial administrators concerned. This initial focus on ‘big men’ and how they figure in the archives and oral histories necessarily produces its silences, especially on issues of gender. Chapters 3 and 4 take up these themes with an exploration of the representation of women and the glorification of gendered production under the colonial system of indirect rule. But

¹ White, L. *Magomero: Portrait of an African Village* (Cambridge University Press, 1987).

we cannot enter those themes, without being first introduced to the leading male personages of Omhedi and colonial Ovambo.

Headmen and their interactions: historical overview

Histories of a place are never just a simple accounting of the ‘facts’, nor are the life histories with which they are closely intertwined. They are always multiple, contested and deploy political discourses produced in specific contexts and made to serve the needs of the present. Thus, this research looks at an entire century of the history of Omhedi from the time when the Kwanyama kingdom was bifurcated by the Namibia-Angola border during colonial occupation. Omhedi became the seat of the recently restored Oukwanyama Royal House in 2005, after many reconstructions.

In 1915, Omhedi was occupied by Ndjukuma Shilengifa, a senior headman who normally resided at Oihole on the southern side of the border. Ndjukuma was uprooted from Oihole to make space for King Mandume. This was part of the momentous changes in the Namibia-Angola border region formerly called Ovamboland, specifically in the former kingdom of Oukwanyama which straddled the border, at the time when Portuguese forces invaded northern Kwanyama in order to occupy the border region in World War 1. With these relocations, a question arises as to Ndjukuma’s sentiments towards King Mandume due to his displacement from Oihole to Omhedi. It is widely alleged that he later collaborated with the South African troops to dispose of Mandume. However, there are conflicting accounts that state that there were much deeper dynastic politics or tensions within the kingdom that existed between Mandume and Ndjukuma before the South Africans appeared.²

According to oral sources, the headman Ndjukuma was a prominent man who came to power under King Weyulu in the late 19th century. Tensions worsened due to the fragmentation of central royal political and military control under Kings Weyulu and Nande (Mandume’s predecessors), where princes and *omalenga* headmen established themselves as local power brokers by attracting followers.³ There were serious tensions that existed between King Mandume and his headmen. King Mandume asserted his control over the clients of princes,

² Mandume came to power when the *omalenga* had accumulated too much power under the two previous kings, Weyulu and Nande Hedimbi and generational tension escalated when Mandume tried to curtail their power. See Hayes, P. “When You Shake a Tree” The Precolonial and the Postcolonial in Northern Namibia in Peterson, D. & Macola, G. (eds), *Recasting the Past* (Athens OH: Ohio University Press, 2009), pp 80-81.

³ Hayes, P. ‘A History of the Owambo of Namibia’, pp 163- 164 and Kreike, E, *Recreating Eden*, p 50.

omalenga headmen, and missions alike by effecting reforms that recentralized power in royal hands and withdrew certain privileges from big headmen. For example, control over land distribution, judicial matters, communal rites, rituals and ceremonies gave the king controlling power over his subjects. However, individuals close to Mandume's predecessors including those *omalenga* headmen who had made their careers under kings Weyulu and Nande, had built up considerable power, and so Mandume succeeded to the throne in 1911 faced with internal rivals.⁴ There were tensions between Mandume and those *omalenga* who had accumulated power for themselves, as they were now afraid of losing it.

Mandume ya Ndemufayo fought the South African forces in 1917 at his residence at Oihole, and died in battle. After his death, the Oukwanyama kingship was abolished.⁵ In reconstructing political authority in Ovamboland the South African colonial administration sought to reduce or increase power exercised by existing rulers.⁶ It thereupon set up a Council of Headmen consisting of eight senior-headmen in the Oukwanyama 'traditional authority area' in lieu of the kingship, and divided the area into eight districts, with a senior-headman in charge of each.⁷ The most prominent headmen in Oukwanyama were now Nauyoma ya Mweshipandeka, Haufiku la Kasheeta, Ndjukuma ya Shilengifa and Hamukoto wa Kaluvi.⁸ These headmen assumed jurisdictions which were smaller than Mandume's had been, but larger and more legitimized than any previous *omalenga*.⁹

In this regard, a central issue emerges as to how the replacement of kingship in Oukwanyama with the Council of Headmen changed the 'tribal' practices after 1917. This thesis will argue that overall, the stakes for colonial intermediaries (council of headmen) were higher than they had been under pre-colonial rulers. The intermediaries were supposed to exert authority over ordinary people to maintain law and order, mobilize migrant labour, collect taxes and preserve selected rituals, for instance *efundula*, the female initiation ceremony. Individual headmen such as Nehemia Shoovaleka held authority over a few villages, and were supposed to take collective decisions in councils.

⁴ Hayes, P. 'A History of the Owambo of Namibia', pp 163- 164 and Kreike, E, *Recreating Eden* p 51.

⁵ Hayes, P. "Order out of chaos: Mandume Ya Ndemufayo and Oral history" *Journal of Southern Africa Studies* (Vol.19, No.1, March 1993), p 89.

⁶ Hayes, P. 'A History of the Owambo of Namibia', p 240.

⁷ Totemeyer, G, *Namibia Old and New: Traditional and Modern leaders in Ovamboland* (London: C. Hurst, 1978), p 45.

⁸ Hayes, P. 'A History of the Owambo of Namibia', p 241.

⁹ *Ibid*, pp 240 - 241.

It is important to try and understand how colonial administration influenced the Council of Headmen and manipulated tradition to legitimize a place like Omhedi and the practices that took place there. Omhedi was chosen over other headmen's places because it served as a central point for most of the colonial administration's activities in alliance with the headmen that resided there, though it was not the only site of headmen's influence. As noted earlier, Ndjukuma resided at Omhedi from 1915 when he was relocated to make space for King Mandume at Oihole. A starting point for this research therefore is to investigate the dynamics of local power when Ndjukuma resided at Omhedi. The thesis then looks at how Omhedi was visualized by analysing two photographers' collections which are rich in documenting the 1930s in Oukwanyama (Chapter 3). This is because during Nehemia Shoovaleka's term, Omhedi stood forth as a representational space for photography, tours by South African officials, and showcasing of cultural events such as *efundula* (female initiation).

At this site, a huge mass of photographs of Ovambo customs and ethnography were produced by Native Commissioner C.H.L. 'Cocky' Hahn and Alfred Martin Duggan-Cronin¹⁰ who also photographed the Ovakwanyama at Omhedi. The former is said to have transformed local ritual practices into spectacles of culture. Under the influence of pre-colonial kings, Oukwanyama people (and the Ovambo more broadly) had placed emphasis on large public ritual before contact with Europeans. However, during the colonial era, Omhedi as a space was created rather sensationally to emphasize the power, authority and wealth of the headmen. At a time when indirect rule was being articulated as official policy, the colonial state staged itself through public spectacle such as the *omaludi eengobe* cattle festival, *efundula* female initiation, and other festivals.

Although this indicates that somehow headmen and state were linked, for the colonial government allowed local intermediaries to exercise certain functions within their communities grounded in alliances with them incorporating ethnically-defined administrative components linked to the local population, they were in fact disaggregated. Hahn's support for public gatherings such as the *efundula* arose from the wider development of arguments concerning indirect rule, where officials were instructed to support existing structures of

¹⁰ Alfred Martin Duggan-Cronin was a South African/Irish photographer (1874-1954) who is well known for his photographs that he took all over southern Africa. His work is housed in the McGregor Museum in Kimberley.

African authority through which colonial rule was administered.¹¹ Hahn frequently photographed *efundula* ceremonies with his panoramic and other cameras.

‘Cocky’ Hahn, the Native Commissioner for Ovamboland from 1920-1946, set up Omhedi as the crucial site for visitors to Ovambo to photograph ‘the native’, especially during the residence of Nehemia Shoovaleka, one of the most important headmen in Oukwanyama. *Efundula* female initiation was seen as a spectacle during visits of the Administrator of South West Africa and other officials to Oukwanyama. Here polygamy was repeatedly offered up to the camera, and photographers continued to visit this site even after Hahn’s retirement.¹² It has been argued that there was a tendency towards the spectacular that might have existed before Hahn encouraged performances in public form. This is because Kwanyama public cultural practices in pre-colonial Oukwanyama were connected to performance (spectacle) as well as royal power. Hahn appropriated these spectacular aspects that were generated under pre-colonial conditions, promoting and extending their representational dimension through solicited performances and photographs.¹³ What is more, an Ovambo homestead (a replica of Nehemia’s house at Omhedi) was constructed in Windhoek for the 1936 Trade Fair Exhibition.

Additionally, Omhedi also catered for *omaludi eengobe* festival which was an annual event when cattle were brought back from the main areas of residence after grazing at outposts through the long dry season. Here, cattle owners would show off their fattest cattle and thus take part in the spectacle of wealth and power. This was a displacement (or redirection) of the festival from its previous royal location. In this way, Omhedi was generalized as symbolizing a generic Ovambo ‘culture’ through its headmen and Hahn’s representations. This visualisation of Omhedi for the purposes of indirect rule is explored in Chapter 3, and Chapter 4 engages in a deeper exploration of women’s productive roles and the cattle economy in Ovambo, in order to deconstruct the colonial image made so powerfully by Hahn at Omhedi.

¹¹ Hartmann, W, Hayes, P, Silvester, J. “Photography history and memory” in Hartman et.al (eds), *The Colonising Camera: Photographs in the making of Namibian history* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 1998), p 3.

¹² See Hayes, P. ‘Efundula and History: Female Initiation in Pre-Colonial and Colonial Northern Namibia’, paper presented at the International Workshop in Gender & Empire, American University of Cairo, Egypt, April 2007.

¹³ See, Hayes, P. ‘Efundula and History’.

In the late 1960s and after Nehemia's death in 1966, Gabriel Kautwima took over as headman at Omhedi and his term lasted through the 1970s and 1980s. In the 1970s Kautwima used to have 'Tribal Hearings' where public floggings and other activities were carried out at his homestead at Omhedi and at the Oukwanyama offices at Ohangwena. Of particular importance here is the General Contract Workers Strike of 1971-2, and the floggings that followed it at a time of heightened political mobilisation. Here, the colonial administration together with the Council of Headmen exercised a ritualized public violence – public floggings whose primary purpose was the ostentatious display of power.

Further, Omhedi featured greatly in the 1980s when the liberation struggle waged by guerrillas of the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) intensified, because the war in the north heightened Omhedi's central importance as a location where hearings, beatings and so forth took place (Chapters 7 and 8). Since headmen especially Kautwima played a role in the political repression, a study of Omhedi necessarily reflects on certain aspects of the liberation struggle in northern Namibia, particularly in Oukwanyama. This study also looks more generally at the opposition to colonial rule before and after the launch of the armed struggle in 1966 by young Namibian men and women, most of whom were Ovambo. Thus, this research gathered life histories regarding this period and specific practices that used to happen at Omhedi when Kautwima resided there.

The aim here is to portray how the history of a place gives a specific angle to different phases of history, from pre-colonial to postcolonial. A place such as Omhedi is given certain meanings that range across the cultural, historical and social. This research analyzes how these meanings are manipulated in the socio-political production of a place, and how these are related to what happened there within a larger colonial and later nationalist frame. Furthermore, this research will ask key questions about political legitimacy at Omhedi, a site of frozen tradition but riddled with contradictions.

For example, in the late 1990s the Ovakwanyama traditional leaders made plans for the restoration of the Kwanyama kingship and installed King Cornelius Mwetupunga Shelungu. However, in 2005, after Shelungu's death, the Ovakwanyama traditional leaders installed queen Martha Mwadinomho ya Christian ya Nelumbu as the *ohamba* queen of the Oukwanyama. The queen came to reside at Omhedi where the Kwanyama palace is now situated, whereas previously the royal capital was located at Ondjiva in southern Angola. All these shifts are connected to the history of Omhedi. The restoration took place after many

years when the Kwanyama people had been without a king, approximately 79 years. An important question arises as to why the queen is placed at Omhedi and what significance does this place have in regard to the Kwanyama kingship? Since Kautwima's death in the mid-1990s, Omhedi was not occupied, and the residence was abandoned. Thus, why did people feel that the current Oukwanyama palace should be situated there? Was this a redefinition of Omhedi as a place in terms of it being a symbolic site for the previously displaced Kwanyama kingdom? I argue here that a place that was considered illegitimate is now made legitimate as the current Kwanyama Queen resides there.

The restoration of pre-existing pre-colonial kingships in Namibia is a recent event in the retraditionalization of regional politics and power and constitutes a very postcolonial question. There is a need for a deep ethnography of dynastic histories and politics in the face of the centralized Namibian state committed to nation-building. The shifts in power from king Mandume to Council of Headmen as a consequence of the levelling process by colonial South Africa and then the postcolonial transition to the current queen, forms an intriguing case of destruction and reconstruction of royal legitimacy under different conditions. The decision to study the years between 1915 and the present is because it takes us from the beginning of South African rule in Ovamboland until independence, and they have obviously been significant in forming cultural, social and political struggles that have led to the restoration of the kingship in the 1990s. Relatively inadequate attention has been paid to the specific nature of the cultural policy set up between the 1960s and the 1980s in Ovamboland, particularly Oukwanyama under South African rule (see Chapter 5). The collapse of apartheid and the attainment of independence for the Namibian people in 1990 has triggered a seeming resuscitation of old identities and renewed emphasis on the reinstatement of past kingships. But this merits deeper scrutiny.

Important figures at Omhedi: a biographical approach (from 1915 - to the present)

On one level, the history of Omhedi could be introduced and analysed through the lives of three Kwanyama senior headmen and one woman, the current *Ohamba*. In resurrecting such lives, the thesis strives to capture something of the tone and tenor of the life at Omhedi since 1915 to the present. It records the changes that have taken place in the economy, in custom, in relationships both social and political, and in Omhedi's changing relationship with the broader Ovamboland. The lives of four principal characters encountered in this study are

introduced here in the form of short biographies, as they provide a basis for approaching these questions. These biographies are framed here in the order of each person's residence at Omhedi, firstly Ndjukuma ya Shilengifa, then Nehemia ya Shoovaleka, Gabriel Kautwima and finally Martha Mwadinomho ya Christian ya Nelumbu.

a) Ndjukuma ya Shilengifa

For our purposes, the story of Omhedi starts after king Mandume's defeat by the Portuguese at Omongwa in 1915. The king burnt down his palace at Ondjiva and went to Namakunde at Hamunyela wa Kamati's homestead while he decided where he was going to live. After much deliberation, the decision came that the king would take Ndjukuma's homestead at Oihole and Ndjukuma was asked to make space for the king and move to Omhedi. Ndjukuma then moved to Omhedi where Hamunyela (gona) wa Ngula lived.

According to oral testimonies,¹⁴ Ndjukuma ya Shilengifa was born in 1844 in Okashashi in Oukwanyama, during king Weyulu ya Hedimbi's reign. He came to prominence during Weyulu's reign. Ndjukuma was a wealthy man, he had many cattle and horses, a lot of *mahangu* and *omamanya omaKwanyama* glass and *ouputu* iron beads. He inherited some of his wealth from his uncle Musheko wa Kapa, but he also accumulated it through hard work as he is described as having been a highly talented and skilled man, especially with making leatherwear, such as *eenguwo* long skirts for women, *eemwiya* belts (where he hooked bones and beads), good leather shoes and also glass bead necklaces. The tanned hides of cattle provided articles of clothing which formed an important component that defined the social background of the Kwanyama. King Weyulu and King Nande rewarded him with cattle and other goods such as beads because of his expertise, thus he became very rich. Following the war and relocation, Ndjukuma managed to reconstruct some of his wealth after some years at Omhedi. His homestead became the 'show' of the Oukwanyama area, and by the 1930s he delighted in personally conducting tours of his house through the intricate pallsided maze and other interesting parts of his homestead.¹⁵

Ndjukuma's prominent biography is important to this study because his arrival at Omhedi produced a space of tension with the kingship at the onset of colonial rule. Later it became a focus of the transition to a local politics of 'tradition'. He had more legitimacy than the later

¹⁴ Vilho Tshilongo, Ongwediva, 18.06.2010, Hinananye Nehova, Windhoek, 30.01.2009, Lucas Shinedima, Onuno, 23.06.2009.

¹⁵ NAN, NAO 19, Native Affairs – Monthly and Annual Reports, file no 11/1, 1934.

headmen Nehemia Shoovaleka and Gabriel Kautwima as he had gained his social importance and power from older precolonial kings, Weyulu, Nande and Mandume.

b) Nehemia Shoovaleka

The second big headman at Omhedi was Nehemia Heelu la Shoovaleka who was born to Shoovaleka ya Shaetonhodi and Ndawapeka ya Kaulinge ka Hakwena in 1896 at *Oluxwa laKalunga* near Ohameke. He went to school at Namakunde, where he met his teacher (Wilfred) Mushimba Mbwiti-Kamatoto. He learnt to speak English very well, better than most younger men his age. Nehemia's ability to write and communicate in English made him a prominent intermediary figure as he worked on the railway in Walvis Bay where he was an interpreter for his fellow workers. It was in Walvis Bay where he met Harold Eedes who became one of the Ovamboland Native Affairs' Officers after Mandume's death, initially based at Namakunde in 1924 and later at Oshikango.¹⁶ Eedes then convinced Nehemia to leave Walvis Bay and work as an interpreter for him and the Kwanyama council of headmen at Oshikango. He joined other Africans employed by the South African government and who were already working at Oshikango such as Lukas Shileya, Salomo Homateni, Jonas-Kamanya Kahenge and others.¹⁷

Nehemia was not of 'royal' descent, nor a creation of royal patronage. He acquired influence only after exposure to European education and then became a colonial appointee and headman. As headman, he was awarded a village called Omundudu, which he owned before he moved to Omhedi. After Ndjukuma's death in 1934, he took over the homestead at

¹⁶ Harold Lionel Pritchard Eedes was born on the 26th June 1899 in Cape Town. Eedes was initially sent up to Ovamboland as Assistant Commissioner to C.H.L. Hahn who was Native Commissioner of Ovamboland from 1920-1946 and was stationed at Namakunde near the Angolan border. Later he was transferred to Nkurenkuru, as Officer-in-Charge of the Okavango. After Hahn's retirement in 1946, Eedes was promoted and transferred to Ondangwa as Native Commissioner of Ovamboland and Kaoko until 1954 when he retired. He was known throughout northern Namibia as "Nakale" (the tall man) which denoted his stature. For a detailed account see NAN, SWA Annual 1977, "Nakale" – Harold Eedes: A Legend in His Time – The last of the Lords of the Frontier, pp 38-41.

¹⁷ These men formed a number of Ovambo colonial employees whose role in mediating between colonial officials and fellow Africans shaped relations between the colonizer and the colonized. For a full discussion on colonial intermediaries in Africa, see the edited volume entitled: *Intermediaries, interpreters and clerks: African employees on the making of colonial Africa* Lawrence, B. N., Osborn, E. L., Roberts, R. L. (eds) (The University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), which focuses entirely on African colonial intermediaries such as interpreters, translators, clerks and secretaries. The volume contributes to the social history of ordinary African employees of the colonial state, and provide insights on the fact that the intermediaries were active participants in their own right rather than helpless colonized subjects who were at the mercy of colonial officials. These African interpreters, translators, and clerks straddled the colonial divide in mediating between Europeans and Africans. See also Osborn, E. L. "'Circle of Iron': African Colonial Employees and the Interpretation of Colonial Rule in French West Africa", in the *Journal of African History*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (2003), pp 29-50.

Omhedhi and became Senior Headman of the whole Omhedhi district and Oukwanyama more broadly. He succeeded Andreas Kashala ka Shindjoba as interpreter for the council who was initially king Mandume ya Ndemufayo's interpreter. Nehemia later became the secretary for the Kwanyama council of headmen and was responsible for giving potential Kwanyama contract workers passes to go for waged work in the south, which was obviously considered a very powerful position.

Nehemia's biography is central because he was the most flamboyant of all the headmen at Omhedhi and he revelled in pretending to be an illiterate traditionalist. He was educated, he had been baptised and confirmed, and had become a dedicated Christian.¹⁸ Thereafter he married his bride Hilma ya Aron ya Kayapa in a Christian ceremony and they had their first son Gottlieb ya Nehemia. However, after some years, he left the church and became polygamous through marrying many wives after choosing initiates at the *efundula* female initiation ceremonies, which he hosted at Omhedhi where many people attended.

c) Gabriel Kautwima

His successor Gabriel Kautwima was known as Haikoti ya Kautwima ka Kandjabanga ka Hiililewanga. Gabriel Kautwima is described as a descendant of the Kwanyama royal family although he was not appointed as headman because of his elevated birth. He was a teacher by profession. He taught school at Onamutayi but was later appointed as secretary for the traditional authority in Oukwanyama east in the early 1940s. He held this position for a long time. After Nehemia Shoovaleka's death in 1966, he became Senior Headman and took over Omhedhi homestead as well as the village. He was married to Netumbo la Kanime, who passed away in 1973(4).

Because of his ability to write and speak good English and also because of his social standing, Kautwima became the first Chairman of the Ovambo Legislative Assembly after the implementation of the Odendaal Plan which allowed for a concurrent and continuous preservation of tradition subsequent to indirect rule, a post he held until he resigned in 1985 for political reasons. Kautwima is important to this study because he represents the hardening attitude of all the collaborating headmen at Omhedhi. He was involved in repressing the

¹⁸ Here I refer to a simple version of modernisation theory, with its arrangement of stages, in which life as a Christian was to be seen as in transition from the 'heathen' or 'pagan' life to the western Christian life. A number of features marked this transition, of which monogamy was particularly crucial, and the adoption of western cultural styles of living, dress, and manner in which one behaves.

nationalist opposition to South African colonial rule that transcended early ‘peasant’ unrests, and resulted in public floggings in 1973. Kautwima later felt the full brunt of the war of liberation in Ovamboland. He became a target of South West Africa People’s Organisation (SWAPO) guerrillas, which resulted in his homestead at Omhedi being surrounded by bunkers of sand to protect him from live bullets.

When Namibia became independent in 1990, he asked for redemption and gave himself up to the new ruling government. Kautwima remained Chairman of the Council of Traditional Authorities in Ovamboland and thus gave his attention to the development of the restoration of traditional political structures inside Oukwanyama. Before his death in 1995, he gave up his homestead at Omhedi to the committee that was working with the idea of restoring the Oukwanyama kingdom so that the new king or queen could reside at this site.

d) Martha Mwadinomho Christian ya Nelumbu

The final resident of Omhedi that we consider here is Martha Mwadinomho who was born at Oifidi, in Angola, in August 1931. Her mother is Nahango ya Mboliooli, a close relative of *Ohamba* Nekoto.¹⁹ She grew up in Oongo for only a short time, and then her aunt Kaleinasho ka Ndaiweda the *Ohamba yo Koshihambo* took her to live with her when she was just a toddler. She did not stay there for long, probably ten years, and then her aunt passed away. After Kaleinasho’s death, she was then ‘inherited’ by Vilho ya Weyulu who brought her to the Namibian side of the border, at Ohaingu where she grew up. She claims that she came to Ohaingu during the year when people were going off to fight in Hitler’s war (probably in the early 1940s). She grew up and started school at Ohaingu where she attended Standard 1 and Standard 2. *Ohamba* Mwadinomho also joined classes for baptism and after that attended classes for confirmation at Engela. When she was older, she got engaged and married her husband Sheehama and moved to Okambebe.

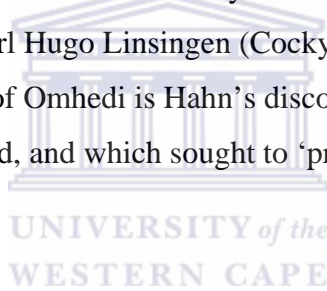
After independence, people started looking for the Kwanyama royal family to choose the king until Rev. Shinana found them. They found and inaugurated the late Cornelius

¹⁹ Ohamba Nekoto was an aunt to kings Weyulu and Nande of Kwanyama and a great-aunt to the last Kwanyama king, Mandume ya Ndemufayo, and exerted great influence over her nieces and nephews. As a member of the royal family, she ruled over a large section of Oukwanyama where she took all relevant political decisions and judicially sentenced in court. Although she had authority, she was not a sole ruler. It is not known when she was born.

Mwetupunga Shelungu as *Ohamba* of Oukwanyama, but after his death *Ohamba* Mwadinomho was chosen to succeed him because people knew her well from the time when she was growing up at Vilho Weyulu's homestead at Ohaingu. In November 2005, she was inaugurated as *Ohamba* - Queen of the Ovakwanyama people - on the Namibian side of the border. Ohamba Martha was not largely known due to the fear that the Kwanyama royal family lived with, as they had been in hiding during the colonial period. She is still unknown to many people. Moreover, she heads a kingdom that has been compromised as she only reigns over one part of the fragmented Oukwanyama kingship.

Colonial Figures: the Native Commissioners of Ovamboland

Biographies of native commissioners and assistant native commissioners in Ovamboland are also included here because they had close contact with the local intermediaries. A figure deeply implicated in the fragmentation of the Kwanyama kingship, and thence the architecture of indirect rule, is Carl Hugo Linsingen (Cocky) Hahn. More precisely, interwoven with the whole story of Omhedi is Hahn's discourse which dwelt on the dangers of 'detrribalization' in Ovamboland, and which sought to 'preserve' some aspects of the Ovambo people's traditional life.



Carl Hugo Linsingen Hahn, also widely known by his nickname 'Cocky' and his Ovambo nickname 'Shongola' (the Whip), was a son of Rev. Carl Hugo Hahn and his wife Anna Judith Julie Auguste Hahn (née von Linsingen), and grandson of the famous Hereroland missionary Carl Hugo Hahn. He was born at Paarl on the 4th January, 1886. He attended school until Standard Six in Paarl and thereafter worked in a bank for seven and half years and in the mining industry for two and half years. Hahn joined the Imperial Light Horse in 1914, and served with this regiment through the 1914 rebellion. He proceeded with the Corps to then South West Africa and served in the field until after the occupation of Windhoek. Hahn was then transferred for duty with the Native Administrative Branch and special military work as required by the Military Governor.²⁰

Hahn first went north in 1915 as part of Pritchard's expedition to Ovamboland following the German surrender to General Botha. Because of his skills in 'handling Africans', Hahn then served as Intelligence Officer to Charles Manning, the Resident Commissioner, and was

²⁰ NAN, Find aid 2/31, National Archives of Namibia – A.450 – CHL Hahn (last revised 14 July, 2006), p 2-3.

crucial in gathering information and mustering the support of Kwanyama headmen against their King, Mandume ya Ndemufayo, between 1915 and 1917. He participated in the military action against Mandume in 1917.²¹ In 1920, when Manning transferred to Windhoek and became Chief Native Commissioner, Hahn became Native Commissioner of Ovamboland and remained in that post until 1946. He then served one year on the Public Service Commission in Windhoek, and retired to his farm in Grootfontein, where he died in 1948.²² According to Hayes, Hahn played a crucial, mediating role in constructing ‘the Ovambo’ for consumption by officials and wider audiences. She further states that he wrote “ethnographic texts on ‘the Ovambo’, and for thirty-two years he authored the administrative reports on Ovamboland from which present-day historians, anthropologists and researchers of customary law must garner their knowledge.”²³ Collecting and compiling a coherent body of knowledge on the Ovambo was integral to South African efforts to construct a colonial state in northern Namibia. Hahn’s was the most authoritative voice in these intellectual and administrative initiatives.²⁴ As part of his mediation of the Ovambo to the outside world, Hahn represented SWA at a 1937 meeting of the Mandates Commission of the League of Nations in Geneva. In 1942 Hahn accompanied Lawrence, the South African Minister of Justice, to the League of Nations to advise on the ‘treatment of natives’ in the territory.²⁵

Hahn’s place in this northern periphery (Ovamboland), distant even from the SWA capital, Windhoek, allowed him to exercise enormous independence as a Native Commissioner.²⁶ This autonomy reinforced Hahn’s voice as mediator of the Ovambo to the outside world as much as it did his authority, which in turn facilitated the smooth functioning and positive public image of what he later came to term ‘indirect control’.²⁷ From the outset in Ovamboland, the South African administration had taken what seemed the most practical and economical route, and sought to rule indirectly through the embodiments of African power: those of kings, headmen and sub-headmen who already held positions in Ovambo polities.²⁸

Following in Hahn’s footsteps, Harold Eedes became Native Commissioner of Ovamboland and Kaoko in 1946. As mentioned earlier, he was known throughout northern Namibia as

²¹ Hayes, P. ‘Cocky Hahn and the Black Venus’, p 365.

²² Hayes, P. ‘Cocky Hahn and the Black Venus’, p 368.

²³ *Ibid*, p 366.

²⁴ *Ibid*.

²⁵ *Ibid*, p 369.

²⁶ *Ibid*, p 370.

²⁷ *Ibid*.

²⁸ *Ibid*.

“Nakale ke homato” (the armed tall man) which denoted his stature and what the local people thought of him.²⁹ Following Hahn’s example, Eedes continued taking official visitors and tourists to Omhedi where visitors took pictures and were treated to various tribute gifts of Kwanyama craftsmanship and watched mock ‘*efundula*’ ceremonies. He also carried out official tours of the area as part of his duties and supported the recruiting drive for more migrant labour to the Police Zone. Eedes continued routine visits to the outlying areas of Ovamboland and Kaoko for tax collection and became familiar with the local customs. It was also during his tenure as Native Commissioner that headman Vilho Weyulu accompanied a group of Ovambo people to the Van Riebeeck Festival in Cape Town in 1952 to showcase their various craftsmanship skills and their way of living. The show was linked to the colonial state’s promotion of ‘tribalism’ in order to consolidate control over the ‘native’ people of Namibia and South Africa at the time.³⁰ Eedes retired as Senior Native Commissioner on the 26th June, 1954.

Eedes was succeeded by J.H. Bruwer Blignaut, who worked as an Employment Native Commissioner in the Union Department of Native Affairs. Allegedly Blignaut was not legally qualified for the Native Commissioner position in Ovamboland, but it was agreed that it was one of the few posts in Native Affairs where the possession of a legal qualification was not essential, owing to the fact that Ovamboland was outside the Police Zone.³¹ However, Blignaut was well-known in the colonial administration and was considered to be a capable officer who was able to handle ‘natives’ successfully, thus he was appointed as Native Commissioner for Ovamboland. The fact that Hahn’s and Eedes’ successors are not well represented in existing historical works, could mean that their contribution was less significant or that most of the ethnographic as well as photographic work had already been produced by their predecessors. Alternatively it could also be the result of an Anglophone dominance of sources and history writing, as these later officials (and their records) were Afrikaans-speaking.

²⁹ NAN, SWA Annual 1977, “Nakale” – Harold Eedes: A Legend in His Time – The last of the Lords of the Frontier, pp 38-41.

³⁰ See, NAN, NAO 60 Native Commissioner Ovamboland, file 12/1 (v1) H.L.P. Eedes, “Reports” monthly 5/3/47 – 9/2/53 and NAN, NAO 103, Native Commissioner Ovamboland, file 65/1, Exhibitions and Shows – General 1 Van Riebeeck, 1952.

³¹ NAN, SWAA , Storage Unit 3007, File. S6/137/1 Vol. 2, 1921-1954.

Omhedi, gender and history

Aside from the restored Queen of Oukwanyama, it is of course striking how masculine the dominant figures at Omhedi are in terms of the biographies set out above. This raises issues about women's presence at Omhedi and also their lesser visibility in the various kinds of sources that are available for the colonial period.

What will become clear however in Chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis, is that women do have certain kinds of visibility. Omhedi is at the centre of photography in colonial Owambo, and women were consistently at the centre of photography at Omhedi. Thus photography renders women visible when previously they seemed almost invisible in documentation. For example, when *efundula* performances were held those Ovambo women who were normally out of the public space are foregrounded with the photographers, who tended to focus on clothing and hairstyles as markers of 'tradition'. It is thus important to historicize the nature of women's visibility and invisibility in textual/documentary archives because documents in the colonial archives rarely provide much written evidence about women. This should serve as a reminder that there were different agendas of visibility as far as Ovambo women were concerned. It is a fact that they have been made visible at different times, but we have to be critically aware of the conditions of this visibility at different points in time.

Many photographers such as Cocky Hahn were keen to erase/exclude themselves and all signs of western culture from their photographs as these would not have been useful ethnographic and administrative records from the colonial point of view. As will be shown later in the thesis, women appeared in large numbers and in a series of portraits. One also tries to take note of what is not photographed. The next chapter will therefore explore the issue of visual construction in the making of Omhedi, by analysing photographs taken at this place. It will refer to the photographic collections by resident Native Commissioner Cocky Hahn and visitors to Omhedi that developed after the fall of the Oukwanyama kingdom in 1917 and the founding of the 'Council of Headmen' in its place.

Chapter 3

Photographic construction of Omhedi

Introduction

This chapter introduces core aspects of indirect rule that will be discussed in the course of this study. It makes use of photographic archives because the practices and institutions that were used in the administration of Ovamboland under colonial rule were highly visualised. I historicise the rise of Omhedi as a photographic place and the visualisation of indirect rule by looking at a number of photographs produced at Omhedi. Many of the photographs are of Ovambo customs and ethnography by Cocky Hahn, who was resident in Ovambo and gained knowledge of the people he ruled to be able to control them. The photographic density at Omhedi could also be credited to visiting photographers and writers to Omhedi such as Alfred Martin Duggan-Cronin, Anneliese Scherz, Ernst and Ruth Damman, Negley Farson, Lawrence Green and Alice Mertens among others.¹ An important motivation to highlight the photographic construction of Omhedi in this chapter arises from the way the images from Omhedi came to stand for the whole of colonial Ovamboland, and had generic effects. Because of the unique accessibility of Omhedi to photographers, its history as a place is entangled with the question of projecting an overall picture of indirect rule.

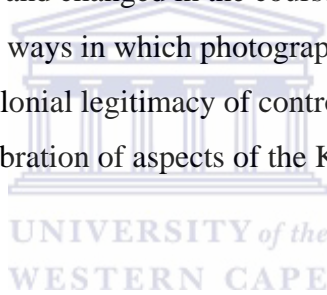
A comparative analysis of photographs taken of the Ovakwanyama at Omhedi by Hahn on the one hand, and by Alfred Duggan-Cronin (in 1936)² on the other will be undertaken here. This will show how Omhedi was visually imagined by the two photographers. Although Hahn was not famous as a photographer at the time as Duggan Cronin was, he acted as a mediator for Duggan Cronin's visit which meant that he was still shaping the way Omhedi and his brand of indirect rule were to be seen by the outside world. Hahn's photographs of the Ovambo were circulated in official reports to the League of Nations, and have been more

¹See Miescher, G. and Rizzo, L. 'Popular Pictorial Constructions of Kaoko in the 20th Century' in *New Notes on Kaoko: The Northern Kunene Region (Namibia) in Texts and Photographs*, edited by Giorgio Miescher and Dag Henrichsen (Basler Afrika Bibliographien 2000), p 251 and Hartmann, W, Hayes, P, Silvester, J. "Photography history and memory" in Hartman et.al (eds), *The Colonising Camera: Photographs in the making of Namibian history* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 1998), p187.

² Alfred Martin Duggan-Cronin was a South African/Irish photographer (1874-1954) who is well known for his landscape and ethnographic photographs that he took all over southern Africa. His work is housed in the McGregor Museum in Kimberley.

recently exhibited and critically examined.³ Duggan Cronin's photographs (taken in Ovambo and elsewhere in then South West Africa) were published in the four volumes that covered photographic studies of the Bantu people of South Africa but have since remained an untapped resource. Over the years, only a small number of them have become known through a variety of uses, such as in exhibitions of the photographer's work. Most of them were unknown until June 2007, when certain photographs were included in an exhibition of Duggan-Cronin's work titled 'Thandabantu: a photographic journey through Southern Africa 1919-1939', held at the Castle in Cape Town.

The issue of visual construction in the making of a historic place is thus engaged with by way of analysing these photographs. Drawing on oral, archival sources and photographs, this chapter contributes to methodological, historiographical and theoretical debates concerning the possibilities of visual history. It investigates colonial perceptions and ideas about Omhedi and the ways that these interacted and changed in the course of colonial appropriations of the place. This chapter shows various ways in which photographs have been part of a visual selection used to conceptualise colonial legitimacy of control in northern Namibia. In this way, the colonial authorities' celebration of aspects of the Kwanyama 'native' culture is highlighted.



On visual evidence and colonialism

Until the 1870s photography was rarely attempted in Africa beyond the main centres of European settlements.⁴ However, by the 1880s photography was being used more or less systematically by those engaged in the extension of colonial rule in a relentless quest to classify and catalogue 'exotic' places and peoples.⁵ The fine reproduction of photographs was a notable feature of the ethnographic monographs, which by the 1890s were beginning to supersede the discursive expedition report, and the prevailing interest in physical anthropology was also served by the photographs. The Second World War and its aftermath gave a new importance to photographs of Africa as instruments of propaganda. Colonial administrations, which had previously employed commercial studios as 'government

³ Hahn's photographs held at the National Archives of Namibia were exhibited as part of *The Colonising Camera: Photographs in the Making of Namibian History* in 1994 in Windhoek, and 1995 in Cape Town, and were published in the book of the same name. See ref

⁴ Killingray, D and Roberts, A, 'An Outline of Photography in Africa to ca. 1940' in *History in Africa*, Vol. 16 (1989), pp 197-208.

⁵ Ibid.

photographers', began to form information departments with their own studios, which rapidly generated quantities of photographs intended to instruct or mould opinion.⁶ Colonial expansion, in combination with technical advances in photography, popularised the medium and pushed it to new frontiers, both literally and technically. Thus, the potential of the photograph to convey colonial propaganda was quickly realised. When a desired scene was inaccessible, it was constructed, complete with props, costumes and all necessary preconceptions.

For that reason, in especially non-western areas, events were staged and highly stylised to present a marketable depiction of 'tribal' culture.⁷ Hence, as was true everywhere on the continent, colonial expansion and later consolidation intensified the need for photography.⁸ This is because photographs were crucial in representing place and people as an aid to support and justify colonial enterprises. Strong stereotypes about Africans as 'primitive' tended to prevail, which affected the expectations of Europeans as to what they would see. As we shall see, this meant that sometimes 'the primitive' had to be invented in order to address such expectations.

Ethnographic photography in Africa belongs to the larger framework of a colonial discourse about the 'other'. It is important here to look at why visuals took on such importance in displaying subjects and landscapes of the colonised, alongside oral or textual genres. This is because photographs were and are commonly used as evidence.⁹ For this reason, and as part of the Mandate created by the stage of its bid to gain the League of Nations mandate to rule Namibia and to control Namibians, photography was crucial to the politics of representing the place and its peoples.¹⁰ South Africa had to win the mandate in Versailles in 1919, and then justify keeping it all the time. Thus, the availability of published visuals increased decisively under South African colonial rule in Namibia.¹¹ It must be emphasised that the South African

⁶ Killingray, D and Roberts, A, 'An Outline of Photography in Africa', pp 197-208.

⁷ Lee-Webb, V 'Fact and Fiction: Nineteenth-Century Photographs of the Zulu' *African Arts*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Jan, 1992), pp 50-99.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Wells, L, *Photography: A critical introduction* (London: Routledge, 1997), p 30.

¹⁰ Hartmann, W, Hayes, P, Silvester, J. "Photography history and memory", p 3.

¹¹ Miescher, G. and Rizzo, L. 'Popular Pictorial Constructions of Kaoko in the 20th Century', p 12.

occupation took place with a strong sense of audience with honorific functions – large numbers of photographs were taken and many of them published.¹²

Hartmann et.al argue that, “Indeed, the whole question of photography throws open a number of problems about Namibia’s colonialisms as Southern Africa became deeply implicated in metropolitan processes of mechanisation of visual reproduction from the late nineteenth century”.¹³ They also suggest that, “Looking at the ways photography spread through the hinterlands of the subcontinent, following the uneven spread of capitalism and colonialism, a product of industrial culture which could create new knowledge and easily export it, we can talk of simultaneous processes of colonisation and visualisation of the other”.¹⁴ They maintain that, “Photography – the production of knowledge (and images) about Bantu and Bushman -- fed into a number of institutional and administrative initiatives in South Africa”.¹⁵

Over a decade, from 1929 to 1939, each Annual Report sent to the League of Nations was complemented by a photographic appendix. Its intention was twofold; on the one hand, the administration represented itself as part of a modern, civilised world, and on the other hand the areas beyond the so called ‘red line’ (or police zone as it is known now) were represented as primitive and backward.¹⁶ Therefore, beyond the Police Zone were regions that were presented as backward and wild, areas in which it would be risky and, indeed, undesirable to force the pace of change and whose inhabitants could only slowly be integrated into the modern world if at all.¹⁷ As a result, Annual Reports to the League of Nations contained photographs that presented a series of juxtapositions between a harsh wilderness and its ‘uncivilised’ occupants and more familiar images of ‘progress’ and ‘economic development’.¹⁸ Hahn’s photography and written submissions supplied much of the content of the reports submitted to the committee, and because few members of the Permanent Mandates Commission visited Namibia, this information constituted their main form of

¹² Hartmann, W., Hayes, P., Silvester, J. ‘This ideal conquest: photography and colonialism in Namibia History’ in Hartman et.al (eds), *The Colonising Camera: Photographs in the making of Namibian history* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 1998), p 15.

¹³ Ibid, p 15.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Hartmann, W, Hayes, P, Silvester, J. ‘This ideal conquest’, p 3.

¹⁶ Miescher, G. and Rizzo, L. ‘Popular Pictorial Constructions of Kaoko’, p 22.

¹⁷ Hayes, P. ‘Cocky Hahn and the Black Venus’ in *Gender & History – Special Issue: Gendered Colonialisms in African history Vol. 8 Number 3* (Oxford UK & Cambridge, USA: Blackwell Publishers, November 1996), p 367.

¹⁸ Hartmann, W., Hayes, P, Silvester, J. ‘This ideal conquest’, p 15.

knowledge of the region and the actions of the administration within it.¹⁹ Their vision of the territory and the impact on it of the South African occupation came predominantly through the information and photographs supplied by the territory's colonial management. These images moved away from the earlier genre of "estate agent photography"²⁰ back into the photography of colonial legitimation.²¹

The Ovambos, comprising seven 'tribes', were regarded as the most powerful group of native peoples in the Territory and were praised by the administration for their effective system of self-government.²² Once it violently gained control over the region, the Union of South Africa merely manipulated and inserted their own authorities into the pre-existing system to establish indirect rule and maintain the appearance that the 'native tribes' and their ways were being safeguarded and respected.²³ However, this was a mere front to satisfy obligations set out by the Mandate, and as such reality proved more accurately that 'colonialists wanted to appropriate to themselves the awe in which subjects held their chiefs'.²⁴ Generally, the photograph was used to reinforce the idea that accompanying texts were privileged and incontrovertible and consequently a true and accurate reflection of their achievements.²⁵ This is particularly the case when the photograph is accepted as reality. An excellent example is the use of Hahn's and others' photographs in the administration's 1946 propaganda publication *South West Africa and the Union of South Africa*.²⁶ Consequently the photograph elevated the credibility of the narrative, while the narrative, in turn, reinforced the preconceived notions that were to be illuminated through gazing at the accompanying images.²⁷

As indicated earlier in this thesis, authors such as C.M. Geary, David Prochaska, John Mack, Enid Schildkrout focus on photographers and the contexts in which they worked, the conventions and motifs that influenced them and the forms of display adopted by Africans

¹⁹ Hayes, P. 'Cocky Hahn and the Black Venus', p 367.

²⁰ "Estate agent photography" refers to the a range of photographs that presented Namibia as inhabited or uncultivated space to attract settlers. For a detailed discussion see Hartmann, W., Hayes, P., Silvester, J. 'This ideal conquest', pp 14-15.

²¹ Ibid, p 15.

²² Hayes, P. 'Cocky Hahn and the Black Venus', p 367.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Hartmann, W., Hayes, P., Silvester, J. 'This ideal conquest', pp 15-16.

²⁶ Ibid, p 16.

²⁷ Ibid, p 17.

who were photographed.²⁸ The potential of visual history in Namibia is explored in *The Colonizing Camera*, which discusses photography of colonial administrators such as ‘Cocky’ Hahn and Rene Dickman. The analysis of the photographs here focused on different spaces, such as ‘natural’ spaces, African spaces, colonial, urban and political spaces, and spaces of the ethnographic, the scientific and that of the hunter.²⁹

Interestingly for this work, Hayes’ essay explores the rich photographic activity of Native Commissioner ‘Cocky’ Hahn. The essay is a combination of visual and textual history and analytical precision. It breaks down categories, enabling Hayes to argue beneath the surface of, for instance, hunting photographs to reveal a thoroughly convincing “blinding construction of power signals”.³⁰ Hahn’s use of the panorama camera is especially remarkable, in his representation of the *efundula* for the Chief Native Commissioner at Oshikango in 1935. As Hayes argues, “...these massive ‘ethnoscapes’ are not surveillance of the stereotypical colonial gaze, they are encompassment, for they grasp the amplitude of what is beyond”.³¹

The whole volume intended to initiate a process whereby people would make connections between old photographs and stories of the past. This was to bring colonial photographs out of the archive and plug them into contemporary historical discourses in Namibia and elsewhere. This particular study follows in these steps, but will go further to combine sustained visual analysis with archival research and oral history in connecting the production of a visual archive with the creation of colonial legitimacy through the example of a place. This study addresses issues regarding the critical interpretation and the use of colonial photographs to reveal how racist misconceptions, gender and social biases, stylistic genres, and the colonial agendas affect content.

²⁸ *Journal of African Arts*, ‘Historical photographs of Africa’ (The James Coleman African Studies Centre, University of California Los Angeles: Oct. 1991, Vol XXIV).

²⁹ Edwards E, ‘Review: Images and History’, *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (2000), pp 519-520.

³⁰ Hayes, ‘Northern exposures: the photography of C.H.L. Hahn, Native Commissioner of Ovamboland 1915-1946’, in Hartman et.al. eds. *The Colonising Camera: Photographs in the making of Namibian history* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 1998), p 181.

³¹ *Ibid*, p 179.

Photographers' narratives

Accordingly, photography by colonisers, whether in the employ of the administration or not, provides particularly striking instances of the effort to project a South African colonial modernity and, frequently and deliberately, indigenous Namibian premodernity or even primitivity.³² Thus, this chapter seeks to re-engage with some of the photographs, published or unpublished, and to comparatively analyse and sketch out some theoretical and methodological concerns of their production. This chapter contextualises C.H.L. Hahn and A.M. Duggan-Cronin as photographers and explores the relationship between the content and construction of these photographs. Their own narratives as to why they took these photographs are also examined here. Therefore, this chapter is concerned with an analysis of the photographs themselves. The various genres and themes relevant to a visual narrative on Ovamboland specifically in Oukwanyama in the period, are explored. Beyond this thematic structure, the study of the photographs moves from an analysis based mainly on archival material and historiography towards one that is largely informed by oral information on some of the photographs.

Some background history of both photographers to highlight their agendas and providing their own narratives as to why they photographed what they photographed is pertinent here. I begin with Major C.H.L. “Cocky” Hahn’s history as he is more central to Omhedi overall, and he is the ideologue. As indicated in the previous Chapter, Hahn sought to preserve tradition so that it does not disappear. He was a leading supporter of the policies of indirect rule and played a mediating role in constructing the ‘Ovambo’ for consumption by national and international audiences.³³ His knowledge of the Ovambo people and their country was highly regarded by the south African government and for thirty-two years he authored the administrative reports on Ovamboland. This was integral to South African efforts to construct a colonial state in northern Namibia. He undertook extensive research and compiled a coherent body of knowledge on the traditions of the Ovambo. Hahn was a keen photographer and took hundreds of photographs of Ovamboland and Kaoko. In Ovamboland, the large homestead of the Kwanyama headman Nehemia at Omhedi, became a tourist or ethnographic

³² Hartmann, W., Hayes, P., Silvester, J. “Photography history and memory” in Hartman et.al. eds. *The Colonising Camera: Photographs in the making of Namibian history* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 1998), p 3.

³³ Ibid, p 366.

destination for many white visitors.³⁴ The homestead, dances and crafts were open to being aestheticised and rendered as ‘traditional’. Thus, a relatively homogenous ‘traditional’ identity was presented at this place; Ovamboland’s isolation and Hahn’s lengthy period as Native Commissioner lent it credibility to most outsiders.³⁵ In Hahn’s view, where westernizing influence was least apparent, “the natives are virile, well ordered and progressive”.³⁶ He incorporated these notions in his photography of the Kwanyama and other Ovambo groups. His photo collections are housed at the National Archives of Namibia and at the Basler Bibliographien in Basel, Switzerland.

Alfred Martin Duggan-Cronin was born on 17 May, 1874 at Innishannon, Country Cork, Ireland, and educated at St Mary’s College in Derbyshire, England. He worked for De Beers in Kimberley, initially as a compound guard and later in the dispensary of the prison hospital and in the copy room. In 1904 he bought a simple box camera, and from then on photography came to play a significant part in his life. His initial range was quite wide: individual portraits, still life and animal studies and scenery. His first photographs of indigenous people were of the men working on the mines and living in the compounds. While participating in the South West African and East African campaigns for the First World War, he took many photographs. In 1919, back in South Africa, he undertook his first photographic expedition to the Langeberge to photograph San people.³⁷

What is relevant to our purpose is Duggan-Cronin’s argument that the ‘traditional’ way of life of the indigenous peoples of southern Africa was being eroded, which is where his objectives as a photographer converge with Hahn’s agenda as Native Commissioner. Duggan Cronin of course witnessed such ‘detrribalisation’ at the mines, and he was determined to record older ways of life on film before it was too late. In the period between the World Wars, Duggan-Cronin travelled some 128000 km to photograph the people of southern Africa. His travels took him from Victoria Falls to the Indian Ocean, the coastline of South Africa, and from the deserts of Namibia to the forests of Mozambique. After 1932 when he retired, Duggan-Cronin devoted more of his time to his task, which he hoped would contribute to ‘a better understanding’ of the indigenous peoples of southern Africa. From 1930 onwards he was

³⁴ Ibid, p 371.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ See publication; ‘Thandabantu: A photographic journey through Southern Africa 1919-1939’, McGregor Museum Trust/Duggan-Cronin Foundation, pp 1-3.

assisted by Richard Madela, a young Mfengu who became a close friend and who accompanied Duggan-Cronin on most field trips. Duggan-Cronin's trips were financed by the McGregor Museum and by grants from the South African Government and the Carnegie Foundation.³⁸

Duggan-Cronin's photographs

I wish to first analyse the similarities and contrasts Duggan-Cronin created in photographing the same people, also photographed by Hahn at Omhedi in the 1930s, by looking at a selection of photographs from his collection on the Ovakwanyama. A small number of Duggan-Cronin's photographs show landscapes and aspects of colonial history. Most of them show people, focusing on 'traditional' Ovambo culture. It appears that people were certainly photographed in a deliberate manner; overall the information provided on the images is casual and subsidiary. Photographs are taken of people with a particular kind of hairstyle, clothing, or ornaments and when they have their weapons, or implements with them, or when the homestead can be seen in the background. For practical purposes, of course, scenes from daily life were, in general, photographed in this region mainly to depict situations which occurred in a traditional home such as dance, housework, blacksmithing etc. This is because he commended the discourse that posited African cultures as pure and authentic, cultures that had to be rescued from the encroachment of the modern colonial world. Generally however, one notices that Duggan's interest concentrated on the 'tribal' life, and the preference for photographs of persons reflects a strong interest in aesthetics.

Many of his photographs are side and back views, not necessarily intended to convey any strong message about the individuals concerned, but rather to illustrate styles of hair, dress, and personal ornament.

³⁸ See publication; "Thandabantu: A photographic journey through Southern Africa 1919-1939", McGregor Museum Trust/Duggan-Cronin Foundation, pp 1-3. Duggan-Cronin's exhibitions were held in various places in South Africa and overseas, notably at the British Empire Exhibition in London in 1924. Between 1928 and 1954 eleven volumes of his photographs were published. Duggan-Cronin died on 25 August, 1954 and is buried in Kimberley. He left his photographic collection as well as a variety of traditional household items and clothing and the like to the people of Kimberley; the McGregor Museum, is the custodian of the legacy. The photographic collection consists of over 7000 negatives and several thousand prints, both large and small.



Fig. 2: Two Kwanyama women of different ages, married and unmarried based on their headdresses and the way they are dressed. Source: McGregor Museum. Photographer: A.M. Duggan-Cronin. Original caption: Left: Kwanyama woman with *omhatela* head dress; right: girl with *elende* head dress, worn just before the onset of the *efundula* initiation ceremony.

Figure two shows a full body picture of two Kwanyama women of different ages, one married and the other unmarried. The photographer's interest was on the way two women of different status dress. The married woman on the left wears *omhatela* (headdress), and the girl is wearing *elende* (headdress), worn just before the onset of the *efundula*. *Elende* is made of *eefipa* (sinews), fat, hair and *ombaba* (cowrie shells).³⁹ Also seen is the *omuhapyawa*⁴⁰ (band around the forehead), which indicates 'taboo', and around the neck the *onyoka* (bead-necklace), made of fragments of mussel-shell.⁴¹ One can also see that the costumes worn by the two women are different; the married woman is wearing *onguwo yomakupa* (a long skirt) which indicates marriage status while the unmarried girl is wearing *ondjeva* (ostrich eggshell beads) made into a short skirt on top of her long skirt.

³⁹ Interview with Mrs. Ndahafa ya Kakonda – Onuno and Mrs. Foibe Shoovaleka – Omhedi 7.02.2009.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.



Fig. 3: *Front and back view of two women carrying baskets on their heads.*

Source: McGregor Museum. Photographer: A.M. Duggan-Cronin. Original caption: Kwanyama with long skirts, a broad belt (*epaya*), made of elephant hide, and ivory buttons (*omakipa eendjaba*), which are decorated with burnt-in incisions.

The photograph in figure three also shows two Kwanyama women with long skirts, broad belts made from elephant's hide and ivory buttons and shells hanging from their necklaces with decorations and burnt-in incisions. Duggan-Cronin's interest here was on the clothing as well as ornaments, from front view as well as the back view. The woman on the left looks at ease, standing proudly with her chest out. However the woman on the right does not look enthusiastic about her picture being taken, although she is also standing straight. The tone and depth of light is very good as their faces are clear. One can also see that the focus was entirely on them as the background is blurred, although there are granaries visible behind them. The photographer highlights the women as individuals not just as people that work with *omahangu* (millet), which is normally kept in the granaries behind them.

Many of Duggan-Cronin's pictures are pictorial in style, especially when focusing on people's adornments, or their beauty. An example of this is shown in figure four which illustrates a photograph of a woman facing sideways from the photographer, but also indicative of anthropometric influences. The shells or ivory buttons lining her back as they hang from her necklace are in focus. Duggan-Cronin's interest seems drawn by the beauty of this woman, the huge bead necklace, the beads and the broad belt on her waist with the ivory

buttons, incisions and all her ornaments. The woman looks confident and calm as her hands rests on her thighs. These kinds of photographs give the impression that the person is not completely looking directly at the photographer. They were taken at an angle, mostly with similar positioning of upper bodies, sometimes cutting out breasts in the case of women.



Fig. 4: *Side view of a woman with shells on her necklace hanging down her back and broad belt* . Source: McGregor Museum. Photographer: A.M. Duggan-Cronin. Original caption: Kwanyama; the ivory buttons (*omakipa eendjaba*) and shells (*eemba*) can be seen.

It is evident that Duggan-Cronin's interest when photographing the Kwanyama women was aesthetic appeal. It is even more evident when light is reflected on certain faces. Duggan-Cronin also attempted to maintain distance, thus preserving the personal dignity of those photographed. The variety of perspectives and arrangements, photographs in semi-profile, clearly indicates the effort that was made to record individual traits. These photographs show different women of different ages and status, married and unmarried.

Among such images, some have clearly been deliberately posed. The subjects, photographed both from the front and in profile, are shown in front of a white sheet. The photographer is focusing on the ornaments, beads and headdresses that these women are wearing and the beauty of it all. The women's breasts are not in focus, but the attention is entirely centred on the adornments. This suggests that women were not being sexualised as is often the case with colonial photography.

Figure five depicts two Kwanyama women stamping *olukula* (ochre), which is obtained from the roots of the *Dolf Pterocarpus angolensis*⁴², known as *omuuva* by the Kwanyama. At a first glance one can say the focus was on the everyday life of Kwanyama women, but if you look closely, Duggan-Cronin doubled a cultural act as he photographed a cultural act and in the process added to the effects of the act. The fact that he took a photograph of the two women pounding *olukula* sticks to produce *olukula* powder, which people use to smear on themselves, tripled this cultural act.



Fig. 5: *Two Kwanyama women pounding olukula sticks. This photograph demonstrates stage and spontaneity photography.* Source: McGregor Museum. Photographer: A.M. Duggan-Cronin. Original caption: Kwanyama women stamping ochre (*olukula*), which is obtained from the roots of the Dolf (*Pterocarpus angolensis*), known as *omuuva* by the Kwanyama.

This photograph is creative, as focus is on the action. At one level it is contrived and staged for purposes of ethnographic ideologies, but it turned to have far more aesthetic qualities than the norm. The contrast between the pounding sticks and the shadows of the wooden poles on the ground, together with the ones in the background as well as the *olukula* sticks in the basket on the ground, makes it much more than just an ethnographic photograph, because it plays with visual form for its own sake. *Olukula* as cosmetic enters into all the ceremonies of the Owambo and is a part of their everyday life, its use being more or less like getting

⁴² As indicated by the original caption by Duggan-Cronin.

dressed.⁴³ In cases of death, formerly the body was stripped of clothing and adornments and was rubbed with *olukula*.⁴⁴

As far as content is concerned, Duggan-Cronin's photographs are of considerable interest because they were taken at the time of the establishment of 'indirect rule'. Most of his photographs – as in Hahn's collection – show people lined up with different hairstyles, costumes and ornaments. The selection of the cultural traits recorded is varied and less arbitrary. Individuals/groups that have certain occupations, such as hunters, smiths etc., also feature with the implements they use. A number of pairs were photographed – one standing in front, the other seen from the side – that suggests the influence of rather anthropometric genre in physical anthropology but also to serve as bearers of predominantly cultural traits. Although these photographs are captioned, there is lack of information regarding the time at which they were taken, and identification of subjects is restricted to broad territorial references, for example Omhedi homestead, or ethnic classifications, or the role and status of those photographed.

There was no doubt a push from Native Commissioner Hahn to photograph certain things. This is because a letter was addressed to 'Cocky' Hahn in mid 1936 from a well-known South African anthropologist, G.H. Hoernlé, to ask him to help Mr. Duggan-Cronin when he came up to take photographs of the Ovambo.⁴⁵ Duggan-Cronin is also quoted as saying, "The administration of all Ovamboland is carried out by only two men, Major Hahn and Mr. Thompson, assisted by a young clerk. Major Hahn sent me to the Omhedi tribal kraal, where I carried on my work. The kraal is built with strong palisades, and an intricate maze of passages. No one, not even Major Hahn, is allowed to enter the King's (referring to the Senior Headman who acts like a king) apartments. The tribe has a holy fire which is never allowed to go out, except when the king dies. Then it has to be kindled again with fire sticks. It is not allowed to flare up, and nobody may warm himself by it".⁴⁶ This confirms that he was invited to take photos following Hahn's permission and guidance, although Duggan-Cronin also had his own agendas.

⁴³ C.Estermann edited by Gordon D. Gibson *The Ethnography of Southwestern Angola: The Non-Bantu Peoples, The Ambo Ethnic Group* (Africana Publishing Company, 1976), p 58.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p 85.

⁴⁵ NAN A450, C.H.L. Hahn Papers, Box 4, No 1/30, 1925-1945.

⁴⁶ 'Kimberley man's adventures in the desert: Many valuable native photographs and relics brought to city - Mr. Duggan-Cronin "Strikes Oil" on latest Trip into African territories', *Diamond Fields Advertiser*, September 1936.



Fig. 6: *Senior Headman Nehemia Shoovaleka posing for a portrait which conveys a sense of affluence and authority.* Source: McGregor Museum. Photographer: A.M. Duggan-Cronin. Original caption: Headman Nehemia Shoovaleka – Kwanyama ‘Tribe’.

Figure six shows a portrait taken of Nehemia Shoovaleka wearing an animal skin. Nehemia became Headman after Ndjukuma’s death in 1934.⁴⁷ Nehemia who was an interpreter at Oshikango became Headman through his progressiveness and education, through the aid of Harold Eedes and Major Hahn.⁴⁸ He was one of the most important headmen in Oukwanyama. Since he was a Senior Headman and also polygamous, many visiting dignitaries and officials were taken to his homestead at Omhedi to take photographs. Here, Duggan-Cronin’s portrait of Nehemia is examined against ‘Cocky’ Hahn’s many portraits of him. Hahn also photographed Nehemia wearing both western clothes and traditional costumes (see figures 7 and 8), as can be seen in figure eight where Nehemia is photographed standing bare-chested in a loin cloth with some of his wives.

⁴⁷ Interview with Mrs. Ndahafa Kakonda, Onuno, 24.11.2008 and 7.02.2009; Mr. Kaupa ka Mwatotele, Efidilomulunga, Ongwediva 05.02.2009, Mrs. Foibe Shoovaleka, Omhedi 7.02.2009.

⁴⁸ Bruwer, J.P. ‘The Kuanyama of South West Africa – A preliminary study’ (Unpublished M.A. D. Phil. University of Stellenbosch, 1962), p 34.



Fig. 7: Senior *Headman Nehemia* in a suit with some of his many wives. Source: J.M. Elsing (1966: 58). Photographer: Unknown?



Fig. 8: Senior *Headman* (far left) in a traditional costume with some of his wives. Source: National Archives of Namibia, Photo collection number 03763. Photographer: Hahn.

This photo was taken by Hahn at Nehemia's homestead at Omhedi. However, given the discrepancy between Hahn's portraits of Nehemia and Duggan-Cronin's theatrically 'traditional' portrait, it is noteworthy that Duggan depicted Nehemia, not as he usually appears in Hahn's images (wearing western clothes), but adorned with animal skin. Hahn's portraits of Nehemia (in western clothes) depict him wearing a jacket, collared shirt and trousers, with his short hair neatly combed. In the photograph in question, however, Nehemia appears in an animal skin, looking serious, with a distant look as if he is deep in thought. He exudes authority, royalty and importance.

And here we come to a central issue. I argue that the function of the animal skin costume in this photograph is to make Nehemia appear 'native', 'tribalised' to his viewers, since Duggan-Cronin's intentions are seen to perpetuate these beliefs and attitudes that exclude altogether change and adaptation. At the time, leaders sought to pose for portraits with the attributes which, according to the cultural codes of the perceived audience, would accurately reflect their status and would convey a sense of affluence and authority. For Hahn's agendas however, this served to legitimise Nehemia as a Senior Headman of the Oukwanyama traditional authority, as he was not really royalty or a 'chief' as the animal skin signifies. He was a colonial appointee, even though this photograph showing him wearing an animal skin gives him a chiefly look. It would seem therefore that Duggan Cronin not only traditionalised Nehemia in such portraits, he also elevated him. There is also the textual reference to Nehemia as a 'king' in the photographer's notes.⁴⁹ One wonders what the nature and extent of Nehemia's participation might have been, because it is believed that Nehemia not only agreed to pose for the portrait but also certainly knew what kind of picture he was posing for and what function it would serve, since he was a 'lynchpin' of Hahn's representational system.

This study posits that Kwanyama intermediaries, especially Nehemia, participated in the creation of spectacles, not only as photographic subjects but also as translators and informants. According to oral history, white photographers who used to come to Omhedi normally brought 'native' people with them who used to direct people as to what to do or what was required of them by the photographers as they could speak the language.⁵⁰

Conceptualisation of tradition marginalises or excludes altogether change and adaptation, thereby divorcing culture from historical process and freezing it in the past in the name of a putative authenticity, or in fact inventing it if it has already changed. This refers to Duggan-Cronin's argument that the traditional way of life of the indigenous peoples of southern Africa was being eroded, as he witnessed at the mines, and his determination to record it on film before it was too late.

⁴⁹ As indicated in 'Kimberley man's adventures in the desert: Many valuable native photographs and relics brought to city - Mr. Duggan-Cronin "Strikes Oil" on latest Trip into African territories', *Diamond Fields Advertiser*, September 1936.

⁵⁰ Interview with Mrs, Foibe Shoovaleka, Omhedi, 04.2.2009.

‘Cocky’ Hahn’s photographs

‘Cocky’ Hahn, as Native Commissioner of Ovambo from the early 1920s to the late 1940s, took numerous ethnographic, landscape and panoramic photographs. He set out to use the camera by exploiting its potential as a neutral accurate instrument of description. I will begin by looking at a selection of photographs taken from his collection on the Ovakwanyama. His photographs include those that are side and back views, intended to convey anthropometric conventions, not necessarily to illustrate styles of headdress, dress, and personal ornament.



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Fig: 9. *Four Kwanyama women in front of kraal, Ovamboland.* Source: National Archives, courtesy of Basler Afrika Bibliographien, date : c. 1930. Photographer: Hahn.

Those photographed are typically shown as unemotional and static. Some photographs that I will be looking at are generally of single individuals taken in different poses or of people who are carefully posed so that they do not face each other; thus it is made deliberately difficult to gauge any particular reaction between them (see fig. 9). It is evident that the subjects in this photograph were told to pose the way they appear, as they look rather uncomfortable. The photograph also implies no particular level of interaction between the photographer and the subject, who remains unnamed, anonymous – a type of person constituted as a representative of a particular culture by his or her style of adornment, rather than an individual.

However, it is necessary to go further than this and suggest that the style of such photographs contributed to the colonial enterprise itself, which was to justify their colonial policies. This ‘typological’ style of photograph implies a quest to master colonial subjects, as the very construction of the photograph shows people disciplined, playing the game to the rules laid

down by Hahn. Oral informants relate that when Hahn and other photographers used to visit Omhedi, they came with 'native' assistants who spoke the local languages, and they told Nehemia's wives and children what to do especially when certain poses like in the photograph in fig. 8 are required.⁵¹ These anthropometric photographs can be distinguished from the portraits of named individuals that were intended to show their individual character and their style of dress and body adornments. However, while the bead ornaments and clothing worn by the subject seem authentic, they could have been part of the photographer's stock of props. I say this because according to Mrs. Foibe Shoovaleka, people would dress up for occasions such as this.

Foibe Shoovaleka related the whole process of making photographs at Omhedi when her father resided there from 1935 to 1966. She was born in 1932 at Oshikango, and she remembers a great deal about Omhedi from when she lived there in the late 1940s and early 1950s before she got married and left. She says that they used to have many visitors, and they were normally told that there were important visitors coming to Omhedi from Windhoek, and that they had to prepare everything for that day. They would spend the whole night making beer and preparing the homestead for the visitors. The following morning, a bus with many white visitors would arrive, and when they entered the homestead, everything became chaotic.⁵² She says that they were told what to do by her father or sometimes by assistants who came with the photographers, because normally visitors wanted to photograph people doing housework. Staged photography was the order of the day, so people pretended to do something even if it was not really happening. She laughingly narrates how sometimes they were told to pour water in the *omhako* (beer strainer), pretending to make beer. One was required to be up and about, and a whole day could pass while one was standing, as visitors took pictures of you. Certain activities such as plaiting hair, making clothing, pounding *mahangu*, milking cattle, making butter, cooking, making beer, smelting iron, going through *efundula* -- the female initiation, etc. were highlighted. She maintains that almost everything was done for the camera.

While going through these photographs, she would sometimes break out into a tone that sounded like the beatings of drums when she came across photographs of *oshidano* (public

⁵¹ Oral interview with Mrs. Foibe Nehemia, Omhedi, 4.02.2009; Mrs. Olivia Naikuva, Onekwaya east, 24.06.2009.

⁵² Oral interview with Mrs. Foibe Nehemia, Omhedi, 23.06.2009.

dance) and men with drums. She told me of the exciting times when they had staged *efundula*, and young women participated although it was just done for the camera. The real ceremony never took place at Omhedi, as only certain homesteads hosted the ceremony and Nehemia's was not one of them. The one that took place there was just for the visitors to photograph. Foibe can also recognise the different huts in the photographs, such as Nehemia's principal/main hut close to the *olupale* (the main reception area) and the beer huts. She also validated that the photographs were taken at Omhedi by noting the numerous palm trees in the field around the homestead.

She additionally substantiated that most photographs were taken inside the homestead, moving from the *epata* kitchen of the *munya lombe* (principal wife) to the least important wife's kitchen. She remembered her father's many wives, naming some of them who were photographed together -- Shiwangobe, Ngishikuwete, Kasheno etc. -- and confirming that Nehemia had eighteen wives. Because many public events like dances and cattle festivals were performed for government officials and other visiting foreigners, Hahn took numerous photographs at these occasions, many of them in a series showing the event from the start to finish and from different angles. The wide-panoramic angled camera allowed him to photograph huge crowds of people in a single image. For his purposes, Hahn asked people to assume roles that were not genuinely their own, and he saw his images as records of reality, however odd or peculiar that reality may have seemed. With his photographs, particularly those taken with a panoramic camera, the inevitable question arises as to the relative influence of photographer and subject in composing the images.

There is another side to 'Cocky' Hahn's photographic work, as pictures of Ovambo celebrations and rituals, and frequently of people at work in their fields and compounds, demonstrate his interest in aspects of the everyday life of these people. They intentionally show the vibrancy of unpolluted 'tribal' life which is implicitly contrasted with the loss of culture, authority and health which accompanies urbanisation and 'loss of tribe'.⁵³ The visual images reinforce the notion of idyllic, rural homelands and timeless tradition; in such ethnographic photography Africans are given culture but not history. That is why, conventionally, the presence of white people is elided from such photographs, resulting in

⁵³ Hartmann, W., Hayes, P., Silvester, J. "This ideal conquest", p 17.

what Pinney describes as “the effacement of any marks of the presence of the photographer’s culture”.⁵⁴



Fig. 10: *Staged ethnography ‘Ovambo dance’ at the Windhoek Agricultural Show of 1936.* Source: South West Africa and the Union of South Africa: The History of a mandate (1946). Photographer: Hahn?? Original caption: Ovambo ceremonial dance.

Photographs were taken during occasions of more spectacular public exhibition or display. Perhaps the best known example of this was the Windhoek Agricultural Show of 1935 (see figures 10 and 11), and here Omhedi was brought to the capital city. The Show was the grandest colonial fairs that took place in South West Africa/Namibia at that time. The inclusion of ‘native’ people provided a perfect comparison for progress and it legitimated South African Government’s colonial policies. This nationalist and colonial self-confirmation was to be accompanied by ethnological and anthropological education and a hierarchical placing of groups.

⁵⁴ Ibid, p 17 and Pinney, C. 1992 “The Parallel Histories of Anthropology and Photography”, in *Anthropology and Photography 1860 – 1920*, edited by Elizabeth Edwards (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), pp 74-95.



Fig. 11: *Diverse group of Ovambo representatives in their homestead ‘dubbed’ as Kwanyama photographed lined up.* Source: South West Africa and the Union of South Africa: The History of a mandate (1946). Photographer: Hahn?? Original caption: Preparing for the Tribal Dance.

As the commissioner of Native Affairs C.H.L. Hahn explained in his annual report, “it is the purpose of the show to make an extensive exhibit illustrative of the mode of life, native industries, and ethnic traits of as many of the native tribes as possible”.⁵⁵ A feature of the show was the reconstruction of ‘Ovambo life’ in which representatives of the different kingdoms lived together and, arrayed in traditional costumes, performed traditional crafts and customs. One of the ethnographic processes occurring at the show was the ‘typicalisation’ of a generic group through the co-presentation of diverse groups from the Owambo region, carrying with them and on themselves signs of this diversity, but displayed and photographed together as if one putative tribe⁵⁶ – dubbed ‘Ukwanyama kraal’. To that end, groups from all the principal tribes in the North were selected, in order to demonstrate how they conducted their domestic affairs, supposedly the same way as they did at home, and made and sold their products.

Oral histories narrate the preparations and the strenuous journey to Windhoek for the show as exciting, but it required a lot of things. People had to get poles, make huts and all the necessary materials needed for the construction of the homestead. It also brought insubordination and confusion afterwards, as participants came back with different ideas. Mrs. Julia Mbida says “When some women that went through *efundula* at the Windhoek show came back, they thought they were in reality initiated”.⁵⁷ Insubordination and confusion

⁵⁵ Authority of the Government of the Union of South Africa, *South West Africa and the Union of South Africa: The History of a mandate.* (New York: Manhattan Printing Company, 1946), p 72.

⁵⁶ Hartmann, W., Hayes, P., Silvester, J. “This ideal conquest’, p 17.

⁵⁷ Interview with Mrs. Julia Mbida, Odibo, 20.08.2008.

was caused by the fact that *efundula* was an initiation ceremony through which all young Owambo women were expected to pass and was a transition between girlhood and womanhood. Thus when a girl goes through the initiation she can now be claimed by a husband approved by her family after successfully completing all stages of *efundula*. Hence when some women came back from Windhoek, they thought they could get their husbands as they were initiated, not realising that the ceremony at the show was staged for the benefit of a colonial audience. Whereas Hahn had deliberately been blurring the line between reality and staged scene at Omhedi, these young women found themselves in a situation where they confused performance with actual ritual passage in Windhoek.

A striking feature of this show was that it was staged ethnography for purposes of colonial scientific research.⁵⁸ It is important here to analyse why there was that ‘typicalisation’ of a generic group (to call all people Kwanyama when they were not) and why Nehemia’s homestead at Omhedi was reproduced at the show. According to oral accounts, Nehemia’s homestead was a big, stockaded enclosure containing many huts and quarters for livestock and may have served as a trap for invaders (see fig. 12).⁵⁹ Inside the homestead, a broad space leads to the entrance: this is the ceremonial dancing place, the playground known as *oluvanda* where most events took place.



Fig: 12. Nehemia Shoovaleka’s homestead at Omhedi photographed at a slightly upper angle.

⁵⁸ Hartmann, W., Hayes, P., Silvester, J. “This ideal conquest’, p 18.

⁵⁹ Interview with Mrs, Foibe Shoovaleka, Omhedi, 23.06.2009. See also, Tonjes Herman, *Ovamboland: Country, People, Mission, with particular reference to the biggest tribe, the Kwanyama* - translated into English by Peter Reiner - (Windhoek, Namibia: Namibia Scientific Society, 1996).

Source: McGregor Museum. Photographer: A.M. Duggan-Cronin.

This homestead like all others has three entrances: the two front ones face east toward the sacred rising sun, one is for cattle and one for people; the third, actually an 'exit' beside the cattle enclosure, is used as an entrance only by the family and its personal friends. The homestead's family meeting place is called *olupale*. It contains a circle of stools and logs for seats, with special places for women and men. The homestead's head sits at the sacred fire facing the first wife's sleeping hut, which is built on the inside of the *olupale* or just outside its southeast end; to the south of her hut stands a large wooden rack full of sacred ox skulls and horns. The *olupale* is the family meeting place; there the wives (especially in a polygamous home) bring their daily cooking, which is then apportioned by their husband, the homestead head, for himself, his guests, servants, and herd boys, a portion being returned to each wife for herself and her children.

This description is provided here not only because many Owambo homesteads including the *ouhamba* at Omhedi are still constructed in the same manner although there are a few adaptations. This is especially the case with people who could afford to construct a full-size homestead, particularly polygamous or prominent members of society. But at the time of the agricultural show, to replicate such a complex homestead in an urban colonial site suggests the lengths to which Hahn would go to project his image of indirect rule. Let us examine some of the implications more closely.

Nehemia's homestead and the homogenisation of the Ovambo

A brief description of Nehemia's homestead is given to understand why it was taken as a standard homestead of the Ovambo at the Windhoek Agricultural Show. It was a big homestead, and not many homesteads at the time could be compared to it. Initially Omhedi belonged to Hamunyela ya Shikalakuti who was moved to Engela, so that King Mandume could go to Oihole where Ndjukuma was removed. After Ondjiva burnt down, King Mandume lived in *eexwelo* (the bush) for some time, while people were negotiating with Ndjukuma Shilengifa to make space for him at Oihole. Ndjukuma then moved from Oihole to

Omheddi where Hamunyela lived. After Ndjukuma died in 1934 at Omheddi, Nehemia took his place in 1935.⁶⁰

By the time the Windhoek Show took place in 1935, Nehemia had just moved in the house at Omheddi; he had not been staying in there for long, and the homestead was not that old. So, it is interesting that his homestead was used as a model for all homesteads in Ovambo.

Hartmann et.al writes, 'It is fascinating that the further away from Ovambo these ethnographic subjects were, the less heterogeneous they became'. Because although the group includes people who came from elsewhere, the homestead display at the show tends towards homogenisation.⁶¹ I believe this had to do with legitimising Nehemia as a 'chief' in Owambo, who was exemplary enough to represent all groups in Owambo. Is it doubtless too that Omheddi was a good template for a perceived cultural homogenisation as it had qualities that were desirable or distinguishing it as an Owambo homestead.

Hahn took many series of pictures of people making things. These too were meant to serve as scientific documents for colonial audiences, although some are wonderful images from an aesthetic point of view. Some are posed, in the sense that people are looking up, or holding still, for the camera, and in some instances whole scenes may have been set up. These pictures include images of men and women brewing beer, dancing, cooking, and pounding *mahangu* millet. He also took many series of photographs of dance, such as the ones involved in *efundula* (see fig. 13).



Fig. 13: Wedding (*efundula*) initiates in a line with the *omufukiki* in front.

⁶⁰ Interview with Mr. Kaupa ka Mwatotele, Efidilomulunga, Ongwediva 5.02.2009 and Mrs. Ndahafa Kakonda, Onuno 7.02.2009 and Mrs. Foibe Nehemia Shoovaleka, Omheddi, 23.06.2009.

⁶¹ Hartmann, W., Hayes, P., Silvester, J. "This ideal conquest", p 18.

Source: National Archives of Namibia, photo collection number 11784. Photographer: Hahn.

There were casual photographs of ‘natives’ and Europeans that were not meant as scientific documents e.g. the Oshikango photographs where ‘white’ people appear together with ‘natives’, but one can still see that ‘natives’ had their place on the margins.

Hayes maintains that, ‘Hahn’s photographs depicting the Ovambo people cut them off from any visible contact with white or colonial influences, representing them more as aesthetic objects characteristic of a traditional culture’.⁶²



Fig. 14: *Line of young Kwanyama girls carrying beer pots on their heads at a tribal gathering to give tribute to visitors of honour probably at Oshikango or Omhedi.*

Source: National Archives of Namibia, Photo collection number 00448. Photographer: Hahn.

His photographs by and large consist of lines of people, looking ordered and uniform (see fig. 15).

⁶²Hayes, P. ‘Cocky Hahn and the Black Venus’, p 367.



Fig: 15. *Beer and meat offerings by women in homestead, Ovamboland.*

Source: National Archives, courtesy of Basler Afrika Bibliographien, date: ca. 1930.

Referring to photographs taken in Kaoko, Miescher and Rizzo note that ‘the matter of arranging people on the picture is “in a line”, showing them both seated and standing, and therefore never participating in any kind of activity, primarily suggesting the existence of a clear administrative order’.⁶³ Hahn continued to draw out specific connections with the past, imbricating ‘tradition’ into the administrative and visual web of knowledge.⁶⁴ He also could therefore be trusted to be left to his own devices without outside interference.⁶⁵ In this way, Hahn served both his personal desire for control, and secured the impression that he was effectively carrying out his administrative and moral duties for the benefit of the Union of South Africa and its mandate.⁶⁶

It is evident in the photographs that there is formal composition, for example in the symmetry, and rigidity of some of the people’s stances (see fig.15). This formal demeanor was the result of a number of factors, including, of course, the awareness the subjects inevitably had of the camera. Hahn photographed the same people over and over again, some of them over a period of several years e.g. Nehemia and his wives. It appears that the representation of the Kwanyama (and others) that emerges in his photographs was the result

⁶³ Miescher, G. and Rizzo, L. ‘Popular Pictorial Constructions of Kaoko in the 20th Century’ in the book *New Notes on Kaoko: The Northern Kunene Region (Namibia) in Texts and Photographs*, edited by Giorgio Miescher and Dag Henrichsen (Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2000), p 18.

⁶⁴ Hayes, P, ‘Camera Africa’, p 51.

⁶⁵ Hayes, P. ‘Cocky Hahn and the Black Venus’, 367.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

of a dialogue between senior headmen in which the subjects had little or no input in determining the composition of the images. Martin Chanock maintains that Africans were agents in processes (such as this), not simply pawns or dominated subjects. He shows that customary law, far from being simply a colonial imposition, was fashioned by both colonial state and African interests.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, the authority of the white stranger with the camera is evident in many photographs. People look stiff, expressionless, and sometimes anxious. When Hahn photographed those he knew, the subjects had much more control over the images. A series of photographs of Nehemia Shoovaleka, with his numerous wives illustrates this point.

Photographs in the present

Photographs connect memories of our past to the present. This was evident in the interviews conducted on certain photographs by Hahn and Duggan-Cronin. The idea was to find out how the interviewees see colonial photographs taken at Omhedi or elsewhere in a postcolonial setting. This is to look at the way these photographs represent collective memory and historical knowledge as they are wrenched from an institution to the people, thus taking them out of their colonial context into a completely different context. As I have taken these photographs along on field trips to be analysed and discussed during oral interviews with informants, they were removed from whatever description or text that went with the original print and are re-circulated to a different audience. These photographs were taken from different archives, Duggan-Cronin's photographs from the McGregor Museum in Kimberley whilst Hahn's were taken from the National Archives of Namibia and the Basler Afrika Bibliographien in Basel, Switzerland. Some of these photographs had captions which plainly reduced individuals to representatives of a colonially defined category, but have now acquired new meanings and are interpreted differently. Normally photographs have a caption or a title attached to them. Duggan-Cronin and Hahn's photographs always had text or captions adjacent to them so that they spoke for the image. Even though the photographs under study were viewed with no actual text or caption, stories about them were rife as they are embedded with meanings that are read by a viewer.

⁶⁷ See Chanock, M. *Law, Custom and Social Order: The colonial experience in Malawi and Zambia* (Portsmouth: NH Heinemann, 1998), pp 67, 223-4, 237.

A photograph is described by Victor Burgin as a place of work, structured and structuring space within which the reader deploys, and is deployed by, what codes he or she is familiar with in order to make sense.⁶⁸ Interviewees like Foibe Shoovaleka and others could recognise familiar objects in the photographs such as granaries, *omhatela* headdress, *eenyoka* eggshell necklaces, that actually mean something to them. However, this was not intended by the colonial photographer at that time, as they were only meant for preservation purposes which were not really for real, as their aim was to justify their colonial policies. But photographs always escape their boundaries. The depiction of artifacts in the photographs then was to convey a rounded, though obviously selective image of native life and objects that are associated with the people. When interviewees looked at the photographs, several reactions became obvious. Identification and recognition of people, places and objects in the photographs were most apparent, and this opened up a whole narrative or relation of the process of making the photographs.

Of interest here is the discovery that people do not see these photographs as a colonial construction; they look at them appreciatively, almost with pride. Photographs that were produced with colonial connotations of objectification aroused different feelings from the ones that were previously intended to. Most interviewees had never seen photographs such as the ones I showed them, seeing that the state had the power to control how and where such photographs were seen. Taking the photographs from the archives to the field allowed them to speak back from the past in a non-objectified or non-colonial way. The interviewees got really excited as they told of different types of clothing women and men used to wear and how certain clothing represented status and age. The different hairstyles and beads that make up many of the necklaces were of most interest to the interviewees as they reminisced about many things that are really hard to acquire now.⁶⁹ They are now instead the picturesque products of ingenuity, and more significantly, the tokens of a former order. Furthermore, a certain cultural group in the north, headed by one of the interviewees I talked to, says that they are reconstructing some of the 'traditional' clothing for their performances by looking at similar colonial photographs.⁷⁰ This is exactly the production and reproduction of 'fixed tradition', which is made 'living' by referring to these photographs. I believe that people want

⁶⁸ Burgin, V. 'Looking at Photographs' in (eds) *Thinking Photography – Communications and Culture* (Humanities Press Intl, 2nd edition 1982), p 153.

⁶⁹ Oral interviews with Mr. Lucas Shinedima Onuno, 2.08.2008 and 23.06.2009, Mrs. Ndahafa Kakonda, Omalyata and Onuno, 24.11.2008 and 7.02.2009; Mr. Kaupa ka Mwatotele, Efidilomulunga, Ongwediva 5.02.2009, Mrs. Foibe Shoovaleka, Omhedi 4.02.2009, Mr. Vatilifa Hangula, Okelemba 4.02.2009.

⁷⁰ Oral interview with Mrs. Ndahafa ya Kakonda, Onuno 7.02.2009.

to reconstruct the past by making similar clothing that their ancestors used to wear as they consider them more 'traditional' and not influenced by European styles. This suggests that photographs really escape the original constraints of their production. But the question remains as to what would happen when these photographs are put in postcolonial museum at Omhedi.

Conclusion

In the 1930s Duggan-Cronin's and Hahn's photographs participate in pinpointing and at times manipulating Kwanyama performance and displays – this is evident in their attempts to photograph these people in traditional costumes whenever possible. For Hahn, in particular, the visual representation of traditional forms of native cultures, as they had existed in the recent past, involved re-creations or restaging, including individuals dressing up in traditional costume to legitimise the administration's control. I believe that for Nehemia and the many men and women who were photographed, the donning of costumes and the rehearsal of tribal beliefs and practices through oral testimony and physical re-enactment constituted a use of tradition to legitimise a contemporaneous project of social, economic, and authoritative survival. This is not to say that tradition served only such a strategic function, as both for the people and for Nehemia's counterparts (the headmen), the margin between 'invented' and 'lived' tradition was no doubt a fluid one, if it was experienced as real at all. The decline of 'custom' inevitably changes the 'tradition' with which it is habitually intertwined. Native Ovambo cultures, like numerous others all over southern Africa, experienced a dramatic and often violent change of both custom and tradition in the colonial period. The colonial administration later took opportunities for the continued use of their photographs, which supposedly conveyed Kwanyama 'traditions', as they emerged during the 1930s and later.

Hahn and Duggan-Cronin's photographs can take the viewer well beyond a revelation of dominant white attitudes toward race and culture at the turn of the century; the photographs are mute witnesses that nevertheless can be made to speak in unexpected ways. The subjects themselves were portrayed in a manner at once dispassionate, detached, and impersonal. In that lay the claim to the objectivity of the image. The process of taking photographs in the opening period of the century is significant. 'Cocky' Hahn wanted photography to give the viewers a sense of being there, and he wanted the images to capture, as closely as possible, the theatrical enactment as he and others had imagined it. He seemed to see the act of

photographing as an act of capturing, subduing the subject although not as conquest. But rather as the establishment of a moment of trust or obedience in which the subject would forget his innate fear of the camera or the photographer and collaborators in the production of an image. I argue that this was the difference between Duggan-Cronin's and Hahn's agendas as the former just concentrated in recording and aestheticizing whilst the latter had more scope to preserve and regenerate tradition.

I conclude that it was centrally important to a colonial administration that the environment was tame and safe (tribal), but it was presented as remote and wild. The landscape was recreated as backward, and spectacular events (e.g. *efundula* and *oshidano* etc) organised there enabled fusions and exchanges with Ovambo traditions. Hahn, and to some extent Duggan-Cronin, felt the landscape needed to be manipulated to 'excite the wonder of the onlooker' and to maintain its 'primitive charm'. The festivities surrounding the *efundula* or the tribal meetings that took place at Oshikango⁷¹ and Omhedi respectively were also revealing of the way in which colonial culture selectively accommodated aspects of Kwanyama tradition or how tradition shaped colonial culture. Nicholas Thomas advocates that an 'anthropology' of colonialism should be attuned to the localisation of colonial projects and narratives. By a 'project' he means neither a 'culture' nor a strictly demarcated 'period' but instead a 'socially transformative endeavour that is localized, politicized and partial, yet also engendered by longer historical developments and ways of narrating them',⁷² meaning, Omhedi and Oshikango were spaces where 'cultures' were assembled and reassembled in the wake of indirect rule.

⁷¹ I mention Oshikango here because it was the official place of South African Administration in Oukwanyama, where general administrative matters were discussed. However, massive gatherings like the 'Tribal' Meeting of 1936 with the Union's Administrator were held at Oshikango. The office of the Assistant Native Commissioner was also situated there. Omhedi was the centre of everything 'traditional' or cultural and also served as a place where hearings and appeals to regulate the general Kwanyama 'tribal' affairs were discussed.

⁷² Thomas, N. *Colonialism's Culture Anthropology, Travel and Government*. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), p 105.

Chapter 4

The Economics of Women and Cattle at Omhedi

Introduction

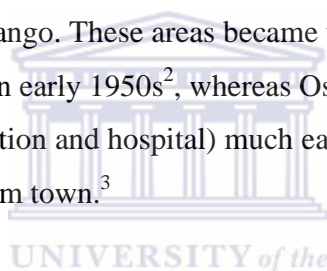
Photographs highlight certain things such as the empirical contrast between the invisibility of Ovambo women in most colonial documentation and their consistent visibility in colonial photographs of the period. This chapter continues certain themes from the previous chapter and the legitimation of existing social structures through photography and projections of timeless tradition with polygamy an important subject matter of the photographic activities at Omhedi. This chapter analyses the productive and symbolic aspects of polygamy and pastoralism in Oukwanyama and Omhedi. It examines the labour of women and production by looking at related colonial texts on polygamy, and by studying genealogies of Nehemia Shoovaleka's numerous wives at Omhedi and elsewhere in Oukwanyama. This is because women's productive work and the symbolic features surrounding them were re-enacted and displayed in the photographs taken at Omhedi. Thus, this chapter explores the role of women in the construction of tradition at Omhedi and how they were represented by the colonial administration. Omhedi was an ideal place through which indirect rule was effected and as such, the preservation of certain customs and aspects of culture (such as polygyny) was required. Indirect rule provided ideological procedures by which the cultural space and practices of the Kwanyama were observed, imagined, and also disrupted.

This chapter offers a critique of these colonial texts on polygamy and the influence of missionaries on the Kwanyama way of life that embodies a series of assumptions about them. The Native Commissioner Carl Hugo 'Cocky' Hahn and South African colonial policy supported polygamy as a healthy 'tribal' tradition. Missionaries however objected to it as 'heathen' and promoted notions of monogamy instead, which for them was seen as the highest accomplishment of a successful conversion. In general, Kwanyama and other men made an effort to increase their property and standing, shown through the number of wives and the number of heads of cattle. An example of this is demonstrated

by senior headman Nehemia Shoovaleka and other important headmen who had numerous wives and were thus considered wealthy.

According to oral testimonies, Nehemia had eighteen wives, some of whom were from well-known or prominent family backgrounds¹ and were at the centre of the ethnographic construction of Omhedi. I want to use polygamy as a lens to look at further issues for instance missionary influence and the Christianization of Kwanyama people as they offer an unprecedented means to historicize other issues. These could be the growth and shrinking of Omhedi during the pre-colonial kingship and later under colonial control as it can be big and prosperous at one time but can also be empty and abandoned upon the owner's death. Taking into consideration the issue of tradition, Omhedi remains a small society given the fact that it is not included in any of the close municipal areas i.e.

Engela, Ohangwena and Oshikango. These areas became urbanized at different times, Ohangwena being established in early 1950s², whereas Oshikango and Engela (the latter originally a Finnish mission station and hospital) much earlier. Oshikango currently has developed into a sprawling boom town.³



The other significant aspect of production here is cattle. Cattle represented to the Ovambos a resource of enormous social and cultural significance. Their distribution played a central role in relations between chiefs and commoners and was a fundamental feature of wealth. For that reason, this chapter will look at the analysis of social and class formations in Ovamboland, which is linked to the loss of cattle and consequently to stratification and impoverishment, to show how these relate to polygamy at Omhedi and Oukwanyama more generally. It will also look at the migrant labour analyses focusing on the complex process of impoverishment or pauperization and the response to it. This is because one of the most crucial initiatives of Indirect Rule in Ovambo was to encourage and develop the efficient supply of migrant labour to what was then referred to as the

¹ Interview with Foibe Shoovaleka, Omhedi, 04.2.2009, Hangula Vatilifa, Okelemba, 04.2.2009.

² Interview with Hinananye Nehova, Windhoek, 30.1.2009.

³ See Dobler, G. 'Oshikango: The Dynamics of Growth and Regulation in a Namibian Boom Town' in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Volume 35, Issue 1, March 2009, pp 115 – 131.

Police Zone. However, according to Hayes, it is important to note the contradictions that ensued as although the colonial administration's main objective was to increase the rate of migrant labour, later the emphasis fell on tightening its systematization.⁴ The administration wanted Owambo men as raw labour for the Police Zone, yet they controlled their mobility and term of employment to supposedly prevent 'detrimental'.

Polygamy: A Brief Outline of issues

Polygamy is defined as a practice where a person is married to more than one spouse at the same time, as opposed to monogamy, where a person has only one spouse at a time.⁵ Moreover, polygyny is a form of polygamy in which a man is permitted more than one wife. This allows a man to have many children, providing him with a broader productive base, as he controls the labour of his wives and children to a large extent.⁶ Frequency of polygamous marriage, for example, varies according to whether men marry additional wives in order to enhance their resources, or as symbols of wealth.⁷ As in most agricultural African societies in the past, polygyny in Oukwanyama was widely practiced between 1845-1915.⁸ Usually rich or powerful men married several wives and consequently fathered many children. This served as a marker of wealth as by having a large number of children in a society where human labor is essential, a large number of children could mean more economic gain and prosperity to the family depending on whether they are boys or girls and if descent is matrilineal or patrilineal.

According to Hahn's discourse, he argued that, "A man's status is generally in proportion to the number of his wives, his fields being consequently larger and his beer more plentiful. His actual riches are, however, gauged by the size of his granary and the extent

⁴ Hayes, 'The Famine of the Dams: Gender, Labour and politics in colonial Ovamboland, 1929-30' in Hayes, P., Wallace, M, Silvester, J. and Hartmann, W. (eds) *Namibia under South African rule: Mobility and Containment, 1915-46* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1998), p 124.

⁵ Kocktvedgaard Zeitzen, M. *Polygamy A Cross-cultural Analysis* (Oxford and New York: Berg Editorial Offices, 2008), p3.

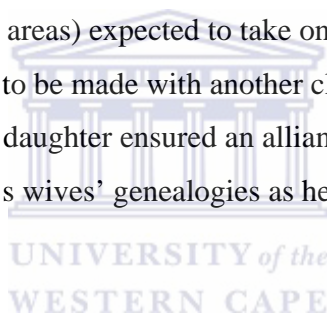
⁶ Ibid, p 9.

⁷ Ibid, p 49.

⁸ Clarence-Smith, W.G. and Moorsom, R. 'Underdevelopment and Class Formations in Ovamboland, 1845-1915', in *Journal of African History*, XVI, 3 (1975), p 365-381.

of his herds”.⁹ Clearly, the number of wives a man takes will depend on his wealth, and the number of wives is therefore, always a fairly accurate indication of how much property he possesses. This was because cultivating the garden required extensive labour, and it was the women who did most of the work.

Generally, through polygyny, men attained their dominant position by having control over the means of production as well as reproduction, giving them added legitimacy. For that reason, the demand for wives thus derives in large measure from the demand for children, the perceived advantages of which include prestige, old-age security, and heirs. This was most common in rural Africa where societies tend to be those which rely on human labor as a means of production. In the 19th century (or even earlier), polygamy was also a means of creating political alliances in many societies in Africa. For example, a chief was (and still is in some areas) expected to take on many wives, as each wife represented a potential alliance to be made with another clan – family – even ‘tribe’. Marrying a relative or a chief’s daughter ensured an alliance with that clan. This is also evident in the case of Nehemia’s wives’ genealogies as he married women from prominent family backgrounds.



However, with the Kwanyama, marriage did not establish or determine any relations, as a man was not a relation of the woman whom he married, nor was he a relation of his children. The children always remained the ‘property’ of the woman’s kin in cases of matrilineal descent.¹⁰ While residence was patrilocal, matriliney informed such practices as inheritance.¹¹ Inheritance of all movable property, including cattle and grain, followed the matrilineal line, and the clan elder arranged the distribution of the estates of deceased members.¹² Bride wealth was not so important in Oukwanyama as in patrilineal societies;

⁹ Hahn, C.H.L. “Preliminary Notes on certain customs of the Ovambo”, *Journal of the South West Africa Scientific Society* Vol. III 1927-28, Windhoek, S.W.A. 1929, p 24.

¹⁰ Tonjes, Herman, *Ovamboland: Country, People, Mission, with particular reference to the biggest tribe, the Kwanyama* - translated into English by Peter Reiner - (Windhoek, Namibia: Namibia Scientific Society, 1996), p 123-4.

¹¹ Hayes, P, ‘A History of the Owambo of Namibia, 1880-1930’ (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 1992), p 40.

¹² Kreike, E, *Recreating Eden: Agro-ecological change, food security and environment diversity in southern Angola and northern Namibia, 1890-1960* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2004), p 115.

it was a gesture, symbolic rather than substantial.¹³ Consequently, wives obtained divorces frequently and easily; and the children belonged to their mother and if she left her husband she took them with her.

As Kreike suggests, until the late 1920s in Oukwanyama, the bridegroom paid the bride wealth to the mother of the bride.¹⁴ Although bride wealth in Oukwanyama was and is still not commercialized as in other societies in southern Africa, the bridegroom is required to make a substantial present, which comprises a number of iron hoes, and an ox. If a woman divorces, the relatives allegedly were required to return the bride wealth, subject to an elaborate set of conditions that highlighted the importance of agriculture: if the wife had not yet cultivated the fields, the bride's relatives returned the hoes to her husband. If she was not pregnant, they returned the ox.¹⁵

In works dealing with patrilineal societies, Diana Jeater's analysis of marriages in southern Rhodesia points out that marriage was not simply a case of women being transferred between men as part of a process of extracting surplus labour, but was rather a transfer of control over women's reproductive capacities, in which both women and men might obtain an interest by investing bride wealth.¹⁶ Here, the labour aspect relates to Oukwanyama because although it is matrilineal, it was patrilocal, therefore women and children stayed and worked for the husband. However, the exploitation of women because of bride wealth does not apply to the northern Namibian case because they are matrilineal, although wives provided labour to their husbands. As Kocktvedgaard Zeitzen argues, "such gender dichotomies providing institutionalized differences between men and women are found in many cultures and lend themselves eminently to legitimizing polygyny".¹⁷ She further posits that "the gender dimension of polygamy hence not only involves the relations between the sexes, but also very much concerns the relations

¹³ See Loeb E. M. *In Feudal Africa* (Indiana University, 1962), p 315.

¹⁴ Kreike, E, *Re-Creating Eden*, p 115.

¹⁵ Kreike, E, *Re-Creating Eden*, p 115.

¹⁶ Jeater, D. *Marriage, Perversion, and Power: The Construction of Moral Discourse in Southern Rhodesia 1894-1930* (Oxford University Press, 1993), p 11.

¹⁷ Kocktvedgaard Zeitzen, M. *Polygamy A Cross-cultural Analysis*, p 126.

between members of the same sex”.¹⁸ This implies that there are unequal relations between men and women based on a man’s ability to marry several wives while women can only marry one man. Polygyny in most cases also increased conflicts either between men with many wives and those without wives, or between the wives, as the latter will be discussed in the course of this chapter when dealing with relations between Nehemia’s co-wives.

With the encroachment of indirect rule in Oukwanyama, it is important to problematize the relationship between polygamy and the colonial administration’s reaction to it. This is because colonial administrative policies at this time supported the preservation of native customs and supported polygamy as a healthy ‘tribal’ practice. Leroy Vail et.al argue that the work of missionaries, anthropologists and colonial officials in alliances with the African intellectuals, worked in tandem in the construction of ‘tribal’ or ethnic identities. However, this argument does not quite work with the Ovakwanyama case as the construction of Kwanyama ‘ethnicity’ was not exactly a joint undertaking between colonial officials, missionaries and the African ruling groups (in this case headmen) as the authors are arguing, because there were conflicts/clashes between headmen, colonial officials and missionaries regarding what is considered ‘tribal’ or ethnic, particularly in the case of polygyny (as examined in this chapter).¹⁹ This raised elaborate debates around the monogamous versus the polygynous family unit. The administration’s support for polygyny caused serious rifts with the missions. An elaborate anti-Christian discourse on monogamy as the cause of low food production and poor housing was compiled by the Native Commissioner ‘Cocky’ Hahn, in the 1930s as will be discussed in the course of the chapter.²⁰

From early on, missionaries focused on women in polygynous marriages, whom they saw as powerless victims of an oppressive and heathen African tradition. Missionaries have

¹⁸Ibid p126. See also Allman, J., Geiger, S. and Musisi, N. *Women in African Colonial Histories*, (Indiana University Press, 2002) on issues of gender dichotomies.

¹⁹ I am aware of the discussions on how ‘tribalism’ was created in southern Africa, see Leroy Vail’s book *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa* (James Currey, London, 1989). More recent work had begun to reconsider debates on the creation of tribalism in Africa, resulting from many scholarly work done on the Rwandan Genocide of 1994.

²⁰ See Hayes P. ‘Famine of the Dams’, p 136.

been trying to remove polygyny from the marital repertoire for over a century, making monogamy a prerequisite for baptism and acceptance into the Christian Church.²¹ Although polygyny was officially discouraged in all of colonial Africa, the discouragement was rarely reinforced by any sanctions of laws against polygynists. European legal principles and procedures never displaced customary law in matters of marriage, though the two sets of laws were often modified as legislators and traditional leaders attempted to adapt them to each other.

Similarly to the Native Affairs in South West Africa/Namibia, the Native Affairs Department in Southern Rhodesia also maintained polygyny as they did not want to challenge it or the payment of bride wealth, despite the fact that both were seen as evidence of perversion by other settlers with different interpretations of African 'immorality'.²² It is important to examine why this was the case. The native administration in Southern Rhodesia argued that bride wealth and polygyny were interpreted as legitimate 'native law'.²³ Jeater argues that, "...while the Administration saw what it interpreted as prostitution and child sex as the most damaging perversions in the African community, the missionaries granted the same status to polygyny, which the Administration refused to see as a perversion at all."²⁴

Their positions were not only different, but actually in conflict. Yet both were able to present their case as embodying the fundamental and eternal values of morality and civilization".²⁴ She maintains, "Thus despite intense mission pressure, no moves were taken to limit or prohibit polygyny. This was not only because the Administration did not want to make a direct attack on the power-base of African leaders at a time when 'native policy' was dependent on maintaining their authority. It was also because the Administration felt that polygyny might actually be a good thing under present conditions".²⁵ The latter point and Cocky Hahn's anti-Christian discourse on monogamy and support for polygyny are in many ways similar, although Hahn's stance is a more

²¹ Koltvedgaard Zeitzén, M. *Polygamy A Cross-cultural Analysis*, p 137.

²² Jeater, D. *Marriage, Perversion, and Power*, p 55.

²³ Ibid, p 56.

²⁴ Ibid, p 63.

²⁵ Ibid, p 74.

extreme version of this Rhodesian case, as will be shown in an analysis of his texts on polygamy in Ovambo.

‘Cocky’ Hahn on Polygamy

Colonial discourses on polygyny in northern Namibia offer new and fresh views on production and how it relates to polygamy and matriliney. I begin here with reconstructing the contradictory reasoning used by ‘Cocky’ Hahn in supporting the institution of polygamy, criticizing the mission for practically destroying the good social and economic order in Ovambo. He states the following:

The Ovambo are mainly dependent for sustenance on agriculture. The staple food is millet which they call “*omahangu*”. The production of this grain entails much hard work and the size of a man’s field is determined by the number of wives he has. A heathen with several wives usually has a fairly large kraal with a correspondingly large cornfield. In such a kraal are usually to be found not only the man, his wives and children but also several young men and girls who repay hospitality by performing certain tasks. The girls do corn pounding, cultivation, and other women’s work whilst the young men busy themselves with the cattle, making of corn baskets, repairing the kraal, fetching poles and other man’s work. Should such a kraal-head embrace Christianity and become baptized all the young men and girls return to their families. The man’s wives do likewise with their children and he is left alone. If he wishes to marry one of these wives by church rites he cannot do so until she also is baptized. The compact and self-supporting entity is now broken up and the man is reduced to the one-wife status. He can no longer cultivate his large field, nor keep his large kraal in repair. The result is that his wife cultivates a small part of the corn-field and he uses the now disused parts of the kraal to repair and keep habitable the small section now occupied by him and his wife. Eventually the poles rot with the passing of time and he, being alone, cannot fetch new ones, so he uses corn stalks and bushes and his kraal develops into an eyesore. Existence which was once a happy affair, well organized and disciplined with plenty of willing hands to assist, now becomes drudgery.²⁶

²⁶ NAN NAO 20, Monthly and Annual Report File 11/1, Vol. 10, 1937, pp 13 -21.

It is important to examine this colonial discourse and the visual metaphor sketched by “Cocky” Hahn concerning the dilapidated kraals that develop into an ‘eyesore’ due to the Christianization of natives. To Hahn, dilapidated monogamous kraals are an ‘eyesore’, whereas bigger and more substantial polygamous kraals are the beauty of Indirect Rule. For purposes of indirect rule, the ‘landscape’ needs to be beautiful with well built kraals constructed with wooden poles instead of corn stalks and bushes which make the kraal an ‘eyesore’. Within polygamous societies like this one, multiple wives are typically status symbols denoting wealth and power for the husband. It signals that he has the resources to build up a large household and maintain it. This places him in an elite group within societies where most men can only afford to establish and maintain a monogamous household.

In such a society, the larger size of polygynists’ families and households, and the labour force they contain, demonstrates their social status, as well as providing a large productive basis through which to generate more wealth.²⁷ Large families brought a man pride and small families brought him shame. Small families were symbols of poverty. The political and economic foundations of polygamy thus come together and express themselves in the prestige and status that polygamy confers on its practitioners.²⁸ For that reason, Hahn’s photographs of Nehemia’s well built and immense polygamous homestead with his many wives highlight issues about the scale of polygamy and the ‘beauty’ of the cultivated native landscape.

Tension between visibility and invisibility is also highlighted because the scale of polygamy at Omhedi is only made visible in the photographs but its significance and relationship to Indirect Rule is not so evident in the texts in the archives. Hahn’s photographs show Omhedi as a place locked into a ‘traditional’ paradigm and thus complements other archives where this is less visible. This is emphasized by Hayes in her article about landscape photographs of Kaoko stating, “If we take photographs of landscape to represent the ‘dreamworks’ of colonialism, they suggest some of the

²⁷ Koptvedgaard Zeitzen, Miriam *Polygamy A Cross-cultural Analysis*, p53.

²⁸ Ibid, p54.

overlooked aesthetics and imaginary dimensions to the occupation of a frontier space”. She maintains, “...they give us access to an ‘affective tone’, where Hahn chooses and frames a series of ‘African’ signs through the lens to produce aesthetics of his administrative presence in Kaoko”.²⁹ I use this argument because Hahn applied similar administrative aesthetics on the landscape at Omhedi by keeping it in a ‘traditional’ paradigm although the area saw rapid social changes with Christianization and labour migration which caused friction between younger people and the ‘traditional’ authorities in place.³⁰

This is obvious in Hahn’s monthly report when he states: “There is no doubt that the Ovambos are fast abandoning native customs and adopting those of Europeans. Youths and young men leave the country for the labour centres as raw savages and after a year or more amongst Europeans return to their homes as ‘civilized’ members of the tribe”.³¹ Koktvedgaard Zeitzen also stresses this issue generally by stating; “The increasing urbanization of Africa, which develops in tandem with industrialization, has generally meant a reduction in polygamous marriages.”³² This was Hahn’s fear as he thought that if a tribal area like Oukwanyama and all Owambo were generally become corrupted by “civilized” and urbanized services, it will lose all its tribal customs and become an ‘eyesore’. His photographs taken at this ‘traditional’ landscape were the beauty of indirect rule, as they had both administrative and aesthetic value.

Going back to Hahn’s discourse on the significance of polygamy, he continues:

It is quite obvious that an organized native kraal, in which the head of the kraal has several wives, produces more food and necessities of life than that of a Christian with his single wife. The more wives a kraal head has the higher his status and bigger his authority. When the planting season approaches and the arduous cultivation of fields commences, the kraal head organizes working parties consisting of his wives, their children, members of their different *epatas* and friends living in surrounding kraals. Beer and food is provided to these workers and the work is

²⁹ Hayes, P, ‘Camera Africa: Indirect Rule and Landscape Photographs of Kaoko’, 1943 in *New Notes on Kaoko: The Northern Kunene Region (Namibia) in Texts and Photographs*, edited by Miescher, G. and Henrichsen, D. (Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2000), p 56.

³⁰ Hayes, P. ‘Camera Africa: Indirect Rule’, p 57.

³¹ NAN NAO 19, Monthly and Annual Report File 11/1, Vol. 4, 1931, p 20.

³² Koktvedgaard Zeitzen, M. *Polygamy A Cross-cultural Analysis*, p 151.

tackled with a will and soon disposed of. When this kraal-head's field is cultivated the workers proceed to the next kraal where similar provision has been made, and so on until all the fields of the participants have been disposed of. By this pooling of tribal resources work is made easy and with the subsequent feasting this sort of labour becomes an attractive undertaking. The heathen, when his children reach the age of usefulness, has them to rely on for the performance of many tasks, as he has them at the kraal all the time and they are usefully employed. The Christian, on the other hand, must send his children to school or incur censure on the part of his spiritual leaders. He thus loses their services for the greater part of the day. Then also, besides, the regular Sunday services there are innumerable church holidays and mission holidays which have to be observed. The seasons advance inexorably and any time taken up with religious observances means a smaller production, tasks left undone and a general deterioration of the standard of the kraal and the tribal organization surrounding it. The last two famines proved conclusively that the Christian kraals were the first to be affected and most of the bigger heathen kraals needed no assistance at all. From this it is apparent that a native by adopting Christianity with its consequent monogamy reduces his status. He becomes a weak link in the all-important organization of food production. It is futile for the missions to argue against these facts. Our observations show that as already stated, in times of drought it is the Christian Ovambo who requires assistance long before those who adhere to tribal life. It has been stated by missionaries that there are not sufficient women in the country to provide more than one wife for each man. To this I would reply that our last census revealed that over the whole country there were 30, 000 women as against 20 000 men (counting men and women of marriageable age). As the women are a definite asset, being the chief food producer, there is naturally an inclination on the part of thrifty and enterprising natives to acquire as many wives as possible. In Ovamboland, therefore, Christianity operates against the native economically. It should, however, not be forgotten that the Missions do bring benefits to the native, apart from purely spiritual ones. The mission does bring enlightenment to the native and the missionaries attempt to improve his standard of living. Unfortunately the wrong methods are too often applied. It is sought to impose a European standard on a primitive people in a country where the opportunities for earning the necessary money to maintain such a standard are practically non-existent.³³

Throughout Hahn's discourse, it is evident that he saw the missionaries' influence as a great evil to the progress of a native, socially and economically. He is not just proposing that polygamy is good because it was administratively convenient; he supports its contribution to labour and food availability during the 1913-14 and 1929-30 famines. It is commonly argued that polygynous marriage systems are related to the sexual division of

³³ NAN NAO 20, Monthly and Annual Report File 11/1, Vol. 10, 1937, pp 13 -21.

labour and to the economic value of women as producers for the household. Ester Boserup in dealing with polygamy in economic terms identified a relationship between polygamy, economics and women's position. She argued that agricultural societies dominated by hoe farming demand labour power as their main productive input, giving men a directly beneficial reason to accumulate more wives, and hence father more children, in order to utilize them as a work force in their fields.³⁴ Women were therefore valuable as producers as well as reproducers, and polygamy is regarded as a profitable institution in the rural economy. In most rural African systems, more wives mean more social and economic power, for a man may increase his wealth through securing the productive and reproductive capacities of more women.³⁵

Hahn also argues that the missionaries' promotion of monogamy results in losses of labour for Christianized homesteads as their children attend school and are away for the greater part of the day. Also, more time is taken up by the regular Sunday services and the numerous church holidays and mission holidays which have to be observed. This had negative costs, as any time taken up with religious activities means a smaller production of food. Consequently, Christian kraals were the first to be hit by famines as they did not produce enough to last them longer anymore. What is interesting here is the fact that women are considered as commodities, "definite assets", being the chief food producer, men were inclined to acquire as many wives as possible. Equally, Hahn shares the same argument that an additional wife means an additional economical asset and a man's standing is largely based on the number of wives he can afford to keep.³⁶ In a sense, Hahn himself was reasoning as an African man.

Nehemia's polygynous 'kraal'.

As indicated earlier, within polygynous societies, multiple wives are typically status symbols denoting wealth and power for the husband. Oral informants state that it was

³⁴ Boserup, E. *Woman's Role in Economic Development*, (London: Earthscan Publications Ltd, 1970), p 37.

³⁵ Koptvedgaard Zeitzén, M. *Polygamy A Cross-cultural Analysis*, p58.

³⁶ NAN NAO 19, Monthly and Annual Report File 11/1, Vol. 4, 1931, p 20.

also common among the Kwanyama, to marry as many wives as possible so that they could bear many children, tend the fields, take care of things around the homestead by which wealth was measured in the society.³⁷ Wealth in the form of numerous cattle, plenty of *omahangu* millet, many children reflected tremendous prestige on a man and could form the basis of his power.³⁸ Senior headman Nehemia Shoovaleka and other important headmen had many wives and they were considered wealthy. In earlier periods, according to Carlos Estermann,³⁹ “for every wife a man takes home, he has to build a little complex of huts called *epata* kitchen, one to serve as a bedroom, one as a storeroom, and one a shed under which to put the granaries where grain is stored”.⁴⁰ He maintains, “The first wife is called *omwalikadi wok’elombe*, the second wife has the name *wok’ehaka*, and the third *wok’okati keumbo* (‘the woman in the middle of the *eumbo*’).”⁴¹ Oral testimonies state that many of Nehemia’s wives were from well-known or prominent family backgrounds. He married women from the royal lineages. Some of his wives were: Kasheno Haixwema ya Haulongo whose father was a headman from Omahenge in Ondonga; Mweeteleni Ndeunyema, daughter of headman Ndeunyema of Onekwaya East; Nghuushoshela wa Haufiku ka Kasheeta was a headman for Onekwaya;

³⁷ Interview with Nghiyolo Olivia Naikuva, Onekwaya East, 24.6.2009.

³⁸ Ibid. Take note of the oral practices indicative of the possibility that the past and present may become indistinguishable giving a timeless quality to the account.

³⁹ According to Gibson, Father Carlos Estermann was born October 26, 1895, at Illfurth near Altkirch in Alsace. At a young age, he decided upon a life as a missionary. In 1922 he was ordained as a priest, and the following year completed his studies for missionary work. Estermann had spent thirty-six years in Angola as a missionary and researcher, and had published, in Portuguese, French and German, a series of ethnological papers on various cultures which range from topics such as complex ceremonies, religious concepts, magical practices, native medicine and puberty rites to the historical origins of the certain ‘tribes’. His close knowledge of the Kwanyama effects from the fact that he has worked among the Ovambo during the early period of his long career as a missionary and among the Nyaneka during a later stage. The Ovambo Catholic Mission, to which Carlos Estermann was assigned, had been first established by Fr. Charles Duparquet in 1882 among the Kwanyama. The Kwanyama lay in an area only brought under Portuguese military control in 1909, and was very isolated. He worked among the Ovambo during the early period of his long career as a missionary and among the Nyaneka during a later stage. It was through his knowledge of several of the local Bantu languages, that he detailed descriptions of economic, family, social, and religious life based on his observations. Estermann’s speculations as to the significance of historical, ecological, economic and psychological factors are based upon familiarity with a variety of Angolan cultures. His knowledge of Oshikwanyama especially, aroused his interest and enabled him to record some of the folktales, songs, proverbs and riddles which he heard told at night by the Christianized Kwanyama men who accompanied him on his travels. He had a camera in connection with his fieldwork since 1940 and most photographs accompany his texts. See Estermann, C. edited by Gibson, G. D. *The Ethnography of Southwestern Angola: The Non-Bantu Peoples, The Ambo Ethnic Group* (Africana Publishing Company, 1976).

⁴⁰ Estermann, C. edited by Gibson, G. D. *The Ethnography of Southwestern Angola*, p 60.

⁴¹ Ibid, p 60.

Djeiko ya Nghishiiko was also a daughter of a headman; Namukokola lived with Ndapona ya Shikende (king Mandume ya Ndemufayo's mother) and Nanyemba ya Mweshipandeka's daughter who was a younger sister to Reverend Vilho Kaulinge.⁴²

These are all daughters of prominent men in Oukwanyama, who were either descendants of past kings or headmen that served with king Mandume ya Ndemufayo, Nande or Weyulu. Nehemia's wives were many but only a few are mentioned to emphasize the point that he used to marry women from well-known families because that symbolized status – it was a way of marrying within one's own 'class' or attaining upward mobility in Nehemia's case because he was not from the royal family as such. Nehemia was born at *Oluxwa laKalunga* near Ohameke in 1896. As mentioned earlier, he went to school at Namakunde, where he learnt to communicate and write in English. He was promoted as an interpreter for the Kwanyama council of headmen at Oshikango and later became senior headman at Omhedi.

As indicated earlier, polygamy is considered to be produced by diverse strategies under a range of different conditions and comprising different systems of meaning and function. In considering Nehemia's polygamous marriages to prominent men's daughters, I believe his marriages also served a political function (besides status and prestige) by cementing coalitions with other prominent matrilineal families through marriage. As Kocktvedgaard Zeitzen states "Affines gained through polygamy may be directly useful as when a local chief marries the daughter of another local powerful man, and thus can count on his allegiance in the fight against common enemies, or in business dealings. Or it may be more diffuse as when a king is required to marry a woman from each local area of his kingdom in order to create symbolic, but politically important, allegiances all over his realm".⁴³ Thus, it was women who solidified kinship alliances through their marriages.

It is important here to compare Nehemia's polygamous household to other households in terms of prosperity and good relationships that his wives shared with each other. This is

⁴² Interview with Foibe Shoovaleka, Omhedi 04.2.2009; Ndationanwa Nehemia, Odibo, 25.6.2009.

⁴³ Kocktvedgaard Zeitzen, M. *Polygamy A Cross-cultural Analysis*, p 151.

because in some areas, it is each woman who is primarily responsible for her own and her children's upkeep, including meeting the costs of feeding the household with very little assistance from her husband. However, according to certain oral histories, Nehemia's wives had a very good relationship, they liked each other and there were no conflicts between them whatsoever.⁴⁴ By way of supporting them, Nehemia used to slaughter cattle often so meat was distributed evenly between the wives's *omapatas*. It was said that the wives used to dry their shares, divide it and send some of the dried meat to their parents' homes. During the rainy season, Nehemia also used to hunt for ducks and other small animals and again each woman was provided with something. According to oral testimony there was a good relationship between him and his wives and also between the wives.⁴⁵

However, the accounts of sharing and cooperation between Nehemia's wives need to be looked at more closely. There is much evidence to show a case of co-wives helping and being fond of each other in a polygynous household but I doubt it if it was always cooperative. This is because these accounts paint a romanticized ideal picture of Nehemia's household. Certainly, from a family member's perspective, one would want to give an account where everything was perfect and beautiful. But I ask why? It is important to pose this question in relation to what do these accounts say about relations within the same gender? What do they say about women's discourses? Feminist oral historians have noted that often women talk with ease in woman-to-woman interviews. Belinda Bozzoli notes that in her main interviewer's interviews with twenty two women residents of Phokeng, "common womanhood is appealed to less frequently than Tswana-ness or blackness as a basis for mutual understanding".⁴⁶ This is because, she elaborates, "...each interview was looked at as the text of a conversation between Mmantho (the interviewer) and another woman, to be able to ask questions about the self-perception of older Tswana women vis-à-vis the younger generation, or about the boundaries of common identity established between interviewer and interviewee, which suggest

⁴⁴ Interviews with Foibe Shoovaleka, Omhedi 23.6.2009 and Ndationanwa Nehemia, Odibo, 25.6.2009.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Bozzoli, B. with the assistance of Mmantho Nkotsoe, *Women of Phokeng: Consciousness, Life Strategy, and Migrancy in South Africa, 1900-1983*, (Heinemann Educational Books, Inc., 1991), p 9.

something about the meaning of being a 'Tswana', a woman, a black, or a Mofokeng".⁴⁷ This implies that relations within same gender interviews put both parties at a common identical structural level by virtue of their gender. Thus, women feel more comfortable talking about their most intimate feelings and experiences when they talk to people of the same gender.

It is also important to ask what women's discourses say and think about why women tell the kind of stories they do? In her introduction, Isabel Hofmeyr, refers to a question of how women tell stories and how their narratives compare with those of men. She noticed that in many southern African societies "...women were considered to tell fictional stories, while men told historical stories".⁴⁸ She continues, "...women's stories were often regarded as a rather frivolous pastime that dealt with the imaginary and fictional. Male storytelling, on the other hand, was seen as more important, partly because of its content which dealt with the 'real' world, partly because of its more sober performance, but also because it was enacted in a prestigious, public, male space and concerned itself with the socialization of men."⁴⁹ She further elaborates that "despite being similar to male storytelling, women's narrative labour was less valued, just as their cultivation work could never match the glamour and prestige of male cattle keeping".⁵⁰

These arguments imply that the framing of the meaning of women's storytelling and their experiences takes place within male norms of control. Built into them are gender differences and inequalities which locate a common perception that good storytellers/interviewees are men. However, women's inability to tell stories or their silences on their own thoughts and feelings are influenced primarily by cultural norms. As Bozzoli argues, "...insights into the operation of the relationship between the women's 'selves' and the forces outside the self may be gained by examining their responses to the things that threatened them".⁵¹ Thus, the women's anecdotes about their

⁴⁷ Bozzoli, B. *Women of Phokeng*, p 10.

⁴⁸ Hofmeyr, I. *"We spend Our Years as a Tales That is Told": Oral Historical Narrative in a South African Chieftdom* (Witwatersrand University Press, South Africa, 1993), p 9.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p 30.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p 36.

⁵¹ Bozzoli, B. *Women of Phokeng*, p 150.

experiences are based on cultural motifs about the self/community and the outsider/threat, which given a different metaphorical and historical content depending upon the situation.⁵² Clearly, the accounts of women's experiences are often muted, particularly in any situation where their interests and experiences are in conflict with those that are close to them.

In this case, I furthermore argue that my Kwanyama informant who is Nehemia's daughter, gives a romanticized account about the life in her father's homestead in order to hide the rivalries and jealousies that may have existed in this polygynous household. I am told that there were cases or situations where Nehemia had special affections for some of his wives and ignored others. Foibe Shoovaleka alluded to this stating that Nehemia used to choose wives who would dress up and put on *omhatela* headdress as well as ornaments so that they can be photographed by visitors.⁵³ Similarly, Olivia Naikuva has expressed the same concern saying, "...Nehemia only favoured certain wives and some were never invited to his bedroom".⁵⁴ This was probably a major problem as it created jealousy among the wives who often competed for the husbands' attention, sexual favours and household resources. Coming back to the case of Nehemia hunting birds for his many wives, one needs to consider the fact that at that time (when Nehemia was headman), hunting was only reserved for the privileged few. Hayes explains that during the South African administration, "...hunting now became woven into the rubric of 'indirect control', with kings and headmen given the task of local control."⁵⁵ The end of hunting by commoners came to an end due to disarmament more generally as only the ruling groups were allowed to own guns and were thus able to hunt. Therefore, Nehemia was obviously able to get his wives ducks as he was one of the privileged.

Loeb who did his study in Oukwanyama for a very limited time in the 1960s suggested that, in precolonial Kwanyama, women were ranked in polygynous marriage as first,

⁵² Ibid, p 150.

⁵³ Interview with Foibe Shoovaleka, Omhedi 23.6.2009.

⁵⁴ Interview with Olivia Ngiyolo Naikuva, Onekwaya East, 24.6. 2009.

⁵⁵ Hayes, 'Northern exposures: the photography of C.H.L. Hahn, Native Commissioner of Ovamboland 1915-1946', in Hartman et.al. eds. *The Colonising Camera: Photographs in the making of Namibian history* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press,1998), p 181.

second, third, or later wife and the living quarters given to her determine her status and duties.⁵⁶ He maintains:

The first wife is responsible for the welfare of her husband's guests and for the tending of the sacred fire (*ediko lopulopale*) in the *olupale*. She also supervises the daily domestic work, issues the important foods, and is in charge of grain stamping, cooking, churning, and beer making. And she is often a leader in the seasonal ceremonies; her sleeping hut plays a part in the rain-making ritual, religious and doctoring rites, the cattle ceremony, and the *efundula*. The second wife is usually the one who cooks for the kraal head. She helps the first wife in her domestic duties and is in charge of the daily issue of millet, from which the Ovawambo make their porridge. She is also in charge of the chicken roost (*oshikuku sheexuxwa*) and the hatching of the eggs. The third wife is in charge of the issue of beans and less important foods. The fourth wife assists her. Additional wives are an advantage to a kraal head if he is to raise large crops of grain and to gather large harvests of amarula fruits and nuts and the products of other subtropical plants, and also if he is to have a continuous supply of native beer.⁵⁷

Thus, because of ranks and different status and duties, co-wives were bound to have rivalry and antagonisms. As the desire to have numerous descendants is often the driving force of polygamy, focus on children means that there is often intense reproductive competition among co-wives in polygynous households. Rivalry over inheritance was another reason for co-wives to compete with each other to have as many children as possible, in order to secure a large share of the common husband's resources.⁵⁸ For women in polygyny, the dynamics of co-wives' relations constitute an important gender dimension. Senior and junior wives in the same household are referred to an internal hierarchy and may have radically different experiences and life conditions, such that senior wives may enjoy quite extensive autonomy, whereas the most junior wife may be little more than a house helper.⁵⁹ This is because the first wife is usually vested with the authority to assign and distribute domestic chores to her co-wives; the existence of co-wives also helps enhance her status.⁶⁰ In fact such hierarchies are evident in the Kwanyama oral histories, that certain wives were allocated certain chores and status. This

⁵⁶ Loeb, E. M. *In Feudal Africa* (Indiana University, 1962), p 132.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p 133.

⁵⁸ Koptvedgaard Zeitzen, M. *Polygamy A Cross-cultural Analysis*, p 60.

⁵⁹ Koptvedgaard Zeitzen, M. *Polygamy A Cross-cultural Analysis*, p126.

⁶⁰ Hayase, Y and Liaw, K-L. Factors on polygamy in sub-Saharan Africa: Findings Based on the Demographic and Health Surveys in *The Developing Economies*, XXXV-3 (September 1997), 293–327.

extended into the performative sphere when visitors came to Omhedi, as only certain women were told to dress up or serve the visitors but this is very unique to Omhedi.⁶¹

The idea of production and polygyny suggests that multiple wives provide a large productive basis through which more wealth is generated, but if it is only one wife then the production shrinks. Consequently, on the issue of growth and shrinking of Omhedi, it is important to highlight the effects of matrilineal inheritance norms. As argued earlier, McKittrick also describes Ovamboland as a matrilineal society, and a wife and her children formally belonged to her lineage, not her husband's. Upon her husband's death, a widow had to leave his house and return all the property he had given her. Women inherited the grain in their granaries, which they had grown, and nothing else; sometimes they were even cheated out of this.⁶² She continues, "Women who were not supported had to work within the framework of a perceived marriage bond, in which the husband and wife should serve as an economic unit. They no longer had the option of marrying someone else or returning to their families."

But while marriage changed significantly, matrilineal inheritance practices remained quite consistent; indeed, they are still being negotiated today. Ovambo women continued to be 'chased' from their husband's house and, at most, received only their own property upon his death, or married their husband's brother. But increasingly, these widows had nowhere to go, for often their husband's brothers were Christian and hence monogamous. If they were already married, they could not take on their dead brother's wife".⁶³ Because of matrilineal descent, it was only the husband's matrilineal relatives who could inherit from him upon his death, which explains why a wife and her children did not inherit the least bit when a man died. Rather, it is his mother, sisters, brothers, uncles and nephews on his mother's side who are his heirs.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Interview with Foibe Shoovaleka, Omhedi 23.6.2009.

⁶² McKittrick, M. 'Reinventing the Family: Kinship, Marriage, and Famine in Northern Namibia, 1948-1954' in *Social Science History*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (Duke University Press, Autumn, 1997), pp 265-295: 275.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Tonjes, H. *Ovamboland: Country, People, Mission, with particular reference to the biggest tribe, the Kwanyama* - translated into English by Peter Reiner - (Windhoek, Namibia: Namibia Scientific Society, 1996), p 124.

However, according to Hayes, in the last three decades, changes in matrilineal inheritance practices have been demanded (especially through church channels) to protect widows and children of deceased males. It could be argued that redistribution of wealth through matriclans had remained dominant and while contested, had resisted reorientation until the debates and changes of recent years.⁶⁵ In a case of a polygynous man like Nehemia, after his death, the wives continued to live at Omhedi for several months, it being obligatory, according to oral history, to cultivate the fields once more.⁶⁶ Once the harvest time has passed, as a rule they are again married or they go back to their respective families with their children if they are not inherited.⁶⁷ When Gabriel Kautwima came to occupy Omhedi in 1967, he had to relocate the homestead by carrying away the poles of the huts and their roofs to build it a short distance away from the old one, which, after the death of the owner, has come to be called *oshiumbo*.⁶⁸ This sheds light on the question of the growth and shrinking of Omhedi over time. Although it can be big and prosperous at one time, when the patriarch dies, the wives and children and everyone else go too, as someone new is moving in. The homestead at Omhedi was thus not “owned”.

Class analysis and the acquisition of cattle

The other significant aspect of production that is linked to polygamy at Omhedi and Oukwanyama more generally was cattle. According to Clarence-Smith and Moorsom, from the mid-nineteenth century until World War I, the Ovambo underwent a process of underdevelopment and class formation linked to the evolution of commercial relations with western societies.⁶⁹ It is therefore important to reflect upon social and class formations in relation to the loss of peasant subsistence of which cattle formed a significant part. In the past, the Ovambo combined fairly permanent settled agriculture with cattle herding and there was a greater emphasis on cattle both in economic and in

⁶⁵ Hayes, P. “Famine of the Dams” , p 144.

⁶⁶ Interview with Foibe Shoovaleka, Omhedi 23.6.2009.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Clarence-Smith, W.G. and Moorsom, R. ‘Underdevelopment and Class Formation in Ovamboland, 1845-1915’, in *Journal of African History*, XVI, 3 (1975), pp. 365-381.

cultural terms.⁷⁰ Clarence-Smith and Moorsom describe the progressive transformation between 1845 and 1885 of the ivory trade which temporarily enriched the Ovambo and widened the productive base of their economy through the introduction of fire-arms. At the same time, however, fire-arms became a necessity, and thus forged permanent links of dependence on long distance trade.⁷¹ However, from the mid-1880s to about 1900 cattle replaced ivory as the principal export commodity. As a result, in the 1890s there was an intensification of internal taxation to meet the shortfall of cattle for export in the Kwanyama kingdom.⁷² Drought, famine and changes in colonial policy brought this period of prosperous cattle trading to an end at the turn of the century, as Rinderpest broke out and reached Ovamboland in 1897. In the space of a few devastating months, it destroyed over 90 per cent of the cattle herds.

This disaster was followed by a long series of drought years, interspersed with catastrophic floods and plagues of locusts, which culminated in the terrible famines of 1911 and 1915.⁷³ Rinderpest had temporarily destroyed one of the two pillars of the economy, and this new pressure made it impossible for the Ovambo society to ever recover fully from it. Clarence-Smith and Moorsom argue however that this pressure was not evenly distributed in social terms as the kings did not pay the traders from their own herds, but turned to internal taxation in order to maintain a good living to which they had become accustomed and to retain the loyalty of their followers.⁷⁴

The *omalengas* were said to have now become tax collectors, and the traditional ritual seizure of cattle for the king's court (*okasava*) became a harsh and arbitrary tax, which fell mainly on the most vulnerable members of society.⁷⁵ Cattle tended to be concentrated with people linked to the *omalenga* headmen exempt from taxation and raiding.⁷⁶ The

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Clarence-Smith, W.G. and Moorsom, R. 'Underdevelopment and Class Formations', pp 365-381.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Gewald, J-B. "Near Death in the Streets of Karibib: Famine, Migrant Labour and the Coming of Ovambo to Central Namibia", *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (Cambridge University Press 2003), pp 211-239.

concentration of cattle ownership within a select portion of society meant that the deployment of cattle as a buffer against drought was limited.⁷⁷ The polarization of the traditional stable social order had begun, and incipient classes were entering into increasingly unequal and antagonistic relationships.⁷⁸ An ever smaller group of people were in a position to sell off cattle in exchange for grain during periods of shortage. Those still in possession of their cattle were not to graze them in the immediate vicinity of their homesteads, and not, as had been the case in the past, to send them off to cattle posts established at some distance from homesteads in the vicinity of seasonal grazing.⁷⁹ The extensive utilization of grazing in the vicinity of settlements led to a decline in the quality and carrying capacity of pasturage. This resulted in a further decline in the condition and quality of cattle still owned, further reducing their capacity to insulate society from drought.⁸⁰ Clarence-Smith and Moorsom argue that “A complex process of pauperization was thus set in motion, leading to social differentiation based on the decline in productivity of subsistence economy”.⁸¹ It is said that the major response to pauperization was the induction of communal peasants into migrant labour.

There is a need to highlight why there was a demand for wage labour and the origins of labour migration and formations of class in Ovamboland. I concur with Clarence-Smith and Moorsom’s arguments that in the 19th century the Ovambo went through a process of stratification but I don not think that the formation of classes began with the process of pauperization as they would have us believe. I say this because to a certain extent, there was social differentiation already in existence before this impoverishment happened. Strata of matrilinies who had more cattle than others (regardless of the royal and noble families) existed earlier before the Ovambos’ contact with Europeans and this obviously put them at a different socio-economic level.

A further concern is regarding the issue of (*okasava*) internal raiding, which was a form of reciprocal gifts or tribute. It is important to note however, that earlier *okasava* was

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Clarence-Smith, W.G. and Moorsom, R. ‘Underdevelopment and Class Formations’, pp 365-381.

⁷⁹ Gewald, J-B. “Near Death in the Streets of Karibib”, pp 211-239.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Clarence-Smith, W.G. and Moorsom, R. ‘Underdevelopment and Class’, pp 365-381.

carried out by the king to gain trust and favour from his subjects seeing that the tributes collected as tax were used to assist the poorer subjects in times of crisis. Loeb explains that in the beginning the “voluntary” collections caused little hard feeling.⁸² For several years during Weyulu’s reign it was understood that the owner’s permission must be received before the cattle was taken. The collectors asked permission first of the herds boys, who in turn asked permission of the owners, and the owners then voluntarily gave up their cattle.⁸³ It is argued that the pressure on the cattle population of Ukwanyama made the king to seize that of his subjects to make up for the shortfall in cattle for trading with Europeans. However, the king and the *omalengas* did not do it entirely for self enrichment to support their luxurious way of life as Clarence-Smith and Moorsom’s arguments seem to imply, that the ruling groups (kings and *omalengas*) were to blame for the pauperization of the Ovambo people, and as a result they turned to migrant labour to survive.

It is true that the late 19th century saw the rise of Ovambos migrating to the south for contract labour, but I disagree that this was necessarily brought on completely by the pauperization. Rather, I argue that, the product of wider socio-economic changes brought on by the external incentives for change in the form of increasing trade and contact with Europeans in Owambo, together with colonial policies that in a way urged royal authorities and missionaries to encourage people to go for wage labour, caused all impoverishments. According to Hayes, ‘migrant labour from southern Angola and northern Namibia antedated colonial control by twenty-five years’,⁸⁴ it started much earlier, in the second half of nineteenth century. It was not just because of impoverishment and the need for money alone but preconditions were there that encouraged a flow of labour. Prior to colonial occupation some German agents are said to have visited Owambo leaders in order to form agreements regarding migrant labour to the Police Zone. Kreike explains that these approaches were put at work because ‘after 1900,

⁸² Note: Loeb’s sources are published writings about the Kwanyama but mainly unpublished manuscripts of German missionaries and local informants born in late 19th century, more or less the same age as Rev. Vilho Kaulinge who had authority on the Kwanyama history, e.g. regarding accounts of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ Kwanyama ruling kings etc.

⁸³ Loeb, E. M. *In Feudal Africa*, p 31.

⁸⁴ Hayes, P. ‘History of the Ovambo’, p 146.

the demand for migrant labour in German South-West Africa increased because the German wars of extermination against the Herero and Nama led to an acute labour shortage'.⁸⁵ After colonial occupation in 1915 however, there was still a need for labour in the country that was not met by the 'natives' residing in the then Police Zone.

This is again evident in the administration's Annual Reports in the late 1930s and correspondence by the Native Commissioner in Ovambo regarding the Kwanyama men eligible for contract work. He stated: "Each headmen had to send his subjects to go to work with a letter on which appeared his name and registration number through a central nominated headman at Omafo, Andreas Shindjoba. Nobody left without the headmen's knowledge to ensure that the young boys had their father's permission in accordance with 'tribal' law. The headmen, where necessary, impressed upon these labourers their duty of upholding the good name of their 'tribe' and above all to comply with the obligations of their contracts, which affected not only themselves but the tribe as a whole."⁸⁶ Further, the Administrator's report stated the obligations which the missionaries were expected to fulfill: "Each denomination was expected to furnish the Administration with a written undertaking to assist and support the policy of the Administration and to encourage all natives under their influence to seek employment in South West Africa proper, within the Police Zone."⁸⁷

In addition to that, migrant labour policies encouraged the establishment of trading stores. "The Administration had arranged for a store to be opened at Ondonga, in the hope that this will also stimulate recruiting, as much as it is considered this step is greatly to the advantage of the natives themselves".⁸⁸ This and many other reports and documents indicate that there was some sort of indirect shove from the colonial administration together with missionaries and the 'tribal' authorities to force and encourage local men to go for wage labour. It is indicated in many works that 'the years of continuous drought and famine between 1913-1914 and 1929-1931 in Ovamboland produced an exceptional

⁸⁵ Kreike, E. *Recreating Eden*, p 83.

⁸⁶ NAN, NAO File 1/2 Labour Recruiting, etc. Vol. 3 1937-1938.

⁸⁷ Union of South Africa, *Administrator's report*, 1925, pp 107-108.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, p 24.

surplus of migrant labour’,⁸⁹ but I still think that by then colonial officials took advantage of the situation by working in conjunction with the Ovambo ruling classes because headmen received gifts upon migrant workers’ return.

However, the point I want to make here by analyzing the loss of cattle, impoverishment of the Ovambo (which is said to have given rise to a class system), is linked to questions of whether polygyny was practised widely in Oukwanyama or if it was only practised by the elite (the ruling group and the *omalenga*). According to Moorsom, “The acquisition of women as field-workers, house wives and mothers was the chief mechanism by which male household heads expanded household production and their own personal consumption, and polygamous marriage was the usual method of exchange of women’s labour”.⁹⁰ However, the fact that cattle and other resources were now only concentrated to the ruling elite and the circle of people close to them, ‘men without cattle’ could only afford one wife. Even though labour contracts remained a principal means whereby younger men paid tribute and accumulated the savings in cattle needed to marry and establish a homestead⁹¹, polygamy was only possible for the wealthy. Economic conditions thus operating as a bar, and the teaching of the missionaries being against it, polygamy as a practice was only limited to the elite and the people that rejected Christianity.

The significance of cattle

As I have tried to show earlier, cattle represented to the Ovakwanyama (and to the whole Ovambo society) not only a source of meat and milk but also a resource of enormous social and cultural significance. The possession of cattle was most significant and for the vast majority, it was still the main form of accumulation open to the Owambo men/clans.

⁸⁹ Clarence-Smith, W.G. and Moorsom, R. ‘Underdevelopment and Class Formations’, pp. 365-381; Hayes, P. ‘History of the Ovambo’, p 153; Emmett, T. *Popular Resistance and the Roots of Nationalism in Namibia, 1915-1966* (Switzerland: P. Schlettwein Publishing, 1999), p 197.

⁹⁰ Moorsom, R. ‘Contract Labour System 1900-1926’ in *Underdevelopment and labour migration: the contract labour system in Namibia*, (Working Paper, Bergen, Norway: Chr. Michelsen Institute, 1997), p 23.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, p 35.

Jean and John Comaroff argue that cattle were like commodities: they linked processes of production and exchange, embodied an order of meanings and relations, and had the capacity to reproduce a total social world.⁹² The Comaroffs quoting Kuper state, “one could pile up examples” of the centrality of cattle in ritual and bride wealth, of their celebration in idiom and song, and their salience as political currency.⁹³ However, unlike many patrilineal societies in southern Africa, the centrality of cattle in Oukwanyama (which is matrilineal) did not lie in bride wealth. According to Tuupainen, “The original meaning of the matrilineal marriage gifts was not, like the common Bantu custom of the giving of presents, only to show respect to the bride”.⁹⁴ Cattle were the media through which men shaped their social biographies; they were the supreme form of property.

As everywhere in pre-colonial southern Africa, then, “cattle [were] converted into fealty and political support”.⁹⁵ This is most undeniable as this is obvious in the praise songs and poems that many Kwanyama men had and still have for their cattle. As Loeb posits, “In the past, Kwanyama kings always had their sacred herds; and today the Kwanyama men value their herds, even those that are not sacred, as their most important possession. Cattle are still the chief medium of exchange and standard of value. The men’s main ceremony is the cattle ceremony, for which, after the rainy season, a kraal owner’s herds are brought from the grazing outposts in a big roundup and are displayed to the clan members and the spirits of the clan’s ancestors. In earlier times the Kwanyama rarely killed their cattle except for sacrifice.”⁹⁶ This is still the case today. Although cattle festivals or ceremonies are rarely held, similar ceremonies have been happening in Oukwanyama since the restoration of the Oukwanyama kingship.

The Kwanyama shared with other pastoral peoples the creation and transmission of praise poetry for their cattle and they still name them individually and endow them with human

⁹² Comaroff, J. and J. ‘Goodly beasts, beastly goods: cattle and commodities in a South African context’, *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 17, no. 2, (May 1990), pp 195-216.

⁹³ Ibid, p 197.

⁹⁴ Tuupainen, M. *Marriage in a Matrilineal African Tribe - A social anthropological study of marriage in the Ondonga tribe in Ovamboland* (Forssa: Aurasen Kirjapaino, 1970), p 59.

⁹⁵ Comaroff, J. and J. ‘Goodly beasts, beastly goods’, p 205.

⁹⁶ Loeb, E. M. *In Feudal Africa*, p 16.

qualities. An example of some of the poetry which I believe referred to the periods of drought in Oukwanyama is as follows:

Hailombe, my cow,
the drought is great,
hunger is coming.
Hailombe, you will die,
you will not escape.

Cow Haindongo,
these pumpkins “*eliwa*”
found in the field:
lets keep them
“*onhudi*” the hunger is coming
these pumpkins “*omatanga*”
are in the garden,
Lets pack them ,
the “*ekomba*” the hunger is approaching.⁹⁷

This poem symbolizes the significance of cattle and their loss due to drought or famine that was devastating herds in Ukuanyama and Ovambo more generally. This kind of praise poetry are ways to describe and analyze metaphors regarding the significance of cattle in Ovambo societies and what was happening at a certain time. In this instance, the poem gives metaphors on the failure of rain which resulted in drought and death. It refers to the veracity of the famine of 1914 in Ovambo, where many cattle perished and people survived on pumpkins or other kinds of food from the veld. Therefore, I think the concept of the poem, was the reaction to the hard times of that period and was urging people and animals to be prepared for it. The advice was not just within the framework of survival for people but was also looking out for their livestock and I believe that this signifies the Kwanyama people’s very high regard for cattle.

According to Estermann, special songs are sung in praise of the cattle during the cattle festival. He argues “it is natural that such songs are to be heard at a festival dedicated to the cattle, especially as these little verses set to music make up a part of the herdsmen’s life and in fact a part of the life of every man of the Owambo tribes. There is no young

⁹⁷ Mittelberger, C. ‘Poesia Pastoril do Cuanhama. Litteratura Oral Bantu’ (Unpublished manuscript, n.d. at Biblioteca da Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa SGL: 98-A-27), p 112. Hunger is called *ondjala* – *onhudi* – *oulumbu wonhudi* – *ekomba*. The great hunger of 1914-5 is called *ekomba*. Special references to animals and deaths in year 1915. Translated from Portuguese by Napandulwe Shiweda.

fellow who does not know a certain number of these songs or who does not sing them from time to time, when driving the cattle or when making butter. Even when doing work that has nothing to do with the cattle the men and boys are often heard singing pastoral songs.”⁹⁸ These poems and songs are called *eengovela*. They are generally complete with proper names, names of big cattle owners and geographical terms used to indicate particular sites to which the herdsmen had driven the cattle for grazing. It ties herders and owners to the past and to landscapes with old and ongoing associations.

Going back to the significance of cattle, generally the accumulation of a large herd also gave others the opportunity to initiate ties of alliance and patronage. For most ordinary men, cattle were acquired mainly through inheritance, bride wealth, and natural increase, and except in rare circumstances, it was impossible to build up a sizeable estate in one generation.⁹⁹ Cattle wealth was seen to reflect an inherent ability to mobilize people, and to extend the self by generating support and radiating a personal presence. This form of wealth, in other words, had the tautological quality of all political currency: it was taken to be an expression of the very power it served to create.¹⁰⁰ Mtetwa on the ‘Cattle Complex’ in South East Africa states that “Exploitation at the Rhodesia centres of employment, mines, farms and towns forced the Africans to sell a lot of cattle to obtain cash with which to fulfill their financial obligations such as taxes and rents”.¹⁰¹ He maintains, “The functions of cattle increased during the colonial period because Africans are economic men, it was irrational to them to part with their cattle”.¹⁰² During the period of famine and grain shortages, cattle were exchanged with neighbours or people in distant areas for grain. Cattle were also killed and the meat was taken and sold at the villages with grain; or cattle were driven to and killed at these villages and the meat was traded there.¹⁰³ Also important in the pre-colonial period were the many functions of cattle: they provided meat, milk, hides for mats, thongs and skin clothes.¹⁰⁴ Oral accounts in

⁹⁸ Estermann, C. edited by Gibson, G. D. *The Ethnography of Southwestern Angola*, p 138.

⁹⁹ Comaroff, J. and J. ‘Goodly beasts, beastly goods’, p. 205.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Mtetwa, R.M.G. “Myth or Reality: The ‘Cattle Complex’ in South East Africa, with Special Reference to Rhodesia”, *The Zambezia* (1978, VI (i)) pp 25-35.

¹⁰² Mtetwa, R.M.G. “Myth or Reality”, pp 25-35.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

Oukwanyama relate cases of how cattle were killed and meat bartered for grain or other household items with better-off neighbours or relatives. As mentioned earlier, cattle's economic and cultural values are emphasized by the Kwanyama in their praise-poems in which the cow is admired.

There is a need to take it further and discuss the other symbolic aspects/dimensions of cattle products such as skin etc, and how it all ties in with the economics of cattle which makes the Kwanyama headman Ndjukuma ya Shilengifa's case interesting. His case illustrates the values and importance attached to cattle products as they also represent wealth. According to his great-grandchild,¹⁰⁵ Ndjukuma was a great headman who became prominent during the reign of a Kwanyama king Weyulu ya Hedimbi. He initially lived in Weyulu's residence in Ondjiva but was given Oihole to build his own residence. He was the first to reside in Oihole. He was not from a family of 'omalengas', but he managed to become one because of his skills/talents. Ndjukuma was very good at making leather goods such as *eenguwo* long skirts for women, *eemwiya* belts (where he hooked bones and beads), he could also make really good leather shoes and also glass bead necklaces. The tanned hides of cattle provided articles of clothing and formed an important component that defined the social background of the Kwanyamas. Large skirts *eenguwo* were very popular with the rich Kwanyama women as king's wives were expected to wear exceptional outfits.

Certain skirts such as *eteta* (made from the cow's stomach) was distinctively made and worn to show status. Shoes and belts were also a means of determining social classification.¹⁰⁶ Ndjukuma's great grandchild describes him, as a very honest, disciplined, hardworking and creative man.¹⁰⁷ It was because of all his integrity that he was promoted by king Weyulu to headmanship and was given many gifts such as cattle and many other things. According to oral testimonies, it was apparently almost impossible to determine the number of head of cattle in Ndjukuma's possession, who was

¹⁰⁵ Interview done by Patricia Hayes with Selma Tweumuna – Senior headman Ndjukuma's great grandchild.

¹⁰⁶ Shigwedha, V. and Nampala, L. *Aawambo Kingdoms, History and Cultural Change. Perspectives from Northern Namibia* (Basel: P. Schlettwein Publishing, 2006), p130.

¹⁰⁷ Interview done by Patricia Hayes with Selma Tweumuna – Ndjukuma's great grandchild.

said to have had countless numbers of cattle.¹⁰⁸ He ruled under the Kwanyama kings Weyulu, Nande and Mandume. Ndjukuma also became one of the eight senior headmen that made up the Oukwanyama Council of Headmen after the kingship was abolished. Those that accumulate wealth or capital in terms of cattle like Ndjukuma ya Shilengifa, obtained social prestige.

***Eengobe tadidana* ‘Cattle dance’**

In precolonial times, one of the many ceremonies in Oukwanyama was the cattle festival, for which, after the rainy season, cattle owners brought their herds from the grazing outposts and were displayed to the community. This is however still practiced today, although not with the same vibrancy as in those days. *Eengombe tadidana* cattle festival or cattle dance that was held at Omhedi or Ohaingu every year with dancing to the beat of drums was originally held at the royal palace at Ondjiva and Oihole before Mandume died in 1917.¹⁰⁹ This was an annual event when cattle were brought back from the main areas of residence after grazing at outposts through the long dry season. Here, cattle owners would show off their fattest cattle and thus take part in the spectacle of wealth and power. There was a displacement (or redirection) of the festival from its previous royal location as it usually took place at the king’s palace. Kreike states, “The herdsmen brought the milk cows and the calves back to the villages first so that dairy products could enhance the local diets, followed by the oxen and the other cattle. The oxen generally were returned to the village in January to February and occasionally as late as April, an event that was heralded by cattle festivals called *omaudano eengobe* (“cattle dances”).¹¹⁰ According to Estermann’s discourse, “The big and medium proprietors customarily organize a festival every year to which they give the name *okuludika eengobe*, which may be translated as “to admire cattle”.¹¹¹ He continues, “It is also called simply *eengobe tadidana* (‘cattle dance’). This celebration never had, or does not now have, a very marked ritual character. The time at which it is celebrated is not stipulated

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Lucas Shinedima, Onuno, 2.8.2008.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Vatilifa Hangula, Okelemba, 04.2.2009.

¹¹⁰ Kreike, E. *Re-Creating Eden*, p 166.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, p 137.

precisely and depends on the wish of the owner, but there is a preference for two seasons, the first after the *eengongo* marula fruit has been consumed and the second at the end of the harvest, when the cattle ‘go eat the straw in the fields’ ”.¹¹²

On the cattle festival discourse, Estermann maintains:

On the day set, all the herdsmen must drive their herds in to show the cattle to the master. This applies only to the full-grown animals. They are all shut up in one or more corrals. On the next day, an hour more or less after sunrise, the herdsmen begin leading the cattle out. Meanwhile the chief wife of the owner is preparing a basket of ashes taken from the fireplace of the big courtyard. As the animals pass one by one through the narrow opening of the corral, she rubs the flank of each beast with the ashes she has prepared, and she and her companions utter the well-known shouts of joy, lililili... Then the herdsmen separate the cattle into little groups which they drive to the outer courtyard (*oluvanda*). There the animals, prodded by the herdsmen, take a few turns around the courtyard, while the owner and his invited friends make their observations on the cattle’s physical appearance. A negligent herdsman, whose cattle appear poorly fed, will be rubbed on the head and face with fresh cow droppings. After the dance, food and drink are served to the herdsmen and all the guests. The next day the owner of the cattle rewards the good herdsmen, giving each of them a heifer. Before the meeting breaks up he generally modifies the distribution of the cattle.¹¹³

Here, Estermann is presenting a specific case of what happened during a cattle dance/festival. However, although some of the events he describes still take place today, most of them are not done anymore.¹¹⁴

Ever since the border between Angola and Ovamboland was properly demarcated in 1928, the Ukuanyama people had, with the permission of the Angolan authorities, grazed large herds of their stock in southern Angola and particularly in the eastern Oshimpolo

¹¹²Estermann, C. edited by Gibson, G. D. *The Ethnography of Southwestern Angola*, p 138.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, p 138.

¹¹⁴ This was evident during the cattle festival that took place in 2009 at Senior Headman George Nelulu’s homestead at Etomba. This can be related to the fact that not many people keep/own cattle anymore as before and cattle dances do not happen so often.

veld, because, owing to insufficiency of water supplies, the area allocated to their people after the kingdom was cut in half has been unable to accommodate the stock.

Consequently, most Kwanyam headmen sent their herds of cattle over the border to graze. The Native Assistant Commissioner at Oshikango described how some of the headmen had a number of cattle lent to relatives and old adherents who were resident in Angola.¹¹⁵ Such cattle were spread over many kraals and for that time were the property of the kraals concerned and they remained in Angola and were never brought over to the Namibian side. According to the Native Commissioner, headman Kamhulu thought he had about 100 head lent in this manner; headman Shiamba 4 heads, the others did not know but it was fairly certain that the total did not exceed 300 heads more or less.

Headman Ndjukuma of Omhedi sent 3 or 4 herds of his own cattle across the border line into Angola during the month of December 1929. His nephew and heir, Hanghome, went in charge of the herds. However, the Portuguese officers seized his cattle which were thought to be trespassing in Angola but efforts were made to assist the headman in his trouble and he got them back with a warning from the administration.¹¹⁶ According to the Native Commissioner's report, the Ovakwanyama, particularly the principal headmen, were warned on the issue of sending their cattle into Angola for grazing purposes. This was because the Portuguese authorities have closed their borders in 1929 and any stock which crossed over was seized. Ndjukuma was also warned by the administration several times but he is said to have disregarded the advice and warnings by the administration officials. As a result, Ndjukuma was fined and he agreed to pay the fine and authorized officials to dispose of some of his cattle to raise the money. It was also disclosed that Ndjukuma had furnished his herdboys in Angola with money to pay the annual tax there.¹¹⁷

Ndjukuma used the border in this way because, in times of drought and in the months before the rains, each year, Kwanyama people's cattle were sent to Angola to find grass and water. According to Kreike, 'during the negotiations that led to the agreement for the

¹¹⁵ NAN, NAO File 5/7 Chiefs & Headmen Ukuanyama 1924-1945.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ National Archives of Namibia, NAO File 5/7 Chiefs & Headmen Ukuanyama 1924-1945.

final transfer of the Neutral Zone to Portugal in 1926, the South Africans lobbied hard for including a clause that would allow herders and their cattle from south of the new border access to the Oshimholo cattle posts in the Lower Kunene.¹¹⁸ He continues, 'Portuguese officials, however, vehemently opposed the petition not only because it infringed on their sovereignty, but also because it forced them to share the Lower Kunene's precious resources with the very people who had fled Portuguese rule, taxes, and labour demands.'¹¹⁹ In establishing their disagreement, Portuguese authorities applied different methods in deterring herders from crossing the border to Oshimholo. Consequently, each year many of the Namibian Kwanyama herders' cattle were lost and stolen, while in Angola.

Kreike writes of an incident in 1931 when a cattle owner, Simon and his herdsman Naquanda, reported having a herd of 10 cattle stolen by a local Angolan near their old cattle post east of Ondjiva. He further explains that this case was not an isolated incident as 'the Portuguese systematically harassed herdsmen from the middle floodplain who passed through the northern floodplain en route to the Oshimholo cattle posts.'¹²⁰ The South African officials were thus anxious that the cattle remain on the south of the line to avoid conflict with the Portuguese. Thus, the undesirability of stock from the south of the border being moved seasonally and sometimes more or less permanently north of the border was realized by the administration and made provisions for all South West Africa Kwanyama stock to be pastured and watered in their area by gradually opening up the eastern Ukuanyama by the provision of new water supplies. However, during the very difficult drought conditions prevailing in Ovamboland as well as in southern Angola, the Portuguese authorities recognized and agreed to Ukuanyama cattle continuing to be grazed in a defined area north of the boundary for a further, but not an indefinite period. The distribution of cattle described above played a central role in Oukwanyama's relations between the nobility and commoners because Ndjukuma as senior headman was in a position to manipulate and play the border, keeping his world at Omhedi intact.

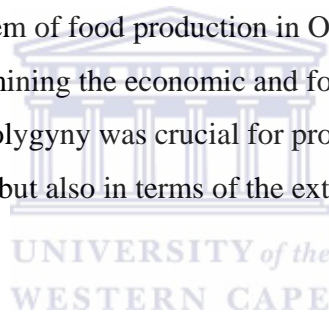
¹¹⁸ Kreike, E. *Re-creating Eden*, p 159.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, p 159.

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, p 160.

Conclusion

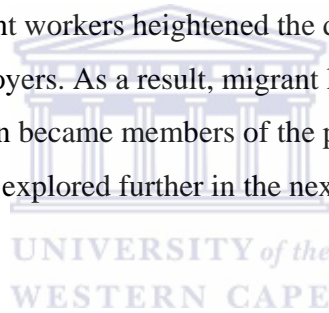
Although women and their role in production at Omhedi were underrepresented in the written archival documents, they were represented as an important subject matter of the photographic activities at Omhedi. Women's labour and their productive role were linked to attributes of polygamy and pastoralism in Oukwanyama and Omhedi. This is because women's productive work and the symbolic features surrounding them were re-enacted and displayed in the photographs taken at Omhedi. Their role in the construction of tradition at Omhedi was represented by the colonial administration because it supported polygamy as a healthy 'tribal' tradition. The Native Commissioner Hahn argued that the increasing influence of the missions was responsible for the subversion of both 'tribal' authority and system of food production in Ovamboland. The administration accused the missions of undermining the economic and food production systems in Ovamboland. He claims that polygyny was crucial for production not only in relation to the size of the production unit, but also in terms of the external labour during activities like planting and harvesting.



The overall effect of the mission influence, he argued, broke down social, political and economic structures in Ovamboland. It also undermined the self-sufficiency of the family as a productive unit and turned the Christian converts into a 'weak link' in all important organization of food production and their homesteads into an "eye sore". As a result of pauperization (caused by the undermining and disintegration of precolonial and economic structures) in Ovamboland, migrant labour became essential to many Ovambo men. I argue that polygamy was only possible for the wealthy. This is because, the loss of cattle and the economic conditions operating as a bar, along with the teaching of the missionaries being against it, polygamy as a practice was only limited to the elite and those that did not accept Christianity. This was a product of the colonial policies that were imposed on Ovambo social formations by the demands of the colonial South African administration and its economic needs. The workers were encouraged to return to

their own homes on the termination of their contract and provision was made for their repatriation.

However, as Tony Emmett argues, “There lay a fundamental contradiction in colonial policy which enforced the isolation of the northern regions and the preservation of indigenous (“traditional”) political, economic and social structures (such as polygyny), while at the same time extracting migrant labour, enforcing colonial authority and allowing the Christianization of these regions. In consequence, while Ovamboland and other northern regions were subjected to the undermining influences associated with colonialism, they were prevented from making the transition to a new form of society.”¹²¹ Hahn feared that if a ‘tribal’ area like Omhedi became corrupted by “civilized” and urbanized services, it will lose all its ‘tribal’ customs and become an ‘eyesore’. However, recurrent exploitation of migrant workers heightened the dissatisfaction and tension between the workers and employers. As a result, migrant labourers formed part of a class-conscious proletariat and in turn became members of the political liberation organization such as SWAPO. This issue is explored further in the next chapter.



¹²¹ Emmett, T. *Popular Resistance and the Roots of Nationalism in Namibia, 1915-1966*, (Basel: P. Schlettwein Publishing, 1999), p 197.

Chapter 5

The Contract Migrant Labour System and Political Uprising in Ovambo from 1950s - 1970s.

Introduction

This chapter examines the origins and effects of a repressive contract labour system, as experienced by the Ovambo migrant workers who gradually became radicalized. The question is, why did Ovambo migrant workers become so militant by the 1970s and rise up to contest colonial power? To answer these questions, it is important to look at the contract workers' distinct position in the political economy of colonial Namibia, under firstly Germany and later South African rule, and at their specific economic and social conditions, ones in which exploitation and attempts at totalitarian control nurtured class consciousness and militancy. The exploitative and repressive conditions entrenched in the contract labour system persisted since the inception of Ovambo labour migration to the south in the late 19th century, and were factors in a growing militancy among the Ovambo migrants and the rest of the workers in Namibia at a later stage.

Migrant workers were denied any rights outside Ovamboland, enforced by pass and contract laws which put total control over job allocation, residence and mobility in the hands of colonial officials. This was based on a South African colonial model that provided for stricter control over the influx of black workers into urban areas. The model embodied the view that the urban areas were the white man's creation and blacks should be allowed to enter them only insofar as their labour was needed. Similarly, control over Ovambo workers entering the Police Zone (modernization) was taken over by colonial officials, while the rest of Ovamboland (which was considered 'tribalized') was left to the ruling chiefs and headmen.

Thus, the central theme of this chapter is to examine Omhedi as a place where repressive migrant labour processes were put in place through structures of indirect rule which extensively used so-called 'indigenous' political institutions (council of headmen). To quote Tony Emmett's argument: 'the Ovambo kings and other rulers were essentially

perceived as “tyrants” who ruled Ovamboland without consideration for the interests or desires of their subjects and under colonial rule this pre-conception became a reality’.¹ Attention is given to the effect the contract labour system had on the Ovambo chiefs and headmen’s control over migrant workers in the Police Zone and how this specifically served the colonial authority. This was because, normally, when the workers’ contracts ended or they were no longer considered economically productive, they were sent back to their places of origin where they were put under the chief or headmen’s control. This chapter also investigates the dehumanizing medical examinations and classifications to which potential workers were subjected. Furthermore, it looks at the worker’s living conditions, as they lived in prison-like bachelor compounds, usually cramped and with minimal facilities and personal privacy. This is pertinent to this study as it was these labour abuses that led to the organization of a politically motivated strike against the contract system of 1971-2 to be discussed in Chapter Six. Most importantly, this chapter’s emphasis on contract labour system in colonial Namibia is to show that the radicalization of Ovambo migrant workers was due to the South African repressive and totalizing control over them.

In the section that follows, I provide a short outline of the origins of the contract migrant system in Ovamboland which have been linked to pre-colonial kings’ exaction of *okasava*, famine and other disasters leading to impoverishment, and colonial labour policies in the late 19th and early 20th century. The chapter looks at the longer history of the early Ovambo kingdoms; the disintegration of pre-colonial political and economic structures, and the development of the colonial labour system discussed briefly in the previous chapter. This essentially highlights the role of the South African colonial administration in the elaboration of and exploitation of Ovambo men’s labour and in creating Ovamboland and other northern regions as recruiting fields. Furthermore, this chapter analyzes the conditions of the contract labour system that led to the historical trajectory of political awareness of the workers in the country. It examines mainly the period when the formation of political organizations like OPO and later SWAPO took place. In a concluding section, I recapitulate the relevance of these analyses to the

¹ Emmett, T. *Popular Resistance and the Roots of Nationalism in Namibia, 1915-1966* (Basel: P. Schlettwein Publishing, 1999), p 210.

General Contract Worker's Strike of 1971-72, which became a starting point of the protests and public floggings that came in its wake.² This is where Omhedi takes on new meanings as a site of colonial control.

Historical context: origins of the contract migrant labour system

This chapter relies heavily on the analyses made by several historians on the origins of the institutionalized structure of labour exploitation, central to colonial power and profit; and the brutal contract labour system imposed on the Ovambo, by the Germans and later South African regimes.³ This literature highlights the dimensions of Ovambo men taking up waged contract labour in the Police Zone as early as 1880s. They also look at more protracted processes of economic incorporation of northern societies into capitalist structures and relations, on the creation of a semi-proletariat,⁴ and the attempts by the colonial state to control these processes, especially through indirect rule and structures incorporating headmen, in which Omhedi becomes relevant. Accordingly, I use Moorsom and Clarence-Smith's work on the origins of labour migration and formations of class in Ovamboland which has been mainly inspired by Marxist perspectives that were prominent in the academy in the 1970-80s.⁵ Their works examine the penetration of merchant capital into Ovambo society between 1845 and 1885, especially through the

² This issue is discussed in detail in the following chapter.

³ See Clarence-Smith, W.G. and Moorsom, R. 'Underdevelopment and Class Formations in Ovamboland, 1845-1915', in *Journal of African History*, XVI, 3 (1975), pp. 365-381; Moorsom, R. 'Contract Labour System 1900-1926' in *Underdevelopment and labour migration: the contract labour system in Namibia*, (Bergen, Norway: Working Paper, Chr. Michelsen Institute, 1997), Katjavivi, P. *A history of Resistance in Namibia*, (Paris: UNESCO Press, 1988), Emmett, T. *Popular Resistance and the Roots of Nationalism in Namibia*.

⁴ Here I use Frederick Cooper's arguments about an African proletariat not fully becoming proletarianised, as an African rarely expatriates himself without the intention of returning most often to his milieu of origin. As a result he does not become permanently urbanised. Thus, for this work, I will use the term semi-proletariat as although the Ovambo migrants stayed in the south for long periods, they always returned to their rural settings. See Cooper, F. *Decolonization and the African Society: The labour question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp 146, 179, 180-189.

⁵ For most of the twentieth century Marxist perspectives have been discriminated against in the United States and Great Britain, and it is only since the 1960s that Marxist ideas could be openly discussed in the academy. Read more on the: 'Marxist Theory - History, Marxism and Other Theories, Contributions, Man Makes Himself, Marxist Perspectives in Archaeology <http://www.jrank.org/history/pages/6264/Marxist-Theory.html#ixzz0ooF20zRa>;' Accessed 24/05/2010.

ivory and later cattle trade, and to a lesser extent through sales of slaves.⁶ According to Clarence-Smith and Moorsom, this incorporation widened the productive base of their economy through the introduction of fire-arms, which became a necessity.⁷ It was the central Ovambo ruling groups who benefited most, as fire-arms were reserved as a royal monopoly, and allowed them to expand their political power through mechanisms of patronage.⁸

However, according to Clarence-Smith and Moorsom, dependence on the imported arms and luxury goods began small-scale inter-group raiding, seizure of cattle and people, who were ransomed or incorporated into lineages as debt slaves, during the 1880s and 1890s.⁹ As a result, in the 1890s there was an intensification of internal taxation *okasava* to meet the shortfall of cattle for export in the Kwanyama kingdom.¹⁰ Moreover, natural disasters and changes in colonial policy brought this period of prosperous cattle trading to an end at the turn of the century, as Rinderpest broke out and reached Ovamboland in 1897. In the space of a few devastating months, it destroyed over 90 per cent of the cattle herds.¹¹ This disaster was followed by a long series of drought years, interspersed with catastrophic floods and plagues of locusts, which culminated in the terrible famines of 1911 and 1915.¹² According to Clarence-Smith and Moorsom, a complex process of pauperization was thus set in motion, leading to social differentiation based on the decline in productivity of subsistence economy.¹³

Although Clarence-Smith and Moorsom conveniently describe phases in the historic incorporation of Ovambo as wage labourers based on factors related above, Hayes and Emmett draw a clear distinction between conditions which initially led to the flow of

⁶ Clarence-Smith, W.G. and Moorsom, R. 'Underdevelopment and Class Formations in Ovamboland', pp 365-381.

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Moorsom, R. 'Contract Labour System 1900-1926', p 24.

¹⁰ Clarence-Smith, W.G. and Moorsom, R. 'Underdevelopment and Class Formations in Ovamboland', pp 365-381.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

migrant labour, and later colonial interventions which both maintained and augmented this flow.¹⁴ Initially, Emmett argues, climatic and ecological conditions were crucial in creating the conditions for labour migration from northern Namibia and southern Angola.¹⁵ This is because, according to Emmett, in Ovamboland, the periods 1863 to 1972 saw 50 years of drought, of which 15 were widespread and severe, a further 13 years of abnormal floods, and at least two years of devastating pestilence (with Rinderpest in 1897 and locusts in 1907).¹⁶

Nonetheless, Emmett further argues, ‘while drought and famine helped to lay the foundations of the migrant labour system in Namibia, colonial policies reshaped these ecological responses into a comprehensive system of labour control and exploitation.’¹⁷ Moreover, Hayes argues that ‘Labour migration became part of a famine behavior in Ovamboland, but only after the structures of migration were established, and then it was only one of many ‘coping strategies’.’¹⁸ However, Hayes cautions that one ought to look at this more closely as indigenous origins of labour migration in Ovamboland were especially important because there was no external conquest, imposition of tax or land repossession to encourage wage-seekers to migrate.¹⁹ She points out that labour migration was well under way before taxation was introduced in the late 1920s, which was light and the incidence low. But, under South African rule, the whole basis of power in Ovamboland was changed. This was done through the combination of a system of indirect rule, which incorporated the kings and headmen into the colonial administrative apparatus, and the occasional use of military force, the South African authorities gradually undermined the power and prestige of the Ovambo ruling classes through ostensibly buttressing it.²⁰ The abolition of the Oukwanyama kingship and the subjugation of its people is a case in point here. The South African administration’s occupation of the Ovambo was considerably facilitated by the conditions of drought and

¹⁴ Emmett, T. *Popular Resistance and the Roots of Nationalism in Namibia*, p 146.

¹⁵ Ibid, p 171.

¹⁶ Ibid, p 172.

¹⁷ Ibid, pp 173-174.

¹⁸ Hayes, P, ‘A History of the Owambo of Namibia, 1880-1930’ (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 1992), p 148.

¹⁹ Ibid, p 146.

²⁰ Emmett, T. *Popular Resistance and the Roots of Nationalism in Namibia*, pp 173-174.

famine in which they found Ovamboland in 1915. Further, the immediate circumstances of the Kwanyama who together with their king, Mandume ya Ndemufayo, had fled across the border into Namibia after their defeat by the Portuguese in Angola, also accelerated the situation.²¹

According to colonial reports, representatives of the South African expeditionary force arriving at the same time from the south on the 4th of August 1915, found Ovamboland in the grip of severe famine and were able to establish an administrative presence without opposition.²² As noted elsewhere, King Mandume ya Ndemufayo ruled the Ovakwanyama between 1911 and 1917, during which time he fought against the Portuguese invasion of 1915 at Omongwa, which forced him into a 'protection' agreement with British-South African officials who had then just defeated the German troops and occupied Namibia and consequently Ovamboland.

Irrespective of the Angola/Namibia border that divided his kingdom, Mandume ya Ndemufayo made armed incursions across the border in order to assert his authority over his subjects in Portuguese territory. The South African/Union Officers gave the Portuguese authorities on his behalf a guarantee for his future good conduct. However, impatient of restraint, Mandume renewed his raids until in 1917 the South African government sent punitive troops to remove him. He died at his palace at Oihole, resisting a force sent by the South African authorities to restore order in February 1917.²³ The defeat of the Kwanyama allowed South Africa to consolidate its administrative and military control over Ovamboland. The removal of king Mandume ya Ndemufayo gave the South African administration access to cooperative headmen who engaged in promoting the flow of labour to the south for their own economic interests. Mandume's

²¹ Emmett, T. *Popular Resistance and the Roots of Nationalism in Namibia*, p 174.

²² See, Union of South Africa, *Report of the Administrator for the Year 1919* (Pretoria, 1919) and also Moorson, R. 'Contract Labour System 1900-1926', p 33.

²³ For a full detailed account on Mandume, see Shiweda, N. 'Mandume ya Ndemufayo's memorials in Namibia and Angola' (Unpublished MA Thesis, University of the Western Cape, 2005) and also Hayes, P. 'History of the Ovambo'; NAN OVJ File No. J1/3/1-6 Wetgewig en Regulasies Opstel, Hersiening en Herroeping: Owambo – wet siviele en kriminele Regsnag van Kapteins, Hoofmanne ens, 1977.

demise also marked the end of autonomy of the past and created the power sharing between South African colonial administrators and the Ovambo chiefs and headmen.

Thus, according to Moorsom, a skeleton administration based on standard principles of indirect rule was now in place, relying on the personal and paternalist influence of white officials, and backed where necessary by the overwhelming military force; minimal interference in 'tribal' affairs; and the least possible state expenditure.²⁴ Further, Emmett argues that, following their defeat, the Kwanyama became the first Ovambo group to be effectively disarmed and the administration was now in a position to ensure that another king was not appointed to provide a rallying point for Kwanyama resistance.²⁵ On the whole, the contribution of Kwanyama headmen and other Ovambo chiefs more broadly starting 1917, was principally collaborationist, which as Moorsom suggests, 'was of the utmost importance to the maintenance of the migrant labour system'.²⁶

The Labour Question in the 'Police Zone'

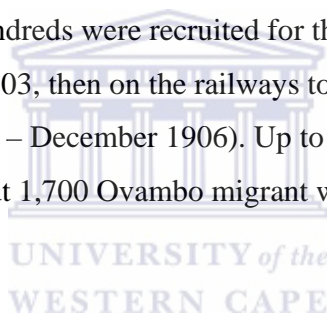
With colonial rule being gradually imposed over Ovamboland in 1915, fundamental changes took place in the area as a result of this colonial penetration and its incorporation - as a labour reserve - into the colonial economy. The South African colonial administration's penetration of Ovambo was uneven, but was an unavoidable process of critical importance in shaping the lives of its inhabitants. These relate to the rate and patterns of labour migrancy due to the diminishing ability of most men to produce sufficient food for subsistence; the intervention of colonial control and the increasing spread of impoverishment. For these reasons, this chapter investigates the changes that shifted the Ovambo people's ideology to go on strike. Ideology shifted their sense of this new form of migration as a survival strategy. As noted earlier, climatic fluctuations and ecological crises were to some extent the factors that contributed to labour migration in Ovamboland. However, as Hayes argues, '...the causes of labour migration cannot be

²⁴ Moorsom, R. 'Contract Labour System 1900-1926', p 33.

²⁵ Emmett, T. *Popular Resistance and the Roots of Nationalism in Namibia*, p 174.

²⁶ Ibid.

reduced to an environmental squeeze'.²⁷ She argues further that the crucial issue was its interaction with local mechanisms of control over labour, in conjunction with external factors.²⁸ This is because migrants decided on whether they would follow what their elders (headmen) and colonial officers decided on, concerning going for contract employment or not. For this study, it is necessary to explore the periods when Ovambo men started migrating for waged labour to the then Police Zone.²⁹ This is because it was estimated that about seven thousand adult Ovambo males left their country every year for the south and then came back for the planting season in the summer months.³⁰ According to Hayes, the first phase of labour migration lasted from the 1880s, to roughly 1908, before the numbers of migrants under German rule started to peak.³¹ Further, she states 'Small numbers of Ovambo worked in the trading networks in SWA and southern Angola during the 1880 and 1890s and on the smaller mines and guano workings in the *Schutzgebiet* after 1892'.³² Hundreds were recruited for the Swakopmund harbour works between late 1898 and early 1903, then on the railways to Windhoek (September 1897 – June 1902) and Otavi (October – December 1906). Up to 1907, however, there were probably never more than about 1,700 Ovambo migrant workers in the Police Zone at any one time.³³



Hayes suggests that although the structural mechanisms for migration to southern labour markets were in place by 1908, up to this date the labour flow had never exceeded 2,000.³⁴ But with changing patterns of economic growth in the south and with the progressive deterioration of subsistence agriculture under the impact of colonialism and natural disasters, the number of men in wage labour increased rapidly. This was

²⁷ Hayes, P. 'History of the Ovambo', p 148.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ According to Wolfgang Werner, the Police Zone refers to the areas that solicited police protection and fell within the sphere of influence of the railway line or main roads. The Police Zone separated that part of Namibia which was later settled by white farmers from those areas where subsistence production was still largely practiced – such as the Ovambo, Kaoko, Kavango and Caprivi regions. See Werner, W. 'A brief History of Land Dispossession in Namibia', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol.19, No.1, March 1993, pp 135-146 .

³⁰ Union of South Africa, *Administrator's report*, 1917-37, p 6.

³¹ Hayes, P. 'History of the Ovambo', pp 148-149.

³² Ibid, p 149.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

particularly marked in 1908 when drought and locust infestation helped to raise the number to 4,000. The further and more severe drought of 1910-11 coincided with an increased migration rate which exceeded 9,000 in each year.³⁵ However, the good rainfall of 1911-12 was accompanied by a drop in recruitment to just over 6,000 in 1912. But, argues Hayes, ‘the years between 1913 and 1916 saw almost continuous drought and famine; hence, the migrant labour force increased to over 11,000 in 1913-14’.³⁶

The ‘native’ question which at the time was synonymous with the labour question was one of considerable difficulty. This is because after the Ovambo started to recover from the effects of the drought and famine, the colonial administration and the local intermediaries (headmen) found it difficult to persuade the Ovambo men to migrate for waged labour. Emmett relates that although the drought and famine of 1915 had resulted in an unprecedented surplus of labour, the surplus of labour did not last very long.³⁷ He further posits that by the end of 1916, when good rains had broken the drought in Ovamboland and the economy of the Police Zone had recovered from the worst effects of the War, the settler economy returned to its familiar state of labour shortage, as fluctuations in the flow of labour from Ovamboland were closely tied to the supply of food in the area.³⁸ This shortage of labour supply was marked in subsequent years in the Administrator’s Annual Report of 1923, stating; “...owing perhaps to the results of the favourable rainy season of last year, for in Ovamboland large crops of grain were reaped, the cattle were in good conditions, and the natives disinclined under the circumstances to go out to work”.³⁹

It is thus evident that famine enforced availability of labour to the south and in times of prosperity it was the opposite.⁴⁰ Emmett argues that the period prior to the depression in the 1930s, was distinguished by the ability of Ovamboland and other recruiting areas to

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid, p 153.

³⁷ Emmett, T. *Popular Resistance and the Roots of Nationalism in Namibia*, pp 174-175.

³⁸ Ibid, p 175.

³⁹ Union of South Africa, *Administrator’s report*, 1923, p 14.

⁴⁰ See, McKittrick, M. ‘Reinventing the Family: Kinship, Marriage, and Famine in Northern Namibia’, 1948-1954 *Social Science History*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (Autumn, 1997), pp 265-295, for a discussion on the analysis and study of famine and how it influenced migrant labour in colonial Ovambo.

resist the pressures for migrant labour.⁴¹ This was because even the establishment of recruiting organizations in the mid-1920s did little to improve the flow of labour, and the slight increase in migration between 1926 and 1928 probably had more to do with climatic conditions in the sending areas than with the efforts of the labour organizations.⁴² Hence, a number of Ovambo people proceeded to seek work on their own accord, because whenever they enjoyed a season of excellent rains which produced tremendous crops, the result is always that little labour was forthcoming. However, during the periods of depression, large numbers of potential young men looking for work have been recorded. This created complications in the 1930 depression, which happened to coincide with a period of drought in most areas of the country, resulting in the employers not needing many workers, so they let them go or refused to employ any more workers.

Drought and depression of 1930

Colonial reports described drought and the depression in 1930 as having deprived the Ovambo of opportunities of earning money in the south and reducing their economic position to a low ebb.⁴³ Note the Native Commissioner's comment above implies that the Ovambo depended entirely on the wages from contracted work, but this might not be how local people would have described the situation. At the time, the wealth of the people was valued in terms of *mahangu* millet, cattle and other treasured goods such as clothing, soaps, tools etc and not necessarily money. However, it is difficult to determine the exact impact of the depression on migrant workers and on the lives of the Ovambo people in general. This is because during the depression, labour demands dropped and many labourers were left without work. Labour wages were often used to supplement subsistence production and many families depended on these for sustenance. Clearly, most Ovambo retained access to land and continued to produce crops and keep livestock for subsistence but the loss of wages must have still impacted badly on them. With the exception of those immediately around mission stations and those that

⁴¹ Emmett, T. *Popular Resistance and the Roots of Nationalism in Namibia*, p 197.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Union of South Africa, *Report of the Administrator for the Year 1932* (Pretoria, 1932).

converted to Christianity, the majority retained their pre-colonial structures and remained under the authority of chiefs and headmen.

However, some families were also dependent on the wages of migrant labourers for other necessary purchases. According to Hayes, in the early periods, wages were used most visibly to buy clothes. She continues that these were not only exchange items but signified status.⁴⁴ In the past, the desire to purchase clothing was relatively simple, but with the coming of Christianity and more people acquiring clothing as a result, the standard of dress had changed to a westernized form. Hayes further suggests that the purchase of cattle, was a main long-term aim of labour migrancy. While wages were used later in the colonial era to pay for stock, pre-colonial migrant labourers probably purchased materials in the south and exchanged them for cattle.⁴⁵ This in a way facilitated and attracted new migrants to venture out and look for waged labour as cattle ownership marked prestige and wealth.

Other more complex mechanisms for migration to southern labour markets were put in place through the establishment of stores, for example the Endola store which opened in Ovamboland in 1939, whose main purpose was to encourage migrant labour.⁴⁶ This was not the only store in the area however, as there was a SWANLA⁴⁷ store in Ondjondjo, Ondangwa before it. Additionally, some goods were brought in by migrant workers from Tsumeb or Grootfontein on their way home, as according to Kauluma, 'it happened that goods were often cheaper in the southern region than in the north partly because of the SWANLA virtual monopoly'.⁴⁸ With the opening of these stores, the administration was therefore opposed to any form of trade or bartering other than the exchange of consumer goods for cash and Ovamboland's only source of cash was migrant labour.⁴⁹ This was also attributed to the fact that Hahn (Native Commissioner 1920-1946) opposed forms of

⁴⁴ Hayes, P. 'History of the Ovambo', p 150.

⁴⁵ Hayes, P. 'History of the Ovambo', p 151.

⁴⁶ Emmett, T. *Popular Resistance and the Roots of Nationalism in Namibia*, p 198.

⁴⁷ SWANLA stands for South West Africa Native Labour Association. This was a colonial labour agency that recruited migrant labour for mines and farms in southern Namibia.

⁴⁸ Kauluma, J. 'The Migrant Contract Labour situation in Namibia and the Response to it' (unpublished paper, NAN, Accession L. 096).

⁴⁹ Emmett, T. *Popular Resistance and the Roots of Nationalism in Namibia*, p 198.

trade between outside traders and the Ovambos and barred them from entering Ovamboland, because he feared a continuation of trade in fire-arms and ammunition which existed prior to South African occupation. However, despite all these mechanisms to attract people to waged work in the south, labour migration only reached a peak between 1908-1915, but was not reached again until the 1930s.⁵⁰ Hahn spent almost twenty years trying to bring up the number of migrants from Ovambo to the south to its levels during late German rule but it was only 'following the depression and severe drought of the early 1930s, that the migrant labour force from the north increased significantly.'⁵¹ According to Silvester et al. it was at the turn of the decade, where drought, coupled with the effects of the world depression and famine in the north, allowed the authorities a moment in which to take advantage of relative weakness on its 'peripheries'. From the late 1920s, then, drought and famine combined with the widespread social changes in Ovamboland to increase dependence on migrant labour.⁵²

According to Cooper, Hahn, was however worried that the financial position of the Ovambos might endanger the 'Tribal' Trust Fund which had been organized in Ovamboland by the colonial administration in 1929 to help traditional chiefs finance infrastructure and improvements in their communities.⁵³ It is important here to note that, Ovambo chiefs and headmen became deeply involved in the contract labour system and were counted upon to maintain the profitable functioning of Trust Funds. The 'Tribal' Trust Funds that had been established in most Ovambo communities, played a major part in the ruling group's involvement, since these Funds depended heavily on migrant incomes.⁵⁴ Additionally, according to Cooper, a five shilling tax on all adult men in Ovamboland was instituted in 1929 by the administration to encourage labour migration, and part of these funds were used to pay salaries of chiefs and headmen to encourage

⁵⁰ Hayes, P. 'History of the Ovambo', p 153.

⁵¹ Emmett, T. *Popular Resistance and the Roots of Nationalism in Namibia*, p 180.

⁵² Hartmann, W, Hayes, P, Silvester, J, Wallace, M, *Namibia under South African Rule, Mobility and containment* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1998), p 25.

⁵³ Allan D. Cooper, 'The Institutionalization of Contract Labour in Namibia', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (March 1999), pp 121-138

⁵⁴ Allan Cooper, 'The Institutionalization of Contract Labour in Namibia', p 133.

their continued collaboration with colonial authorities.⁵⁵ Hahn in a letter to Mr Clarke the SWANLA recruiting official states: “The financial position of the Ovambos generally is now very low indeed and it will be quite out of the question for us to carry on with the Trust Funds unless we can find employment for them.”⁵⁶ According to Emmett, this upward trend was interrupted, but not stemmed, by the outbreak of World War II. With the decline of the mining industry during the depression and World War II, agriculture assumed an increasingly important position within the colonial economy, and was able to demand a progressively larger share of the migrant labour force.⁵⁷ However, Hayes suggests that the conditions of work, housing and rations endured by Ovambo migrant workers, as well as disease and continuing commitment to the pastoral and agricultural cycles in Ovamboland, encouraged high labour fluctuations.⁵⁸

Conditions under the contract labour system

This section attempts to uncover how the intrusion of exploitative practices of the contract labour system rendered it an extension of a more encompassing apparatus of repression by which it secured and controlled its Ovambo workers. This is relevant to this thesis because it shows workers in a more complicated nexus than simply the headmen and their world. Central to German and South African colonialism of South-West Africa/Namibia, was the entrenchment of a labour recruiting system which encouraged the migration of Ovambo workers to the farms, mines and construction sites in the Police Zone.⁵⁹ For most Ovambo men, according to Hayes et al, “the journey on foot through the thirst belt – and the return after the labour contract – was both arduous and dangerous, thus until the 1920s men usually made the trip only once in their lives”.⁶⁰ It was only from 1926 when South Africa formalized a “contract labour system with the establishment of recruiting organizations in northern Namibia, that they introduced

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ NAN, NAO File ½, Labour Recruiting, etc. Vol. 2, 1933-1937; (Native Commissioner, Ovamboland, Ondangwa, 25th/07/1934).

⁵⁷ Emmett, T. *Popular Resistance and the Roots of Nationalism in Namibia*, p 180.

⁵⁸ Hayes, P. ‘History of the Ovambo’, p 157.

⁵⁹ The Police Zone was appropriated for White’s settlement and its economy rested on industries, mining, railway construction, and best arable lands.

⁶⁰ Hartmann, W, Hayes, P, Silvester, J, *The Colonizing Camera, Photographs in making of Namibian history* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 1998), p 50.

motorized transport between Ovamboland and the railheads further south at Tsumeb and Grootfontein, where further recruitment was done.”⁶¹

At Ondangwa, the prospective workers were recruited according to their agility and fitness. Presumed diseased, they were subjected to humiliating medical inspections. The colonial medical perceptions gave way to this functioning of power which subjected the workers to physical examinations which made diseases localizable within their bodies. The laws and policies of this contract labour system centred on the body of the individual migrant worker. Silvester et al suggest that the oral histories conducted with former migrant workers in Ovambo in the early 1990s, were profoundly about the body and the journey south was another dominant and recurring component of these histories.⁶² They further describe that, at Ondangwa, a humiliating medical examination was followed by a classification process, before male workers were transported in cattle and coal trucks and ‘distributed’ to areas of work.⁶³ Classifications were done into three categories, (A,B, and C).

According to Cooper, Category A labourers were generally: physically fit to assume any work; Category B: physically able to assume only light mine work; and Category C: physically able to assume only light farm work.⁶⁴ Classifications were increasingly employed as a means of control, as according to Silvester et al ‘while migrants were being moved in these railway trucks, the state probably had its moment of greatest control’.⁶⁵ Control over contract workers was probably achieved due to the exaggerated dehumanizing ways in which the workers were treated by the recruiting officials and afterwards by their employers. Vinnia Ndadi’s account about his trip to the south on his first contract is a manifestation of such treatments:

⁶¹ Ibid, p 54.

⁶² Hartmann, W, Hayes, P, Silvester, J, Wallace, M, *Namibia under South African Rule*, p 34.

⁶³ Hartmann, W, Hayes, P, Silvester, J, Wallace, M, *Namibia under South African Rule*, p 34.

⁶⁴ Cooper, A. D. ‘The Institutionalization of Contract Labour in Namibia’, pp. 121-138. Also see, Banghart, P. ‘Migrant Labour in South-West Africa and its effects on Ovambo Tribal Life’ (Unpublished MA Thesis, University of Stellenbosch, 1969), p 53, Ndadi, V. *Breaking Contract: The Story of Vinnia Ndadi – Life Histories from the Revolution – Namibia SWAPO* (South Africa: Mayibuye Books, 1974), Ya Otto, J. *Battlefront Namibia* (London: Heinemann, 1982).

⁶⁵ Hartmann, W, Hayes, P, Silvester, J, Wallace, M, *Namibia under South African Rule*, p 34.

We squeezed into small cattle cars, more than twenty men in each. They put canvas down to cover the cattle mess but it was impossible to lie down. There were no buckets or latrines, we just had to wait each time till the next station – if we could – then run to the bush or latrine.⁶⁶

Such cases were common in Namibia at the time. Not only were many workers put into one cattle car, so packed together they could hardly move their legs, but they also got no opportunity to relieve themselves for a long time. Conversely, this kind of dehumanizing treatment in which the workers were transported to their work places was not the only means of control that the colonial state utilized. Workers were also subjected to serialized various forms of humiliations and tools of punishment. I will get back to these in a moment. According to Gottschalk, ‘Namibian workers laboured under the disadvantages, restrictions and weakened bargaining position of pass laws, indenture and migrancy, enforced by criminal law’.⁶⁷ In the face of contracted work, each worker received a blanket, a shirt, sometimes a pair of khaki shorts, which were supposed to last the worker the whole period of his contract, that typically lasted a year or two. The cost of provisions such as, food and sundries, a medical exam and a recruiting fee, was all paid by the employer. And for the duration of the contract, migrant workers were confined to the property of the employer, could not visit home, could not accept visits from family, ate only what their employer was willing to feed them and suffered whatever punishment an employer thought appropriate for any suspected offences.

Conditions and descriptions of jobs on contract varied as, according to Cooper,

Employment at the fishing factories at Walvis Bay necessitated standing at conveyor belts for sometimes 18 hours on end to decapitate sardines before stuffing them into cans to be exported to consumers in North America and Europe. Another option for African workers was strip mining uranium at Rossing which led to exposure to radioactive contamination. Contract labour was available for white farms in the Police Zone, where labourers

⁶⁶ Ndadi, V. *Breaking Contract*, p 18.

⁶⁷ Gottschalk, K. ‘South African labour Policy in Namibia 1915-1975’, *South African Labour Bulletin*, 4, 1-2 (January – February, 1978), p 80.

worked from dawn to sunset, often alone in the fields with hundreds of sheep and with no shelter or provisions.⁶⁸

In this case, farming was probably the worst, as accommodation was bad and most of the time non-existent regardless of the environment and weather. Ya Otto narrates what it was like for karakul sheep herders in Aus, southern Namibia:

The winter was worse still for the shepherds who roamed the mountains above Aus. The slopes provided good grazing for the karakul sheep, whose thick, black wool made fortunes for the German and Boer farmers in southern Namibia. The farmers only employed the contract labourers, mainly Ovambos, who had to live with the herds all the year round. With very little food and clothing and no shelter other than what they could build for themselves from rocks and dry shrubs, these shepherds were ill-placed to withstand the icy wind. I heard them talk about friends freezing to death and about beatings by the baas when sheep were missing.⁶⁹

The work conditions for farm labourers were evidently awful, besides being completely isolated for days, out there alone with flocks of sheep, they were also held accountable if some got lost. Conditions in the mines, factories and public services, which employed a number of Ovambo workers, were probably also not favourable, considering the long hours of routine work most of the time under repressive supervision. The contract system was in fact, a standardised form of almost total control as there was resistance and agency within it. It consisted of specific conditions under which the labourer worked, wage rates were set and bargaining for more was not permitted. Thus, during the period of contract, which they could not terminate on their own will, migrant workers were virtually forced labourers, under prison-like regulation. As Mbembe suggests - referring to mine migrant workers living in mine compounds in apartheid Johannesburg - "Around them was instituted a field of visibility and surveillance, hierarchies and inspections."⁷⁰ Similar controls were also applied to the Ovambo migrant labourers between prescribed areas of work and their recruitment points. This brings me back to the issue of medical examinations that prospective labourers (especially for the mines) were subjected to, in order to show just how the colonial state used them as a means of control.

⁶⁸ Cooper, A. 'The Institutionalization of Contract Labour in Namibia', p 122.

⁶⁹ Ya Otto, J. *Battlefront Namibia*, p 7.

⁷⁰ Mbembe, A. 'Aesthetics of Superfluity' *Public Culture* 16.3 (2004), pp 372-405.

Biomedicine and the relevance of migrant labourer's body

The restrictive characteristics of the colonial South African labour system in Namibia were due several methods of control, which consisted of medical examinations. Using Alexander Butchart who applies Foucaultian concepts of power and knowledge to the problem of the body of a South African miner by exploring mining medicine as a manifestation of discipline, I try to examine his findings in relation to the medical inspections done on the Ovambo migrants.⁷¹ Butchart claims that, until the 1940s, the South African state's primary purpose of selecting and screening individual miners for illness and infirmity was linked to the repressive strategies of confinement by which diseased Africans were banished to the 'native' territories.⁷² Recruitment of the Ovambo men at SWANLA in Ondangwa or any other point of recruitment, incorporated instituted medical examination procedures, which were, according to Banghart, to determine if the recruit was of the correct medical classification, for that particular employment, and to determine if the recruit was free of diseases such as tuberculosis.⁷³ The process was not only done to remove all 'weakly' men, but it was also sufficiently stringent to detect any worker suffering from active tuberculosis so as to prevent him leaving Ovamboland. In a way, this was government's mechanism of keeping diseased Ovambo men away, to protect white health in urban areas, as according to Gottschalk, the migrant labour system institutionalized the policy of the colonial power and mining capital alike: that the reserves were dumping grounds for diseased workers. He further claims that TB spread from the Ovambo men who had been repatriated from South African mines on account of chest pains.⁷⁴ Thus, he argues, 'the labour of Namibian mine workers profited South African capital; but the social and financial costs of these diseased mineworkers was levied upon Namibia's society,'⁷⁵ in this case the Ovambo society.

⁷¹Butchart, A. 'The Industrial Panopticon: Mining and the Medical Construction of Migrant African Labour in South Africa', 1900-1950', *Soc. Sci. Med. Vol. 42, No. 2* (1996), pp 185-197.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Banghart, 'Migrant Labour in South-West Africa', p 83.

⁷⁴ Gottschalk, K. 'The Political economy of health care: Colonial Namibia, 1915-1961' *Social Science & Medicine Vol 26, issue 6*, 1988, pp 557-587.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

It was based on these factors that SWANLA's initial medical examination determined the division between bodies immediately acceptable for contracted labour, or the 'rejects' who were sent back home. Ndadi claims that employers buying people from SWANLA wanted strong boys able to do hard work in mines and on farms, not young boys unable to lift a bag of cement. He states: "I was sent back four times before they finally accepted me. Workers were classified according to their health; the strength of their bodies. That's the only important thing to the recruiting agent – he doesn't want to buy a sick or weak person unable to perform the work he is contracted for."⁷⁶ According to Cooper citing the 'Standard of Fitness of Natives for Mine Works' there was a plan that was followed and strongly recommended in order to assist the medical officer in rapidly and efficiently examining potential workers:

Line up all the 'natives' entirely stripped (they must not be allowed merely to drop their trousers and retain them about their ankles). Stand them in line about 20 feet away from the medical examiner. Make each boy walk towards the examiner, observing his gait and whether he is lame, etc. When about 5 feet from the examiner, cause him to rise on tiptoe then squat, then rise again, then extend both arms above his head, extend the arms at right angles to the body laterally, then forward, then flex the elbow joints. When in this position cause him to clench and open his hands, and then rotate each arm parallel to the long axis of the body. Turn him round and look at his spine. These motions, which take less than a minute, will enable the examiner to judge whether all the joints re-sound in function. Ask the native a simple question in an ordinary voice to ascertain in [sic] whether he is deaf. Look at his ears, his gums and teeth. Cover each eye separately, and ask him to count the fingers of your hand to test for blindness. Look at the skin, noting the presence of any large scars or varicose veins, or herniae, or flabbiness of muscles or skin.⁷⁷

The intensity of this kind of analysis, however, using Butchart's argument, accorded a power to the medical examination only as great as that of the authorities who conducted and controlled the procedure. Its "clinical power can be likened to sovereignty, the

⁷⁶ Ndadi, V. *Breaking Contract*, p 17.

⁷⁷ Cooper, A. 'The Institutionalization of Contract Labour in Namibia', p 125.

doctor equated with the king in the control exercised over bodies”.⁷⁸ But on a whole, the medical examinations done on Ovambo potential workers, were of particularly brutal and invasive exercise of colonial power on the bodies of its subjects. In addition to medical examinations, there were also measures of identification, which had been imposed to restrict migrant workers’ freedom of movement.

Influx control and the introduction of pass laws

James Kauluma argued that the beginnings of legislation affecting Ovambo migrant labourer’s movement can be traced to the fingerprinting and the allocation of passes in the 1930s. This allowed the objectifying and regularizing watch of the colonial state, to converge and to inscribe the individualized body of each worker in the bureaucratic surveillance apparatus of the working industry and the state.⁷⁹ Again it is important to note that it was these methods of control that aggravated the opposition against the contract labour system as migrant labourers were not free to move around until they reached their final work destinations. Indirect measures such as fingerprinting are evident in Kauluma’s account about his recruitment for contract labour at Ondangwa in the 1950s:

From the doctor we were led to another office where our thumbprints were marked on the contract agreement papers. We came to learn later that the thumbprint was also used for identification, particularly in cases where a worker had deserted or broken contract.⁸⁰

The principle of identification remained crucial to the whole repressive labour system. This was because, after being examined and classified by SWANLA, migrant workers were then sent to employers on farms, in the mines and fishing industry on a contract basis. Breaking such a contract was a criminal offence and workers were not allowed to bring their families with them. They had to stay under appalling conditions in the prison-like compounds or for example in basic conditions herding sheep. According to Gottschalk, The Master and Servant Proclamation, 34/1920 made it a crime for a worker

⁷⁸ Butchart, A. ‘The Industrial Panopticon’, pp 185-197.

⁷⁹ Kauluma, J. ‘The Migrant Contract Labour’, p 9.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

to change employers, or leave a job, without his employer's permission while under contract. Furthermore, he states "The Natives (Urban Areas) proclamation, 34/1924 and Curfew Regulations Proclamation, 33/1922 were "for the...better control of contracts of service with natives into" towns."⁸¹ Such proclamations were of course to limit the worker's rights to live in the urban areas, and were constantly put under threat of eviction to the reserve or a jail sentence. At odds, migrant workers were made part of the urban form but yet separated from it. The migrant's mobility was tightened, as according to Silvester et al "The movement which migrant labour represented was intended to be a very controlled one, and forced movement was an integral part of colonial containment strategies."⁸² Furthermore, they argue, "The movement of males was sought by colonialism, but so was its utter control. The rigid institutionalized canals of the migrant labour system attempted to integrate male labour from the north into the larger economy, while maintaining Ovamboland's isolation from that economy."⁸³

Consequently, according to Emmett, in 1935 a comprehensive series of regulations aimed at the control of the migrant labour force was introduced in the form of Proclamation No.29 of 1935 and Government Notice 180 of 1935 for control over the mobility and employment of migrant labourers from beyond the Police Zone as well as from other territories.⁸⁴ Ovambo men, however, who had permanent residential status in the Police Zone represented a small minority and must, in general, live without their families, since their wives were seldom given permission to join them. According to Emmett, in terms of the Proclamation it became an offence to employ pass-less migrants, and for migrants without passes to offer themselves for employment. In addition the proclamation provided for the repatriation of migrants to their "places of recruitment or domicile".⁸⁵ Also, argues Gottschalk, the pass law system made it a crime for any Namibian outside a reserve in the Police Zone to travel, visit, live, seek a job, accept any job, work at any job or carry on any business without the relevant pass.⁸⁶ As a result of

⁸¹ Gottschalk, K.. 'South African Labour Policy in Namibia', p 81.

⁸² Hartmann, W, Hayes, P, Silvester, J, Wallace, M, *Namibia under South African Rule*, p 19.

⁸³ Ibid, p 33.

⁸⁴ Emmett, T. *Popular Resistance and the Roots of Nationalism in Namibia*, p 188.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Gottschalk, K. 'South African Labour Policy in Namibia', p 81.

this Proclamation, people were now supposed to have their passes at all times, since it indicated whether or not the bearer was lawfully in a particular area. If not, he or she was subjected to immediate arrest. The pass laws enabled the state to regulate the flow of Ovambos into the urban areas. As Emmett argues, the principal object of the proclamation was to prevent northern and foreign ‘natives’ from moving into the urban locations, where they become “detrribalized” and failed to support their families. Although “detrribalization” undoubtedly caused some concern among administrative officials in Ovamboland and other northern reserves, the major thrust of the new legislation was to ensure a cheap and rigorously controlled labour force for the farms and mines.⁸⁷ Nevertheless, the Proclamation also made clear that the towns were the white man's establishment and Africans should only be allowed to enter them as long as their labour was needed.

It is important here to note that, Ovambo chiefs and headmen became deeply involved in the contract labour system and were counted upon to maintain the profitable functioning of this system. The role of headmen in the contract labour system will be dealt with shortly. The ‘Tribal’ Trust Funds mentioned earlier, which had been established in most Ovambo communities in 1930s, played a major part in the ruling group’s involvement, since these Funds depended heavily on migrant incomes.⁸⁸ Additionally, according to Cooper, a five shilling tax on all adult men in Ovamboland was instituted in 1929 by the administration to encourage labour migration, and part of these funds were used to pay salaries of chiefs and headmen to encourage their continued collaboration with colonial authorities.⁸⁹ The Proclamation 29 provided for the control over mobility and employment of migrant labourers indicated above was reported to have raised concern from the Kwanyama council of headmen. According to the Native Labour Commissioner:

The first reaction of the Ukuanyama Council of Headmen at a Tribal meeting at Omedi was one of gratitude to the administration for having placed the conditions of employment of labourers on a sound footing. They are very pleased that from now on no native from Ukuanyama will be allowed to stay

⁸⁷ Emmett, T. *Popular Resistance and the Roots of Nationalism in Namibia*, p 188.

⁸⁸ Cooper, A. ‘The Institutionalization of Contract Labour in Namibia’, p 133.

⁸⁹ Cooper, A. ‘The Institutionalization of Contract Labour in Namibia’, p 133.

away from the Tribal area for more than two years. The passing of a new law by the administration for which they had applied strictly, will in future prevent the detribalization of Ovambos. Natives will be repatriated to Ovamboland when they are no longer able to work owing to old age, and their families (*epata*) and the tribe will be called upon to take care of them. The Headmen pointed out that there are obligations which all members of the *epata* must fulfill whilst they are able-bodied, in order to claim the privilege of maintenance in their old age. It is the experience of the headmen that natives who remained in the south for any unduly lengthy periods, lose touch with their *epatas* and do not fulfill their obligations as members of the family. The administration should not wait to send such people back to Ovamboland until they are too old to take part in kraal life and the duties connected therewith. The exemption of all natives from contributing to the Ovamboland Trust Funds is going to adversely affect the revenue of the various funds. It means that for years many natives will contribute nothing towards the development of the Reserves where all their relatives live, but at the same time they retain the right to return and settle in the Reserves and the administration can send them back to their domicile of origin if they are not law abiding or they are unemployed or have no satisfactory means of subsistence. The majority of these people will do nothing to assist their *epata* and relatives whilst they are in the Police zone, but the *epata* is expected to take them back into the fold whenever it suits them or if they are repatriated.⁹⁰

It is important to note a colonial discourse which implies the headmen's acceptance and gratitude of having their young men's mobility restricted. It is obvious that the actual statements by headmen were mediated by a colonial official, and we cannot be sure if this is quite what the headmen would have said. This is because one needs to question quite how much the headmen were allowed to speak and whose voice is coming out from this text? Does the voice belong to the headmen or the colonial official?

The proclamation made it possible for migrant workers to remain in the south for unduly lengthy periods which also gave a choice to those who had worked in the same area for a long time. This had made it possible for workers, as the text argues, to lose touch with their *epatas* and to not fulfill their obligations as members of the family. This was probably accurate but, what is interesting here, is the stance taken by the headmen who as dependents of the 'Tribal' Trust Fund, were entitled to the migrant's levy towards the Trust Fund, and chastised their allies (the colonial state) for allowing the workers to stay

⁹⁰ NAN, NAO File 2/1/1 Report Native Labour Commission 1939-1940.

away from their families. They questioned why if the workers were exempted from paying their levy fee when they reside in the south, why did they have the right to come back to Ovamboland when they were old and destitute and no longer able to contribute to the Fund, or could be sent back if they misbehaved themselves or were unemployed? According to the above text they argued that the administration should not wait to send the workers back to Ovamboland when they were too old to take part in the 'kraal life' and other duties. The payment of the levy by the migrants acted as a very strong tie between them and their home areas, and this tie was severed when they remained in the south indefinitely. This also meant that, if the workers remained in the south and did not come home, the headmen's means of income also suffered as a result. Additionally, this was probably the only way through which the headmen regained some sort of control over the migrants, as when the workers left Oukwanyama, their whereabouts were rarely known during their absence for the whole duration of their contracts. However, according to Hayes et al the South African administration had much success in obliging migrants to return home at the end of their short-term contracts; continuing close links with rural societies in the north also encouraged them to leave the Police Zone.⁹¹

The colonial state's concern over keeping the Ovambo's 'traditional' order to the minimum of change is total nonsense, because Ovambos were becoming westernized even before the South African occupation in 1915, and by the 1930s they had become more Christianized. Nevertheless, there were concerns that Ovambo migrant contract workers would become "detrribalized" by the long residence in the south. But the motive for exercising control over Ovamboland's labour force to avoid "detrribalization" was in fact to exploit the workers for the advancement of the white economic sector. As Silvester et al suggest "The sealing off of the north was intended to exclude the region from the political developments further south, as was the design of the migrant labour and compound systems, which sought to keep the low-paid northern contract workers separated from other ethnic categories and political 'agitators'."⁹²

⁹¹ Hartmann, W, Hayes, P, Silvester, J, *The Colonizing Camera*, p 133.

⁹² Hartmann, W, Hayes, P, Silvester, J, Wallace, M, *Namibia under South African Rule*, p 24.

The role of chiefs and councils of headmen in labour migration

As noted earlier, chiefs and headmen had a very active part in the repressive contract labour system although they did not always have authority over migrants unless it was requested by the colonial officials in order to discipline the workers. According to Hayes, during the German regime, 'in 1905 officials visited Ovambo kings to negotiate labour agreements'.⁹³ Hayes further explains that these officially sanctioned recruiters visited kings periodically to arrange the supply of recruits.⁹⁴ She describes that Ovambo kings were pressed to co-operate in labour recruitment; as the latter had become central to the political interaction of the German state and Ovambo polities. Nande and Kambonde agreed to co-operate when Captain Viktor Franke visited Ovamboland in 1908. This visit coincided with serious famine and the Germans sent eighty tons of grain to create goodwill and dependency.⁹⁵ Ovambo ruling groups were urged to encourage their people to go out in order that they might earn money with which to buy food and generally save their families from starving to death.

According to Moorsom, the Ovambo kings at the minimum never seriously opposed the growth of labour migration after 1907 and there is an indication of a degree of regulation over outgoing workers.⁹⁶ For this reason, it may be tentatively concluded that the Ovambo kings attempted to retain some control over this new source of revenue by putting migrants under their own representatives, by limiting the period of absence, and by sanctions against those who disobeyed royal injunctions.⁹⁷ Also at that time, there was a six month contract period as the labourers liked to be home during the sowing season and generally left home after the harvest was completed.⁹⁸ According to Hayes, 'the short, six-month labour contracts supposedly attracted workers, allowing them to leave

⁹³ Hayes, P. 'History of the Ovambo', p 154.

⁹⁴ Ibid, p 155.

⁹⁵ Ibid, p 156.

⁹⁶ Moorsom, R. 'Contract Labour System 1900-1926', p32.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Banghart, P. 'Migrant Labour in South-West Africa', p 28.

after harvest and return before planting, though it is likely that labour-repressive policies by employers attempted to prevent this'.⁹⁹

As mentioned earlier, indirect rule through the extensive use of “indigenous” council of headmen institutions became the norm in Ovamboland. Only half of the kingdoms still had kings in 1948. In Oukwanyama, the kingship ended in 1917 when King Mandume died. In Uukwambi the monarchy was replaced by headmen and sub-headmen after King Ipumbu Tschilongo was banished to Kavango in 1932. Thus, the Ondonga, Ongandjera and Ukwiludhi, for example had kings until much later, whereas headmen were simply appointed by Government administrators.¹⁰⁰ In this area, the Native Administration encouraged the headmen to attract residents (mostly Kwanyama people) on the Angolan side of the border. However, according to Emmett, there were already signs of overcrowding in Oukwanyama which straddled the border with Angola, in 1924.¹⁰¹ Although land pressures were not solely a result of natural population increases, the influx of Angolans fleeing Portuguese taxation and forced labour also contributed. Furthermore, while out-migration to the Police Zone was strictly controlled, there is no evidence that the administration attempted to restrict the influx from Angola.¹⁰² If anything, it appears that migration from Angola was encouraged in order to expand the potential migrant labour force and by 1932 the Oukwanyama area was already so “congested” that the administration was forced to begin opening up a new zone to the north-east of the main settlement area.¹⁰³

Emmett argues that the development of the peripheral areas, however, required large inputs of capital and technology which had to be drawn from the “tribal” funds. He continues arguing that besides the inadequacy of this source of financing, the “tribal” funds were provided in cash or grain by the Ovambos themselves, and thus served as a further drain on the money and food resources of the area.¹⁰⁴ In 1929, for example, the

⁹⁹ Hayes, P. ‘History of the Ovambo’, p 156.

¹⁰⁰ Tuupainen, M. *Marriage in a matrilineal African tribe: A social anthropological study of marriage in the Ondonga tribe in Ovamboland* (The Academic bookstore, distr, 1, 1970), p 12.

¹⁰¹ Emmett, T. *Popular Resistance and the Roots of Nationalism in Namibia*, p 202.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Emmett, T. *Popular Resistance and the Roots of Nationalism in Namibia*, p 202.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, p 203.

administration took advantage of the drought and famine in Ovamboland to introduce taxation which the Ovambos had previously succeeded in resisting.¹⁰⁵ Initially all Ovambo men were taxed five shillings a year, but the tax had to be suspended soon after because of the shortage of cash during the depression.¹⁰⁶ When it was reintroduced, the Ovambos were allowed to pay in either cash or grain. The grain collected in this way was used to meet later food shortages.¹⁰⁷ According to oral accounts, Kwanyama people used to pay taxes either in grain, cattle or money.

According to Lucas Shinedima, homesteads in Oukwanyama were numbered according to the districts and that was how taxes were collected. He claims that the collection of tax started after senior headman Nehemia came to occupy Omhedi where the *omaanda* grain silos were located. However, he further claims that several silos were set up all over Oukwanyama for people in different districts to pay tax and the grain was later brought to Omhedi.¹⁰⁸ The collection of tax in Ovamboland was introduced by the state in collaboration with the Ovambo chiefs and headmen, but note that things were changing under colonial rule as now the collection of taxes was in the colonial official's control, while previously it was under royal power.

According to Emmett, the administration also took advantage of the famine in the early 1930s to disarm some of the Ovambos by exchanging food for rifles.¹⁰⁹ The disarming of the Ovambos together with legal restrictions on hunting further limited the source of food available in Ovamboland. Emmett argues that besides these economic consequences, disarmament of the Ovambos also had important political implications. The arms possessed by the various Ovambo groupings had acted as an inhibition to more blatant colonial intervention and had allowed better-armed groupings a certain degree of political leverage and independence.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, the undermining of the authority and power of the Ovambo kings by disarmament in turn had important consequences for

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Lucas Shinedima, Onuno, 2.8.2008.

¹⁰⁹ Emmett, T. *Popular Resistance and the Roots of Nationalism in Namibia*, p 203.

¹¹⁰ Emmett, T. *Popular Resistance and the Roots of Nationalism in Namibia*, p 204.

the system of production in Ovamboland.¹¹¹ On an obvious level, kings and headmen were functionaries of the colonial state within the context of indirect rule, and the undermining of their independence clearly facilitated the introduction of policies that favoured the interests of the colonizers rather than those of the Ovambos.¹¹²

The “indigenous” authorities, for example, played a vital role in the recruitment and “disciplining” of contract labourers. According to Emmett, the councils of headmen (*omalenga*) in particular, which were introduced when the kingships of Oukwanyama and Uukwambi were abolished, were, because of their pliability, highly favoured by the colonial authorities. However, pre-colonial political authorities, and in particular the Ovambo kingship, played a central role in regulating production in Ovamboland before colonization, as the powers of the kings were linked to the ecological conditions of the area.¹¹³ Migrant labour clearly also posed a threat to the labour resources of Ovamboland, particularly as migrant labourers were away on contract for at least 12 months (since the creation of SWANLA in 1926), and were therefore unable to coordinate their work in the colonial economy with the seasonal demands of agricultural production.¹¹⁴ Emmett argues that under the circumstances, the collapse of pre-colonial political structures might have opened the way for extensive changes and the closer integration of Ovamboland into the wider economy. In spite of the administration’s massive intervention, however, colonial ideology required the preservation of indigenous structures.¹¹⁵ The result was that the options for change were themselves restricted and that the social forms which emerged were markedly rigid, and bore less resemblance to pre-colonial structures than to the ideological assumptions of the colonizers.¹¹⁶ The kings and headmen were reduced to mere functionaries within the colonial administrative system, and lost nearly all accountability to their people.¹¹⁷ However, colonial rule not only undermined the religious bases of Ovambo social formations, but entrenched kings and headmen (provided they obeyed the colonial authorities) in new positions of power.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, p 207.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, p 209.

¹¹⁶ Emmett, T. *Popular Resistance and the Roots of Nationalism in Namibia*, pp 209-210.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, p 210.

Individual mobility, both within and beyond Ovamboland, also became increasingly difficult.¹¹⁸ The latter will be dealt with in more detail in the following chapter.

Migrant worker's political consciousness

The years between the late 1950s and 1970s have long been regarded as watershed years for the Namibian contract workers' political consciousness. According to Emmett, large strikes were mounted by contract labourers in 1952 and 1953 but these were ruthlessly crushed by the authorities, and, in 1953, several workers were shot dead.¹¹⁹ As a result, the canning factories of Walvis Bay became a major centre of industrial strife, and it was here that one of the strongest branches of the Ovamboland People's Organization (OPO) was established in the late 1950s.¹²⁰ From 1945, machinery was created to trace and arrest deserters in Ovamboland and greater use was made of the headmen to maintain control over returning contract labourers. South African mines offered an escape from the arbitrary system of job allocation managed by SWANLA, but it also served as a means of political education for those labourers who were able to go to South Africa after World War II.¹²¹ Following the Second World War, the rise of South African mining economy attracted contract labourers from both inside and outside South Africa. Thousands of contract workers such as Herman Toivo ya Toivo having diverted into military service, returned with a vastly broadened experience and spread news and ideas about political developments in South Africa and other African colonies. This approach led to contract workers forming political parties and becoming increasingly radical. The first major initiative to organize nationally against the contract labour system arose among a group of Ovambo migrants working in South Africa, who in 1957 formed the Ovamboland People's Congress (OPC), re-named in 1958 the Ovambo People's

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, p 263.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid, p 267.

Organization (OPO).¹²² After this war, most of the political parties for example SWANU¹²³ demanded independence from colonial rule.

Even more importantly, access to South Africa served to “open the eyes” of those able to escape the isolation and restriction imposed on all Ovambos and other northerners. The new opportunities afforded by this means of escape was to lead directly to the formation of the Ovamboland People’s Organization (OPO) in 1959 in Cape Town which, in turn, was to provide the basis of Namibia’s most important nationalist organization, the South West Africa People’s Organisation (SWAPO).¹²⁴ This, in turn, meant that even when a majority of contract labourers were involved in other sectors of the economy, the dismal wages, appalling conditions and underlying violence of farm labour would be an integral part of their experience, and, thus, have a uniformly radicalizing effect on all contract workers.¹²⁵ Vital aspect of Namibian contract labourers’ complex social identity, was their involvement in both a wage-labour sector and in a residual subsistence economy. According to Emmett, the dependence of increasingly larger numbers of Ovambos on wage-labour that followed the progressive disintegration of the pre-colonial economy had a significant impact on the social consciousness of contract labourers, but the fact remains that, no matter how great this dependence, they were forced to return to their sending areas at the end of their contracts.¹²⁶

Emmett posits that the very nature of the contract labour system ensured that there was a constant turnover of labour so that work groups were constantly changing, with new migrants arriving and others leaving.¹²⁷ Furthermore, the structure of the contract labour system in Namibia meant that labourers were constantly changing their jobs. While the solidarity of “brotherhood” may have particularly compensated for this, the constant

¹²² Moorsom, R. ‘Labour Consciousness and the 1971-72 Contract Workers Strike in Namibia’, *Development and Change Vol. 10, Issue 2*, April 1979, pp 205-231.

¹²³ The South West Africa National Union (SWANU) is the oldest political party in Namibia, formed in August 1959. It ran parallel with Ovambo People’s Congress (OPC) now SWAPO but was restricted to educated Herero people in the main.

¹²⁴ Emmett, T. *Popular Resistance and the Roots of Nationalism in Namibia*, p 268.

¹²⁵ Ibid, p 270.

¹²⁶ Ibid, p 271.

¹²⁷ Ibid, p 273.

turnover undermined any attempt at long-term formal organization.¹²⁸ Moreover, while contract labourers were concentrated in large groups in the Police Zone, after the termination of their contracts they would be dispersed over large areas in their reserves. Emmett further relates that both the need for political support from other sources and the essentially nationalist orientation of Namibian contract labourers are illustrated in the formation of the Ovamboland People's Organisation (OPO) and its transformation into the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO).¹²⁹ He further claims that the very rigours of the contract system and the rigid control exercised over the lives of contract workers helped to create the conditions for the launching of a political movement which was to challenge not only the contract system, but the state itself.¹³⁰

Conclusion

Regardless of the colonial state's repressive labour system, Ovambo migrant workers demonstrated a consistent determination to resist against their conditions of exploitation already in the early 1950s. The exploitative and repressive conditions entrenched in the contract labour system, contributed to the development of militancy among migrants from Ovamboland, Kavango and southern Angola. Migrant workers were denied any rights outside Ovamboland, and were enforced by contract and pass laws which put total control over their job allocation, residence and mobility in the in urban areas.

This chapter has highlighted the role of Ovambo chiefs and headmen in the contract labour system and how this specifically served the colonial administration. This was because the headmen and chiefs teamed up with the colonial officials for their own interests rather than their own people. Ovambo chiefs or headmen's authority was requested when a migrant worker 'misbehaved' and needed to be disciplined. Normally when the workers' contracts ended or were no longer considered economically productive, they were sent back to Ovamboland. Consequently, the conditions of travel; housing and living conditions; medical inspections, unnatural classifications of the

¹²⁸ Ibid, p 202.

¹²⁹ Emmett, T. *Popular Resistance and the Roots of Nationalism in Namibia*, p 273.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

fittest, and the systematic control endured by Ovambo migrant workers encouraged resistance against the colonial labour system. Mechanisms employed by the colonial South African state to control and repress the migrant workers became a rallying point for them to organize the South West Africa People's Organisation SWAPO in 1960. Then, from early December 1971 to January 1972 approximately 20,000 migrant workers brought the mining industry to a halt and seriously interrupted the communications and transport systems, commercial operations and rural production. The strike was a direct attack on the system of migrant-contract labour and its influx control. This is relevant to this thesis as the strike and the public floggings that came after it are central to colonial intermediaries discussed in detail in Chapter Seven.



Chapter 6

‘The Love To Be Modern’? Dreams and Desires of Workers

Introduction

The central question for this chapter is to analyze how and why certain Ovambo men and women who were exposed to missions and commodities, especially migrant contract labourers, embraced modernity with such distinctive enthusiasm. This chapter investigates aspects of the Ovambo’s consistent desire for modernity represented by western commodities, Christianity and education. The initial contact with European traders and later employers in the Police Zone produced a marked effect on the Ovambo in terms of adopting European commodities. Although the latter were there prior to colonialism, they were only available to a few. However, they stimulated desire for these goods and this later expanded under colonialism. As the previous chapter explains, as early as the 1880s a small number of Ovambo men travelled away from their homes for contracted labour that lasted six to nine months at a time, and by the late 19th century and early 20th century, this labour migration increased.

This chapter addresses the reasons why especially Ovambo men went into contract waged labour, and the struggles that went on over the environment of that work and the different ways in which waged labour was integrated into their lives. For this, the chapter uses elements of former migrant labourer’s biographies, to get an idea of why they went to the south. This is because, although the whole exercise of labour migration was fraught with danger, many Ovambo men continued to leave their areas of birth for labour centres in the Police Zone. This already suggests strong elements of agency, qualifying the Foucauldian framework of the previous chapter. This is because although contract workers were confined to the terms of their contracts, they managed to act independently and made their own decisions to survive under repressive conditions.

This chapter also looks at the influence of long-distance traders and Christianity as their impact in Ovamboland was both symbolic and material. The traders and missions also nurtured a desire for ‘modern’ goods and thus actually prepared the Ovambo for waged labour. For they instilled in them ‘wants’ that could only be satisfied through entry into the colonial economy, and made them thoroughly familiar with the symbols and values of the

Europeans' modernity. But most importantly, the chapter looks at the reasons why Ovambo people adopted European goods especially clothing in the face of colonialism. This is key because there was a sense of a shift in the way these young Ovambo men and women turned to modernity, owing to forces of economic capitalism that encroached on the social, economic and political space of Ovambo society. Ovambo men sought to use wages from migrant labour in order to build up herds or to set up a household independent of 'patriarchal' restraints. This was because the wages earned from migrant labour allowed young men to challenge the authority of their elders, by building up status and wealth on their own, mainly in the 1920s and 1930s.¹

However, due to long term contracts, many Ovambo men became partly urbanised, gradually giving way to semi-proletarianisation. As a result, men came back to their home areas changed, as they had adopted western ways of living and this threatened indirect rule which was against the 'detrribalisation' of Africans. It tried to ensure this by keeping the labourers' rural connections alive and providing a safeguard so that cultural affinities and respect for traditional authority remained when their labour was no longer needed. Thus, the way in which Ovambo men set about making sense of the whole modern process was mediated by an existing set of motivations, which profoundly suggested a disillusionment with their traditional leaders and headmen. As this implies, the discourses of 'detrribalisation,' migrant labour, money and western commodities, were deeply linked to the colonial process, which divided the urban from the rural, and the industrial centre and the 'native' reserve. And it brought the Ovambo men and women to adopt and appropriate aspects of modernity in their own economic, social and political consciousness.

Rising importance of Waged Labour

Many historians have dealt with the process of impoverishment and underdevelopment which deprived Ovambo people of productive resources such as cattle and forced them into migrant labour, but the question posed by Kreike, Hayes and McKittrick was, why did young Ovambo men become migrant labourers when there was no external conquest, taxation or

¹ McKittrick, M. *To dwell secure: generation, Christianity, and colonialism in Ovamboland* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2002), p 171.

land dispossession to encourage wage-seekers to migrate?² Examining the reasons why the men went into migrant labour does not only give a better understanding of how disillusionment with traditional authorities happened, but also leads to a discussion about the Ovambo's eagerness to change and to have access to western goods.

According to McKittrick, temporary migration to labour centres was a way for young men to escape the devastation in Ovambo communities caused by raiding, Rinderpest, drought and the concentration of wealth and political power that left many without resources to become social adults.³ This is not to say that the young men's inclination towards waged labour was to be explained merely in terms of refuge from the political and ecological situations in Ovamboland, rather, the wages earned from migrant labour enabled them to compete and access goods that distinguished them from other people in the society, for example, kings and headmen. McKittrick claims that the new opportunities offered by colonialism – in particular migrant labour and Christianity – allowed young men to challenge the authority of their elders, by accruing status and wealth outside the existing channels of age-based exchange and redistribution.⁴ This refers to generational conflicts and patriarchal constraints that grew into a tension between young men and their elders, which later motivated them to take an interest in migrant labour. McKittrick further claims that “workers sought from wage labour the means to become senior men within the existing terms of masculinity, as they used their small wages to buy manufactured goods, which in turn were bartered for livestock.”⁵

The argument here is that the majority of Ovambo labourers sought to access the means of social mobility, with which to gain a sense of ‘senior-hood’. This was because livestock amongst the Ovambo was a means of obtaining wealth and more importantly social recognition. And for the poor who did not have cattle, wage labour was viewed as the most stable source of income which was used to acquire them. As Hayes argues, “...in the early period, wages were used to buy cattle following the Rinderpest epidemic of 1897 with which to set up homesteads and also towards the reconstruction of lineage social relations which

² Clarence-Smith, W.G. and Moorsom, R. ‘Underdevelopment and Class Formations in Ovamboland, 1845-1915’, in *Journal of African History*, XVI, 3 (1975), pp 365-381; Moorsom, R. ‘Contract Labour System 1900-1926’ in *Underdevelopment and labour migration: the contract labour system in Namibia*, Hayes, P, ‘A History of the Owambo of Namibia, 1880-1930’ (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 1992); Kreike, E. *Recreating Eden: Agro-ecological change, food security and environment diversity in southern Angola and northern Namibia, 1890-1960* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2004) and McKittrick, M. *To dwell secure*.

³ McKittrick, M. *To dwell secure*, p 124.

⁴ *Ibid*, p 6.

⁵ *Ibid*, p 125.

were in constant tension with the centralising kingships.”⁶ Hence, it became imperative for many young men who had a desire to replenish herds, to undertake waged labour as these were used to set up homesteads. This implies a local version of modernity, or a vernacular modernity, which is the crucial appropriation of elements of ‘western lifestyle’ reproduced in indigenous form. By wanting to set up a homestead and being conscious of local social relations and values, many young men were attracted to contract work to acquire possessions that denoted modernity.

While, in most cases the immediate reason given regarding why men went into migrant labour was cash wages, young men were also attracted by symbols of status possessed by the elite such as clothing and consumer goods. Thus, their wages were also used to buy clothing which at that time did not only serve as exchangeable goods but also signified status. Clothing created a powerful emblem of elitism, identified by their European symbols of modernity. Former migrant labourer’s biographies⁷ not only confirm the critical role migrant labour played in their lives, but also attest to the local version of modernity because they invested their wages in cattle and all sorts of goods to maintain a rural way of life and most importantly goods that signified modernity. Vinnia Ndadi recalls that his parents were Christians who worked in the fields together for their sustenance, except when his father was away working on contract. Referring to his childhood and his earlier primary school days, Ndadi explains that “most of us didn’t have shoes or warm clothing. I remember in winter my feet usually got very sore and cut – and a few times I became sick from the cold. When my father was working on contract he didn’t have enough money to buy us good clothes as he worked for five or six shillings a month, which was barely enough for bread, much less clothes and cattle or things for the kraal”.⁸

Nevertheless, the importance of wages earned from either migrant labour or men’s contribution in the Second World War was reflected in Ndadi’s account, stating: “My father came home in 1944, after more than three years in the army. He had been getting a small salary, which he sent to my mother at the Oshikango Administrative Centre. It was not much; two pounds, sometimes one pound ten. But my mother saved it and when my father returned

⁶ Hayes, P. ‘A History of the Owambo’, p 150.

⁷ See Nujoma, S. *Where Others Wavered: The Autobiography of Sam Nujoma*, (PANAF Books, 2001), and Ndadi, V. *Breaking Contract: The Story of Vinnia Ndadi – Life Histories from the Revolution – Namibia SWAPO* (South Africa: Mayibuye Books, 1974).

⁸ Ndadi, V. *Breaking Contract*, p 15.

he was able to buy some things for the kraal – corn, a few cows and more goats”.⁹ This clearly indicates that it was only after earning money from contract labour or taking part in the army at that time, could many families afford to buy livestock and household goods for themselves.

Indeed, when Ndadi went on contract for the first time at a farm in Mariental, he recalled:

I left Jooste’s farm with less than two pounds...after three whole years! Once my father wrote saying the family needed money so I sent some through the post in Mariental. I also bought a jacket for my father and a few things for the rest of the family – as well as some trousers for myself. I had just enough money left for the long trip to Ovamboland.¹⁰

It is indicated in his account that, he did not return to Ovamboland immediately, as he looked for a job in Windhoek to get more money. Ndadi got to see how Africans lived in Windhoek because a friend of his showed him around, thus he related: “It was very strange seeing all those nice clothes and other things in store windows”.¹¹ His friend also advised him to discard his shorts that he wore in Mariental when he worked on a farm, stating: “You are in town now, they don’t wear those things here”. Apparently all the men in Windhoek that time wore nice clothes – long pants, sports jackets and even suits. After working for Café Zoo in Windhoek, Ndadi recalled: “I was now able to buy nice things for my family and good clothes for myself. At that time I wanted very much to ‘fit in’ with the well-dressed Windhoek Africans. I remember buying a black pin-striped suit the first chance I got. I was so caught up in this clothes thing that sometimes I even dreamed about it”.¹²

In this context, it is not surprising that Sam Nujoma, who also worked as a contract labourer in Walvis Bay narrated his experience in similar terms; “My Norwegian employer had a shore station for repairing small boats, and there I earned a little money to buy clothing for my brothers and sisters, and later on a sewing machine for my mother, which pleased my parents very much”.¹³ After getting a job with the South African Railways in Windhoek, Nujoma explained that with a starting salary of £5 per month, he continued to support his parents,

⁹ Ibid, p 16.

¹⁰ Ibid, p 23.

¹¹ Ibid, p 24.

¹² Ndadi, V. *Breaking Contract*, p 28.

¹³ Nujoma, S. *Where Others Wavered*, p 31.

brothers and sisters who were at school, as they still lived outside the ‘cash economy’, and was hard for them to obtain money.¹⁴

It is evident enough, that many Ovambo labourers were getting assimilated into acquiring western commodities for themselves and their families. With regards to agricultural production, most people also used their wages to buy ploughs with which to expand their fields and produce more food for themselves. These were bought at the SWANLA store at Omafo or Ondangwa. Because of the need for money to pay taxes and other things, Ndadi always had to seek for one contract after the other. He described that “we needed many things at home, including tools and cattle. Also, I was thinking of getting married some day, although I had no steady girlfriend yet, or any savings, I looked forward to having a modern wedding like some of my friends. But that would remain a dream until I earned enough money on contract”.¹⁵ Overall, it seems that contract workers, with the exception of other social responsibilities such as looking after their families, were attracted to the modern things and were willing to work as contract labourer under harsh conditions to attain these goods.

Undergoing contract migrant labour also guaranteed a fiancée as Ndadi’s account implied. At the time (1950s), for a man to succeed in marrying, he had to offer gifts in the form of clothing items and soaps.¹⁶ Thus, modern weddings became popular as most Ovambo men’s weddings combined old and modern aspects. For example, marriage vows were done in a church ceremony accompanied by identically dressed bridesmaids and groomsmen, then it proceeded to both the bride and bridegrooms’ homesteads, where a feast had been prepared for guests. People would ululate, dance around and wave horsetail whisks. This was only possible through contract migrant wages. And although contract workers received little wages, they still managed to send money home and carried back to their families what they had bought in the way of appliances, blankets, utensils and clothing, and other items such as scented soap and perfume.

Although McKittrick centrally questions why Ovambo people accepted Christianity the way they did, her analysis gives very important ideas as to how one can look at migrant labour,

¹⁴ Ibid, p 36.

¹⁵ Ndadi, V. *Breaking Contract*, p 52.

¹⁶ See Namupala, L. T. and Shigwedha, V. *Aawambo kingdoms, history and cultural change: perspectives from Northern Namibia* (Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2006), p209.

colonialism and social change which is linked here to modernisation. She claims that the three cannot be understood without reference to Christianization and its causes. According to McKittrick, Christianity created a desire for goods which could only be obtained through wage labour, while migrant labour gave many men sustained exposure to Christianity for the first time.¹⁷ She further claims that it was the realm of clothing and the meaning embodied by a young labourer dressed in clothing that compelled Christian converts to also engage in wage labour in order to purchase clothing. This was because, converts did not only see clothing as marking of power and status but something more, an intangible connection between foreign goods, foreigners who offered security and a way of life that promised less of the uncertainty inhering in volatile local social relations.¹⁸ Besides the European clothes, migrant labourers also adopted new hair cuts and behaved with 'town' manners as they spoke 'broken' Afrikaans or German which they picked up from their employers.¹⁹

Although waged labour was fraught with mistreatment and dehumanisation, migrant labourers did not display their subservient humiliations at the hands of their employers in the mines and farms. Rather, they displayed the clothing and imported goods they brought back home that displayed the culture of urban areas in which they worked, to signify their new prosperity.²⁰ Hayes referring to an earlier period also points out that a distinct subculture developed amongst Christianised migrants especially in Oukwanyama where young men who had visited the south paraded their foreign clothes after church service and impressed others with their accounts of life in the south.²¹ This relative affluence of the returning men meant that their habits also influenced changes in the others who did not leave the community. And in this way, more and more young Ovambos were persuaded to go to the south because of the need for cash to buy herds, clothes that denoted status or their desire to be independent of patriarchal constraints. Thus the 'modernity' is a combination of cattle and new goods.

¹⁷ McKittrick, M. *To dwell secure*, p 2.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ For a detailed discussion see Namupala, L. T. and Shigwedha, V. *Aawambo kingdoms, history and cultural change*, pp 213-230.

²⁰ McKittrick, M. *To dwell secure*, p 6.

²¹ Hayes, P. 'A History of the Owambo', p 152.

Modernity and Colonialism

It would be too simplistic, however, to assume that the Ovambo young men's adoption of modern European goods was solely because of their love for modernity as there were much bigger forces at play here. Ironically, one can agree with the view that Ovambo men went into waged labour because it brought the potential for economic capitalism to Ovamboland, but the inhabitants of the Ovambo floodplain on both sides of the Namibia-Angola border had been exposed to long-distance mercantilism and commodity exchange with African and European traders before the missionary influence and the colonial occupation in 1915. In that case, why did European goods get so assimilated in the lives of Ovambos so quickly? Carlos Estermann in his analysis of the attitude of the Ovambo 'in the face of European civilization', claimed that unlike the Nyaneka in the regions of Huila and Gambos, whose country was occupied for many years by white settlers, they had changed almost nothing in their ancestral customs. In contrast, the Ovambo, who had been much less subjected to the direct influence of the whites, changed greatly.²² In the mid-19th century, Estermann further claims that while the Nyaneka took a conservative way of dressing, the Kwanyama began at first contact with white people to introduce changes in their costumes. The *eshongi* a piece of leather ending in a horn that young men wore attached behind to their belts, had disappeared, as the rest of the Kwanyama loved fabrics and had the means to dress completely in European clothes.

However, Estermann claimed, it was only the women's costumes –at least for those who did not belong to the Christian community –who were less prone to the influence of foreign fashion. But although Kwanyama women adopted a variety of beads, they still made use of the shell beads made of ostrich eggs.²³ Estermann also argued that the reason why the ordinary Kwanyamas were introducing changes in their manner of dress, was in imitation of their noble and wealthy chiefs, as already during Fr Duparquet's first trip to Oukwanyama in 1879, he met with the Kwanyama King Mweshipandeka dressed completely in European clothes.²⁴ Also, Estermann further argued that European influence was also noticeable in the way the Kwanyama people built their homesteads. Commonly, the 'natives' of the district of Huila, did not group themselves in large villages as their northern neighbours, the Mbundu and Ngangela, but lived in small isolated homesteads, each comprising one two or three

²² Estermann, P.C. 'La tribu Kwanyama en face de la civilisation européenne', in *Africa*, vol.7, no.3, London, 1989), pp. 431-443. Translated by Charles Kabwete.

²³ Estermann, P.C. 'La tribu Kwanyama' pp. 431-443.

²⁴ Ibid.

families, rarely more, always circular, as well as individual huts with conical roofs. On the other hand, the last great chief of Kwanyama, Mandume ya Ndemufayo had a home constructed in European style, but his example of square construction had met few imitators.²⁵ This highlights that the elite and kings such as Mandume and Mweshipandeka, were privileged in getting hold of European goods as they were wealthy and could buy and exchange local commodities for western goods, and as leaders, they popularised these goods and their people sought to emulate them.

Estermann's analysis however is filled with generalisations because not all Kwanyama people adopted or could adopt the fabric as a form of dress or behaved like Europeans. He generalised and implied that the changes in Kwanyama life through contact with European civilization were very deep, but it is not clear whether they had an impact on the customs that were much deeper in people's lives, especially those relating to social and family organization. He further concluded that although there were a few European inhabitants in Oukwanyama area at the time, it was the many young men who went out of the area each year for contract migrant labour in the mines and farms, that brought in quite a few new elements.

I agree that this is possible, but even this contribution was too small to exert a profound influence on all manner of people, as like almost everywhere in Africa, to get deeper transformation, it took a great deal of missionary activity. There is evidence that many aspects of Oukwanyama culture changed rapidly during the initial period of contact and subsequent conquest by South African colonial forces in 1915. Yet, one can possibly react to the frequently posed question, why young men became migrant labourers when there was no external conquest, taxation or land dispossession to encourage wage-seekers to migrate. This is because even though there were no clear external legislations put in place to make Ovambo men go into waged labour, there were several control practices by the South African colonial government, to make sure that young men left Ovamboland to find waged labour in order to increase their reliance on European goods to which they were already exposed.

Firstly, upon colonial occupation, long-distance traders were prohibited from entering Ovamboland, thus restricting access to western goods and to the method of commodity exchange that existed in the area at the time. Instead, there is evidence to show that South

²⁵ Ibid.

Africa encouraged trade in European commodities in Ovamboland by opening a shop as according to the Annual Report of 1925, “A trading Station has been established at Ondangwa and although it may not up to the present have stimulated recruiting noticeably, it is creating demands for various classes of merchandise, food stuffs – such as household utensils, wearing apparel, coffee, sugar, tea and pepper”.²⁶ This clearly indicates that the colonial administration urged Ovambo men to go for contract migrant labour by actually introducing retail shops which sold European goods, as two more shops were later established at Endola and Omafo respectively. Secondly, the adoption of European clothing cannot only be attributed to the love for status which came with wearing them, but can also point to the fact that Ovambo traditional skin costumes became scarce.

It is important to stress that the local environment also played a part in determining what people should wear in terms of the materials used to make this costumes. Famines and colonial disarmament played a part here. Vilho Shigwedha argues that as cattle, the main source of traditional leather clothes, died in massive numbers during the famines, it became impossible to manufacture traditional costumes. Furthermore, it took many years to replenish cattle herds and those who owned them after the devastating droughts became reluctant to slaughter them to provide materials for new costumes and also values associated.²⁷ The end to hunting and disarmament (in the 1920s and 1930s) more generally, had an impact on the source of wild animal skins which were also used to make costumes, as hunting was now in the hands of colonial officials together with Ovambo local control under kings and headmen.²⁸ Thus as a result, I argue that, Ovambo people had no choice but to turn to European clothing, even if it was just to use fabric as loincloth, which were only available through waged labour as well as those given by missionaries. This is however, not to dispute that Ovambo people got easily assimilated to European clothing and consumer goods, compared to other indigenous groups, but it is important to show the underlying forces that took part in the process of “European” influence.

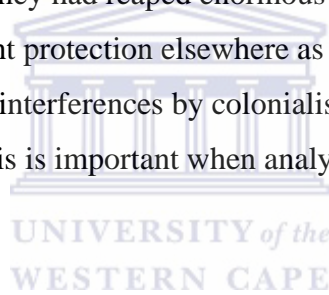
²⁶ Union of South Africa, *Administrator’s report*, 1925, p 31.

²⁷ Namupala, L. T. and Shigwedha, V. *Aawambo kingdoms, history and cultural change*, p 204.

²⁸ See Hayes, P. ‘Northern Exposures: the photography of C.H.L. Hahn, Native Commissioner of Ovamboland from 1915-1946’, in (eds) Hartmann, W. Hayes, P. Silvester, J, *The Colonising Camera: photographs in the making of Namibian history* (South Africa: Juta and Company, 1999), p 181 and Kreike, E. *Recreating Eden*, p 86.

The sense of shift: disillusionment with Ovambo traditional leaders

This brings me to the question of how migrant men became disillusioned with their kings and headmen, and why they started to look for something else. I agree with McKittrick's argument that colonialism undermined the religious authority of chiefs, prompting people to look to other sources of authority and meaning, which in turn further undermined the religious authority of chiefs.²⁹ Overall in relation to my previous arguments, the South African colonial government's control over Ovambo elders and traditional leaders through indirect rule weakened their position of authority in their communities. They controlled the movement of migrants labourers and sought to extract gifts, which often led to generational conflict. In time, headmen became unable to make them return to their rural backgrounds when their contracts were finished. Ovambo leaders had long ago brought European goods under the umbrella of "tribute" payments – as colonial officials urged them to support male labour migration and as a result, they had reaped enormous benefits from the migrant labour system. Hence, young men sought protection elsewhere as their leaders were unable to explain or change transformative interferences by colonialism and in fact they became collaborators with the system. This is important when analysing who was controlling the migrants' wages.



Kreike argues that engaging in migrant labour was not without its costs. Transport between home and the workplace, purchases at the workplace and at home (example, food, clothes, and liquor), colonial taxes, travel pass fees, and gifts to kings, headmen and missions all cut into a migrant labourer's disposable income.³⁰ In Ondonga, according to Leonard Nghipandulwa, "...one's arrival home from a contract, meant that, one had to go to the king's palace to report their presence at home and also to give some gifts to the king. But in Oukwanyama area, this practice was only done by a few people according to their own will, and they only did so in order to be on good terms with the headman so that one day he might be promoted to become a village headman."³¹ This indicates that the rising importance attached to wage income nonetheless, relatively advantaged younger men over elders (family, chiefs and headmen) and men over women, because only young men could earn migrant labour wages. Therefore, when Ovambo men went to work in the south, their social

²⁹ McKittrick, M. *To dwell secure*, p 2.

³⁰ Kreike, E. *Recreating Eden*, p 88.

³¹ Interview by Patricia Hayes with Leonard Nghipandulwa, Ondangwa, 1995.

responsibilities denied them the freedom to organize their wages as they would have wanted. Ultimately - with the formation of political movements in the late 1950s - it is not surprising that these men viewed traditional leaders as an integral part of the repressive colonial system that enabled the survival of the contract migrant labour system.

There was also a weakening of social control over youths. Hayes points out that during the time of famines in Ovamboland, very youthful Ovambo migrants started to become a feature. She claims that this had implications for the later transformation of contract labour into a highly regular pattern in the lives of Ovambo men, for these youths became conditioned to the system from an early age.³² The initial recruitment process relied on the Ovambo leaders who according to Hayes, were to be awarded a fee for each migrant recruited. However, this did not work out as it was left to the system of quasi-tribute that already operated on in Ovambo.³³ Chiefs and headmen were thus able to get benefits from labourers and could regulate the behaviour and compliance of their subjects by setting conditions for them. However, it is difficult to quantify the exact amounts of wages that were given as tribute to chiefs or headmen as although they had influence and control over the labourers, the latter had methods of escaping these practices. Hayes further argues that with the direct impact of modernisation of infrastructure on Ovamboland, and the introduction of motor transport to take labour to Tsumeb, increasing numbers of contracts were taken by the same migrants. This, she further argues, resulted in their firmer displacement into formal migrant labour system, taking the form of recurring contracts and in turn intensifying the process of permanent semi-proletarianisation.³⁴ However, colonial legislations prohibited semi-proletariats from developing or setting themselves up in the cities as the contract system pushed them back to their home areas.

According to Hayes, kinship obligations and authoritarian pressures also drew men back to Ovamboland. Additionally, pressure was particularly exerted by headmen to prevent migrants remaining in the south and punishments were meted out to those who remained for long periods.³⁵ Even so, Ovambo men came back to their home areas changed, as they adopted western ways of living. In the process this threatened the system of indirect rule, which went against the 'detrribalisation' of the 'native' by keeping the labourers' rural connections alive

³² Hayes, P. 'A History of the Owambo', p 276.

³³ Ibid, p 276.

³⁴ Hayes, P. 'A History of the Owambo', pp 334-336.

³⁵ Ibid, p 337.

to ensure that cultural affinities and respect for traditional authority remained when they were no longer of use. Colonial officials had not counted on the tenacity of Ovambo men's enthusiasm towards social change because labour migrations to the cities brought unintended innovations, as men became modernised. The colonizing administration claimed to maintain the cultural integrity of 'tribal' societies while slowly modifying them within their own terms as a way of legitimizing their rule. However, concern came in the early 1930s as evidence of modernization especially among the wage labourers became visible and they feared the collapse of colonialism. As a result, they started to advocate for both the preservation of "custom" and "tribal discipline" and alteration of social and political structures to strengthen and maintain European control.³⁶ Fear that detribalisation would upset the delicate balance of Ovambo societies and the delicate relations between colonial officials and Ovambo traditional authorities, it was the institution of indirect rule that allowed colonial administrators to operate within the structures of kinship and councils of headmen. This relationship which initially made the recruitment of Ovambo young men into migrant labour easier, while maintaining customary law and customary land tenure was again expected to resolve 'detribalisation' by repatriating migrant workers after their contracts. In this way, the colonial system used traditional leaders to control the Ovambo migrant workers leading to their disillusionment with their leaders.

Because many young migrant labourers wanted to acquire a piece of land and set up a homestead, their wages came in handy as one had to give something to start a field from scratch. The traditional leaders threatened the migrant workers who were overstaying in the south, that they would be ejected from their kraals immediately upon their arrival in Ovamboland and that they would not be given permission to settle elsewhere in their 'tribal' area.³⁷ They were also told that they would forfeit their access to farm land if they did not come back to their rural areas and contribute to the 'Tribal' Funds. This is because, as Leonard Nghipandulwa who was also a migrant labourer in the south claimed: "For the land whose owner had passed away or land whose owner had moved somewhere, you had to give a cow or two, it depended upon what the headman would ask you to pay."³⁸ As a result, more Ovambo men went into migrant labour, because the local intermediaries increased land

³⁶ McKittrick, M. *To dwell secure*, p

³⁷ NAN, NAO File 1/2 Labour recruiting, etc. Vol. 3 1937-1938.

³⁸ Interview by Patricia Hayes with Leonard Nghipandulwa, Ondangwa, 1995.

pressures and the need for wages to pay taxes following the establishment of Tribal Funds in the 1930s.

Colonial officials' concern over the breakdown of indirect rule due to the 'detrribalisation' and disruption of Ovambo society grew because of the exposure to the forces of modernisation. The appeal for European modernity was always strong and had long been adapted to local tradition as the cumulative effects of access to a world outside of the traditional nexus of social, economic and cultural exchange was beginning to make it difficult for people to lead the same lives and those of others as they once had. The effects of having access to new markets and education were proving more disruptive, particularly among groups living in close proximity to these opportunities. Also, educated Ovambos had become more politically active as others had in some areas of Namibia at the time. Thus, the politics of 'retribalisation' by the colonial government with the help of traditional authorities was a response, an attempt to enclose urbanized Ovambos within reserves labelled as 'tribes'. Thus, 'modern' Africans in northern Namibia were negatively labelled 'detrribalized' 'natives'.

Modernity and control over mobility

While men became contract migrant workers with the possibility of advancing in skills, prestige, and education, women continued to be assigned reproductive roles in the economic, biological and cultural sense. McKittrick argues that while Christianity was open to men and women, legal labour migration was an exclusively male institution.³⁹ Clearly, the colonial diversion of men into the migrant labour force reinforced the definition of women's place in the rural reproduction sphere and not urban areas. With colonial occupation, restrictions were put on women's movements out of Ovamboland, later connected with a requirement that men should carry passes. According to Hayes, the two most 'managed categories' in colonial Ovamboland were the younger and potentially mobile men and women. This, she claims, represented a profound overlapping between precolonial systems and new measures under colonialism. This is because colonial constructions of gender – involving both men and women – built on and modified pre-colonial gender discourses and practices.⁴⁰ However,

³⁹ McKittrick, M. *To dwell secure*, p171.

⁴⁰ Hayes, P. 'Famine of the Dams' in Hartmann, W, Hayes, P, Silvester, J, Wallace, M., *Namibia under South African Rule, Mobility and containment*, (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1998), p119.

regardless of the measures put in place to limit women's mobility, they made continued attempts after the 1915 famine to move from Ovambo to settle further south.

McKittrick claims that "during the Great Famine, both women and men moved beyond the borders of the floodplain in unprecedented numbers, seizing new survival strategies offered by the colonial economy".⁴¹ Colonial officials together with male leaders and elders prevented this, arguing that Ovambo women could not leave Ovamboland as it was against custom. Hayes argues that this move represented a coming together of 'customary law' and western notions of immorality.⁴² An ideal woman was depicted as being rural-based and the urban and independent-minded women were considered as immoral as they were the ones who resisted the patriarchal ideologies and control. Hayes posits that by the middle of the decade, women from Ovamboland were both located at and attracted to employment centres which had 'native locations' and white residential areas.⁴³ In the mid-1930s, new measures were again put in force to control women's movements to urban areas by means of compulsory inspections for venereal diseases, and efforts to enforce the criteria for the issue of visiting passes so as to prevent women conducting their own independent economic activities.⁴⁴

Another significant discourse regarding women's mobility was the emphasis on 'tribe' as fears were expressed at how easily women were became 'detrilledised'. This was because, argues Hayes, women were becoming much more concretely the 'bearers of culture', especially through ethnographic photography in the then SWA, for international and local consumption.⁴⁵ Hence, without the 'tribe', what was now confidently termed 'indirect rule' could not hold water.⁴⁶ This was because, according to McKittrick, they already had formed nascent communities at urban and industrial centres when South African rule began and they helped to forge a population of urban Africans whose ethnic identities did not fit neatly into categories.⁴⁷ Thus, in the development of this much more systematic discourse on tribe and cultural 'integrity', restrictions on women's mobility emerged.

⁴¹ McKittrick, M. *To dwell secure*, p 171.

⁴² Hayes, P. 'Famine of the Dams', p125.

⁴³ *Ibid*, p142.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, pp142-143.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p 143.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*.

⁴⁷ McKittrick, M. *To dwell secure*, p171.

Ovambo women's mobility also created a new class of people, modernised and possibly educated as Christianity offered education even though rudimentary. Education had a strong link with urbanization, but then again, colonial officials saw education for Africans as primarily functional in the production of skilled migrant labour to fill technical and administrative positions in the mines or urban centres. This was because they believed that formal schooling for the Africans only led to new orientations which shaped their perceptions, attitudes and values. In the process people manifested changes which had a negative impact on the societal and 'traditional' cultural patterns. More specifically, formal education was expected to have a modernizing influence on the Africans, that fostered values and beliefs of independence from wider family and traditional authorities.

Gender dimensions and political consciousness from the 1960s

I bring in the educational aspect here because it is important to question the point when gender enters into the equation and becomes a useful explanatory mechanism. During the colonial period, school was not readily available to women as they were placed in the domestic realm. And because of this, there have always been far fewer women in schools than men at that time. As she shall see in Chapter Seven, South Africa's colonial system searched for opportunities to destroy African modernity which seemed on the rise in the mid 1960s and the early 1970s, with young educated anti-apartheid teachers, nurses, and officials. They were subjected to detentions and other forms of harassment. Thus, to have some educated female students involved in politics in Ovamboland, surely was a problem for colonial officials. It is therefore important here to examine how students – and not just migrant workers - were largely aware of national politics in the 1970s especially in 1973 as they began to identify with SWAPO and became political activists.

There is no doubt that Odibo St. Mary's students in Ovamboland and others in Namibia at that time were influenced by the student strike in Soweto in 1976 South Africa.⁴⁸ It was also through the exposure of Namibian students studying in South Africa at the time and the efforts of the South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO) to mobilise the youth

⁴⁸ The 16th of June 1976, marks the day when students took to the streets in Soweto, South Africa. Their strike was prompted by the decision of Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd, the head behind the Bantu education system, which enforced a regulation requiring one-half of all high-school classes be taught in Afrikaans. A violent police response resulted in the deaths of several children, most of them under the age of eighteen.

through the SWAPO Youth League (SYL).⁴⁹ Apartheid education, according to Williams, which the South African regime implemented in Namibia in 1962, also addressed government interests, largely at the expense of the indigenous people. As in South Africa, ‘Bantu’, ‘Coloureds’ and ‘Whites’, as defined by South African legislation, required separate schools and curricula.⁵⁰ In some measure, these policies improved education for blacks; the numbers of schools for black learners increased and educational offerings were standardised. This is particularly noteworthy as Namibia’s former President Sam Nujoma’s account testifies, stating:

In Windhoek I worked by day, and at night attended adult school where classes were taught in English. I had finished primary school at Okahao, but there we had not been taught in English, only Afrikaans. In the north at the time, English was taught only at Odibo, at St. Mary’s Anglican Mission about 100 km north-east of my home district. People would travel long distances to attend St. Mary’s school. So despite the fact that I left school before the Bantu Education Act came into force in South Africa in 1953, and imposed later in South-West Africa, the syllabus of the Finnish Missionary Society primary schools had still been inadequate. Consequently, in Windhoek I concentrated hard on learning English.⁵¹

This was particularly because the curriculum was designed to train students in practical skills required to ‘reproduce’ labourers, who were in demand, and to train leaders for the planned homelands.⁵² Thus, according to Williams, more Africans began attending school, but few received more than the most basic training, such that in the mid-1970s, only 30 per cent reached standard four or higher in comparison to 90 per cent of white children.⁵³

Anglican Mission schools like St. Mary at Odibo which had previously provided most education to many Ovambo young men and women, were forced to adopt state education policies or not receive state support. According to Nancy Robson, the SWA administration closed down the Odibo hospital (where people were trained as nurses) in August 1974 due to the hospital’s inability to run efficiently for lack of finances and also after some teaching and nursing staff and students left for Zambia to join the liberation struggle. Church leaders and

⁴⁹ See Williams, C. A. ‘Student Political Consciousness: Lessons from a Namibian Mission School’ in the *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (Sep 2004), pp. 539-557.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Nujoma, S. *Where Others Wavered*, p 34.

⁵² Williams, C. A. ‘Student Political Consciousness’, pp. 539-557.

⁵³ Ibid.

staff example Dr Greyling pleaded against this but with the hospital not being able to run efficiently, the administration said they had no alternative but to close the hospital. It was only reopened in 1992.⁵⁴ I believe in this way, the government tightened its control over religious schools by eliminating almost all financial aid, and forcing many churches to adhere to their rules. In fact, according to Robson, the South African Nursing Council would not sanction a nursing school at Odibo as they claimed that the range of practice was too limited to get enough experience.

However the hospital did have a tutor or a Matron called Sister Hazel Dickson and nurses were given training that way but this was not officially accredited outside the mission. All the staff were called nurses and some of those were amongst those registered as assistant nurses after independence.⁵⁵ , According to Ndaiponhofi Nehova, everyone who wanted to become a nurse was trained at St. Mary, Odibo as there were no restrictions based on ethnicity, age and religion. Thus, many people from all over Namibia attended school at Odibo.⁵⁶



A short history of nursing in Ovamboland

The history of nursing in Ovamboland is specifically important to look at as it was one of the professions which was most open to women and was initiated by missionaries from different denominations. Although missionaries had very little knowledge of medical work, by 1890 qualified medical personnel were sent to Ovamboland to assist with health care and it formed a vital part of the Christian message.⁵⁷ Mission nurses, assisted by Ovambo auxiliary nurses opened up the health services of Ovamboland as well as in the western part of Okavango and also some parts of Kaokoveld, particularly in Opuwo. In 1930, the Finnish mission at Onandjokwe commenced training nursing assistants and by 1961, other hospitals such as Engela introduced similar programmes and the South African Nursing Council gave special exemption for auxiliary nurses training for a three-year period to allow the intake of pupils who were not in possession of Standard Six.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Personal communication with Nancy Robson, Odibo, 6.07. 2010.

⁵⁵ Personal communication with Nancy Robson, Odibo, 6.07. 2010.

⁵⁶ Follow up interview with Mrs. Ndaiponhofi Nehova, Windhoek, 15.07.2010.

⁵⁷ Van Dyk, A. *The History of Nursing in Namibia*, (Gamsberg Macmillam Publishers, 1997), p 64.

⁵⁸ Van Dyk, A. *The History of Nursing in Namibia*, p 68.

According to Benita Walter, one initiative of 1964 was the opening of a nurses' training school, but it had to be a school for nursing auxiliaries only, for which the completion of Standard 6 was sufficient. She argues that this basic academic level had first been reached by the school at Oshikuku at the end of 1963. The training school was begun with 6 young women, four of them native Benedictine Sisters of the Congregation of Oshikuku founded in 1932, who already had helped in nursing care. By the end of 1980s, some native Sisters of Oshikuku had acquired the requirements for completing their nurse/midwife training at the state academy in Windhoek.⁵⁹ Agnes van Dyk argues that, the efforts by the Finnish and later by other hospitals in the territory to train nursing assistants was the beginning of nursing education in the territory and the basis for the development of an indigenous nursing force.⁶⁰

Furthermore, according to van Dyk, development of the educational services for the Ovambo was slow as it was very difficult in the early years to persuade parents to send children to school and keep them there. The position of women in the communities was very much lower than that of their menfolk thus, missionary sisters concentrated in drawing women into social assistance work such as caring for the sick and the aged.⁶¹ As the education of the indigenous people developed and more pupils acquired secondary school education, women too became educated. It was perhaps these socially sanctioned gender roles that had made women more determined to also participate in political activism just like the men.

According to Williams, student organisations helped to increase popular awareness of the national struggle, influencing masses of discontented Namibians to come under SWAPO's aegis.⁶² They were influential in their campaign against homeland policy in Ovamboland, as thousands of students throughout the region demonstrated at the Ondangwa Native Commission Offices following the judgment of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) at The Hague, declaring South African occupation of Namibia illegal and ordering it to withdraw its administration from the territory. Students from different schools also attended several

⁵⁹ Walter, B. *Services that saves and heals: Health Care services of the Catholic Church in central Namibia* (Roman Catholic Church, 1996), p 119.

⁶⁰ Van Dyk, A. *The History of Nursing in Namibia*, p 48.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, p 72.

⁶² Maseko 'The Namibian Student Movement', p 117 as quoted by Williams states that In 1972, students from Martin Luther and Dobra, the only two mission schools other than St. Therese offering Standard Ten south of the Red Line, started an organisation 'to promote the unity of all students in Namibia'. This group officially became the Namibian Black Students' Organization (NABSO) in 1975 and promoted Black Consciousness ideas among students. This was one of the student organisations that helped to increase awareness of the national struggle.

conferences at the end of 1973.⁶³ Naturally, these activities were in conflict with the many mission schools such as St. Mary in Odibo, as its objectives were to keep its institution out of politics. Nancy Robson recalls of an incident where nurses wanted to attend a political meeting and the Matron said that if they were not back for duty they would be dismissed. They were not back and were dismissed immediately upon their return, this was in 1974. The church Standing Committee had agreed that the Matron had the right to 'hire and fire'.⁶⁴ In some way, there was a link between this incident and the public floggings at Ohangwena, because these same nurses were sentenced to one week of hard labour at Omhedi and a number of lashes of *epokolo* on their buttocks, as will be discussed in the following chapter.

Conclusion

In answering why Ovambo migrant contract labourers embraced modernity with such distinctive enthusiasm, this chapter looked at the long-distance traders, the influence of Christianity, education and colonial processes, which introduced them not merely to waged labour, but also to other features of commodity production most notably, consumer goods, clothing and money. These processes nurtured a desire for 'civilized' goods and thus actually prepared the Ovambo for waged labour by instilling in them 'wants' that could only be satisfied through entry into the colonial economy, and made them thoroughly familiar with the symbols and values of the Europeans' modernity.

This chapter argued that by looking at the reasons why the men went into migrant labour does not only give a better understanding of how disillusionment with traditional authorities happened, but also leads to a discussion about the eagerness to be modern. The wages earned from migrant labour enabled many men to access goods that distinguished them from other people in the society. It also allowed young men to challenge the authority of their elders, by accruing status and wealth outside the existing channels of age-based exchange and redistribution. I thus argue that the majority of Ovambo labourers sought to access the means of social mobility, as well as a sense of 'senior-hood'. Wages were also used to buy cattle ever since the Rinderpest epidemic of 1897 with which to set up homesteads and also reconstruct lineage social relations. For the poor men who did not have cattle, waged labour was viewed as the most stable source of income which was used to acquire cattle. This was

⁶³ Williams, C. A. 'Student Political Consciousness', pp. 539-557.

⁶⁴ Personal communication with Nancy Robson, Odibo, 6.07.2010.

because livestock amongst the Ovambo was a means of obtaining wealth and more importantly social recognition.

Moreover, wages were used to buy clothing which at that time did not only serve as exchangeable goods but also signified status. This was because clothing created a powerful section of elites, identified by their European symbols of modernity. Migrant labourers displayed the clothing and imported goods they brought back home that displayed the culture of urban areas in which they worked, to signify their new prosperity. As a result, the relative affluence of the returning men also influenced changes in the others who did not leave the community. Thus, in this way, more and more young Ovambos were persuaded to also go to the south to acquire goods that denoted status. I agree that the Ovambo became easily assimilated to European commodities compared to the other indigenous groups, but I also argue that there were particular reasons why modernity influenced them the way it did. I further argue that Ovambo people adopted European goods especially clothing in the face of colonialism because there was a sense of shift owing to forces of colonialism that encroached on the social, economic and political space of Ovambo society. Ovambo men also sought to use wages from migrant labour in order to build up herds or to set up a household independent of 'patriarchal' restraints. This allowed young men to challenge the authority of elders, by building up status and wealth on their own.

This chapter further argues that due to long term contracts, and the influence of urban life, many Ovambo men became urbanised, gradually giving rise to a semi-proletariat, and as a result, men came back to their home areas changed. I argue that this threatened South Africa's 'indirect rule,' which was renowned for upholding cultural integrity of 'tribal' societies, but was actually modifying them within their own terms as a way of legitimizing their rule. South Africa with the help of traditional leaders, strove to avoid the 'detrribalization' of the contract labourers, by keeping their rural connections alive to ensure that cultural affinities and exploitation and dominance for traditional authority remained when their labour was no longer needed. This, I argue, led to migrant workers' disillusionment with their traditional leaders and headmen.

As this implies, the discourses of 'detrribalisation,' migrant labour, money and western commodities, were deeply linked to the colonial process, which divided the urban from the rural, and the industrial centre and the 'native' reserve. And it brought the Ovambo men and women to adopt and appropriate modernity in their economic, social and political

consciousness. Ovambo migrant workers' disillusionment with traditional leaders manifested itself in the general labour strike of 1971-72, demonstrations, election boycotts and violent attacks on headmen's homesteads and government structures in the 1970s and 1980s. Set on liberating themselves from a repressive contract labour system and colonialism more generally, Ovambo men and women joined the nationalist movement SWAPO and the liberation struggle which represented progress and modernity in the form of education and training outside Namibia, supposedly guaranteeing employment opportunities, upon which they based expectations of a good life in independent Namibia.



Chapter 7

The General Contract Workers Strike 1971-2 and the role of the Kwanyama

‘Traditional’ Authorities in public floggings¹

Introduction

This chapter looks at the general contract workers strike of 1971-72. The strike is the starting point for this chapter, but the opposition to South Africa’s policy of separate development, the Ovambo ‘bantustan’ elections of 1973, the public floggings and court hearings that these events generated serves to precipitate a considerable body of evidence. One central question for this chapter is the role of the Oukwanyama ‘traditional’ authorities in the public floggings: and whether the floggings were some kind of last desperate attempt by the headmen to assert their non-existent legitimacy. It is evident that the headmen had authority over their ‘subjects’ because they had power given by the colonial government, but they lacked legitimacy. When the Ovambo kingships came under colonial control, chiefs and headmen found their authority profoundly changed, and by allying with the colonial officials, ‘traditional’ authorities became much-hated by many Ovambo people and were referred to as ‘puppets’ and collaborators. Opposition to South Africa’s policy of separate development and the Ovambo elections by the early 1970s became more organized and militant, and included the burning of headmen’s homesteads and attacks on government structures such as the inoculation pens known as ‘mangas’ and the Namibia-Angola border fence. South Africa’s reaction in the form of police and military actions in this period was brutal and ultimately suppressed the resistance, although not completely.

Most importantly, this chapter looks at the condemnation of public floggings by both domestic and international audiences. The South African government claimed that the public floggings were an old ‘tribal’ custom while the ‘traditional’ authorities argued that the floggings were an internal concern based on traditional forms of discipline and punishment. This chapter looks at the forms of punishment in pre-colonial Ovambo particularly

¹ I am indebted to Riedwaan Moosage for initiating my interest in the subject of public floggings in Ovambo, north-central Namibia in 1973-74, through his unpublished course essay paper, ‘*Epokolo*, The 1973-4 Public Floggings of Ovamboland: An analysis of a colonial legacy in a post colonial present’, (UWC: History Department, 2006). Further, his paper helped me locate documentation that gave more information for the development of this chapter.

Oukwanyama, as it focuses on questions of ‘spectacle’ of public torture to assert power by the Oukwanyama council of headmen, mainly under Gabriel Kautwima, who was senior headman at the time of the floggings. This is because from 1972 to 1973 the Oukwanyama Council of headmen held ‘tribal’ hearings where defendants were handed over from detention by the South African police and publicly flogged at Ohangwena. The colonial officials’ alliance with Kwanyama headmen in publicly flogging individuals associated with SWAPO or opposed to South African colonial rule, was linked to issues of legitimacy and the promotion of authority through claims of customary law.² Furthermore, the Proclamation R17 of 1972, which was introduced in Ovamboland at the time of the unrest following the strike, gave the chiefs and headmen as legislators power to order the detention of “trouble makers”, which helped to quell opposition by dealing with them according to their supposedly ‘tribal’ law. Ultimately, however, all these events and the significant role played by headmen proved to be the turning point in the internal politics of Oukwanyama and Ovamboland as a whole.

General Contract workers’ Strike 1971-72

According to Bauer, the general strike of 1971-72 holds a prominent position in the historiography of labour in Namibia, as more than 20,000 contract workers participated in the strike, which effectively shut down twenty-three workplaces and eleven mines during its first month. Also, within the first month, most of the striking workers were returned to their places of origin, Ovamboland, where protests then commenced on an even wider scale.³ Katjavivi claims that the strike began in response to a comment by the South African Commissioner for Indigenous People in Namibia, Jannie de Wet.⁴ In response to growing criticism of the harsh and binding nature of the contract labour system, De Wet stated that it was not a form of slavery because workers signed their contracts ‘voluntarily’. In so doing, argues Katjavivi, ‘he touched the nerve of people already full of anger at the way their lives were brutalised by this system.’⁵ De Wet’s statement raised an instantaneous reaction as letters were exchanged at the beginning of December 1971 between contract workers in Windhoek, Walvis Bay and

² SWAPO’s nationalist discourse was to unite all Namibian people, particularly the working class, the peasantry and progressive intellectuals into a vanguard party capable of safe-guarding national independence and of building a classless, non-exploitative society based on the ideas and principles of scientific socialism. See full discussion in *SWAPO of Namibia* (undated), p 39.

³ Bauer, G. *Labour and Democracy in Namibia, 1971-1996*, (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1998), p 18.

⁴ Katjavivi, P. *A history of Resistance in Namibia* (Paris: UNESCO Press, 1988), p67.

⁵ Ibid, p 67.

Tsumeb, sharing ideas on how to organise a strike.⁶ This argues a level of literacy among contract workers.

Oral accounts relate that, throughout the compounds of Namibia, De Wet's speech became the topic of debate, thus spreading the wave of pro-strike feeling all over the country as letters telling people to take action were circulated back and forth between the different compounds and Ovamboland.⁷ The strike spread to Walvis Bay; Tsumeb; Klein Aub and Oamites copper mines.⁸ The strike was described as a paralysis that spread to other centres while panic in the white community soared when businesses became affected, goods piled up on the railways, building construction stopped and heaps of garbage encroached onto pavements.⁹ In an attempt to put an end to the spreading industrial rot, the government called in headmen from Ovamboland to persuade the workers, particularly at Walvis Bay to return to work. However, according to Soggot, 'when the headmen (Elifas, Kaluvi and Iipumbu)¹⁰ tried to speak, there was pandemonium and a *charivari* of cat-calls; only [Bishop] Auala was allowed to speak'.¹¹ In response, the government started to arrest those whom they regarded as the strike ringleaders; while the rest of the strikers had their request met and were returned to Ovamboland. According to a secret report by the state ethnologist Mr. Budack, it is stated that after the Ovambo strikers left their work places for Ovamboland, the South African police and Budack addressed some Tjimbandu men at Oshikango on the border and sent them back to their areas of origin to request more workers to go south.¹² Therefore, it seemed that South Africa agreed to repatriate strikers back to Ovamboland in order to replace them with new recruits, especially from Angola.

However, SWAPO alleged that the administration's calls for replacements backfired as the first batch of strike-breakers from Ovamboland had solidarity with the strikers and they only

⁶ Ibid; also see Soggot, D. *The Violent Heritage: The Untold story of South Africa's Vietnam* (London: Rex Collins Ltd, 1986), p 46.

⁷ Interview with Mr Hinananye Nehova, Windhoek, 30.1.2009, and interview held by Patricia Hayes and Leonard Nghipandulwa, Ondangwa, 1995. Also see, Soggot, D. *The Violent Heritage*, p 48.

⁸ Katjavivi, P. *A history of Resistance*, p 68.

⁹ Soggot, D. *The Violent Heritage*, p 48.

¹⁰ These were members of the Ovambo Legislative Council and represented respective ethnic group in the Council. Elifas was the Chief of Ondonga, Kaluvi represented Oukwanyama, and Iipumbu represented Uukwambi.

¹¹ Ibid, p 48.

¹² NAN, BAD, Box 18, File no. O.13, 1972; Owambo: Unrus in die Kuanyamagebied. Translated by Kletus Likuwa.

succeeded in recruiting 1 000 workers from elsewhere in Namibia and neighbouring countries.¹³ In the meantime, an ad hoc strike committee was supposedly elected in Ovamboland, led by Johannes Nanguutuala, who set up a manifesto pin-pointing the worker's grievances. The committee passed a series of resolutions setting out the worker's rejection of the contract system and demands for its replacement.¹⁴ Thus, within a month of the start of the strike and a fortnight after the return of most of them to Ovamboland, the strikers had a coherent set of demands, an elected leadership, a form of grassroots organisation and clearly defined tactics.¹⁵ However, the South African officials together with directors of SWANLA¹⁶ and the homeland government¹⁷ were not prepared to negotiate with the worker's committee.

The South African officials together with their Ovambo allies, met and came to a number of decisions: recruitment would no longer be carried out by SWANLA; labour employment offices would be organised henceforth by the Ovambo government, workers would know beforehand the amount of their wages and fringe benefits, and they would be permitted to maintain contact with their families.¹⁸ But although they had agreed to abolish SWANLA as a negotiator of labour contracts, they replaced it with an employment bureaux run by the Ovambo Legislative Council, and which allowed only minor changes in the contract system. According to SWAPO, "the bureau's provisions were much the same as those of the Bantu labour Regulations in South Africa at the time and was just a major propaganda to sell the

¹³ See, SWAPO of Namibia, *To be born a Nation*, (Department of Information and Publicity, Zed Books, 1981), p 190; and Soggot, D. *The Violent Heritage*, p 48.

¹⁴ SWAPO of Namibia, *To be born a Nation*, p 198.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p 198.

¹⁶ See discussion in chapter four.

¹⁷ The Ovambo Legislative Council was a result of the Odendaal plan which followed general pattern of race relations established earlier in South Africa in 1961 by Fox Odendaal. Under this plan every person in then South West Africa was to be classified ethnically as belonging to one of ten population groups, namely; Ovambo, Kavango, Caprivi, Basters, Tswana, Damara, Nama, Herero, 'Bushman', Kaoko. Each group was assigned a "homeland" within the territory, where its members are recognized as "citizens", with full rights. Outside the homeland every person is considered an alien, without rights. The theory was to push the message of 'separate development' for all Africans, according to their ethnicities. The concept aimed to enable the various groups to exist as separate and fully-fledged nations in every respect, each with its own territory and political system, and that development would depend on the inherent potential for growth of the different peoples and the responsible guidance of the South African Government in its role as guardian. However, the homelands' political stability and economic position was still entirely dependent on South African support. This will be discussed in detail in the following chapter. However, for a full discussion on the Ovambo Homeland Government, see: Totemeyer, G, *Namibia Old and New*, pp 54-140; unpublished paper titled, South West Africa, found at NAN, Elizabeth S. Landis Accession, A. 636/1 Findaid 2/54, 1946-1989; Saunders, C. 'The Transitions from Apartheid to Democracy in Namibia and South Africa in the Context of Decolonization', *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 1:1, 2000.

¹⁸ Soggot, D. *The Violent Heritage*, p 49.

‘new deal’ to the strikers as a major change”.¹⁹ Furthermore, Johannes Nangutuuala the leader of the worker’s committee, was apparently tricked into going on Radio Oshiwambo to tell the workers to stop striking and go sign up for work. But when the workers turned up for work, they discovered that, other than two incidental changes, and the substitution of the Ovambo government for SWANLA, everything remained the same. The workers felt betrayed. To make it worse, the Ovambo Legislative Council stepped into SWANLA’s role of recruiting contract labour and were thus seen to have been active accomplices in the deception.

Infuriated workers retaliated by attacking the properties of so called ‘tribal’ collaborators and informers. According to Soggot, some 400 government stock inspection kraals and fences, including the colonial Angola/Namibia border fence, were destroyed.²⁰ In response, the South African regime reacted by sending armed police into Ovamboland. Police intimidation, arrests and even killings were reported.²¹ What had started as a peaceful strike led to the transfiguration of Ovamboland into an occupied zone as large reinforcements of police were drafted to the territory. The striker’s pent up anger now turned against the Ovambo government and collaborating chiefs. A Race Relations survey of 1972 suggests that “...during January and early February 1972, gangs armed with such weapons as pangas, bows and arrows, hunting knives, and axes attacked kraals of several headmen and of a senior Legislative Councillor, burning huts and several shops”.²² Also, groups of strikers attacked the kraal of Philipus Kaluvi, a headman directly concerned with the contract system and burnt down his general dealer’s shop; the homes of other chiefs and headmen were damaged or destroyed and official buildings were burnt down; sub-headman Samuel Kaulinge was assaulted and seriously injured – his wife was killed after she intervened.²³

In response to the unrest, regulations for the Administration of a district of Ovamboland were gazetted in terms of Proclamation R17 of 4th February 1972. This introduced the quasi-emergency regulations which (with certain exceptions such as church services, meetings of

¹⁹ SWAPO of Namibia, *To be born a Nation*, pp 198-99.

²⁰ SWAPO of Namibia, *To be born a Nation*, p 202; also see, Soggot, D. *The Violent Heritage*, p 49 and South African Institute of Race Relations, ‘A survey of race relations in south Africa 1972’ (Johannesburg, 1973), pp 438-39.

²¹ See Katjavivi, P. *A history of Resistance*, p 68 and Soggot, D. *The Violent Heritage*, p 49.

²² South African Institute of Race Relations, ‘A survey of race relations’ pp 438-39.

²³ Soggot, D. *The Violent Heritage*, p 50, also see NAN, BAD, Box 18, File no. O.13, 1972; Ovambo: Unrus in die Kuanyamagebied.

statutory bodies or called by heads of kraals to discuss domestic matters, sport gatherings, entertainments etc), effectively prohibited political meetings; it became an offence to undermine the authority of the State, the Ovambo government, or any chief or headman; individuals could be arrested without a warrant and detained for questioning; detention was incommunicado with no right of access to legal advisers.²⁴ Furthermore, failure to obey the lawful order of a chief or headman was punishable; it also became a criminal offence to make an intimidating statement, to boycott a meeting called by an official, chief or headmen, and to fail to obey any lawful order given by a chief or headman, or to treat him with disrespect.²⁵

According to *The Star*, this quasi-emergency introduced in Ovamboland at the time of the disturbances there, was very similar to Proclamation 400 introduced in the Transkei during the Pondoland disturbances of 1960.²⁶ The Pondos were fighting against the imposition of the Bantu Authorities Act Bantu Authorities Act; the extension of passes to women; and schemes for the rehabilitation and reallocation of land in the Transkei. In response, the South African government gazetted a similar Emergency Proclamation 400 in 1960 and according to Govan Mbeki, 4,769 men and women were held in custody for indefinite periods during that year.²⁷ Both proclamations prohibited meetings without permission, imposed strict conditions of entry, made it illegal to disobey a chief, boycott his meetings, or “render such services as should be rendered in accordance with native law and custom”.²⁸ However, in the end, the general strike in 1971-72 triggered the radicalisation of many Ovambo people, as this was marked by the boycott of Ovambo elections in August 1973. It is important to give a detailed account of how the unrest in Ovamboland was constituted, and which factors forced people to respond in the way they did.

²⁴ For a full account on the Proclamation R17 of 1972, see; Soggot, D. *The Violent Heritage*, p 50 and South African Institute of Race Relations, ‘A survey of race relations’, pp 438-39.

²⁵ Again, see Soggot, D. *The Violent Heritage*, p 50 and South African Institute of Race Relations, ‘A survey of race relations’, pp 438-39.

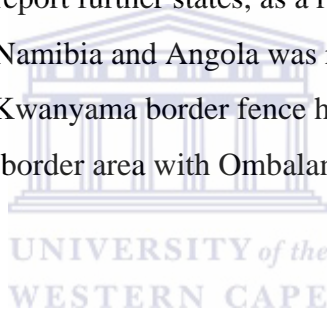
²⁶ ‘Some Chiefs more powerful’, *The Star*, dated 24/11/1973 . Note: A large number of newspaper cuttings comes from the National Archives of Namibia in Windhoek, they are found under Accession NAN, A. 570, SWA: Security (Floggings), February – Dec 1973.

²⁷ Mbeki, G. ‘The Peasants’ Revolt, extracts from Chapter 9, (London: IDAF, 1964, the full text of which is available on <http://www.anc.org.za/books/peasants.html>).

²⁸ ‘Some Chiefs more powerful’, *The Star*, dated 24/11/1973.

The Ovamboland Unrest

According to a secret report by K.F.R. Budack²⁹ on the unrest in the Kwanyama area in 1972,³⁰ several factors were found to have contributed to the violent attacks unleashed on some of the Kwanyama headmen and government structures. One such factor was the division of the Kwanyama 'tribal' area by the Namibia/Angola international border. The report claims that, this border fence was broken down strongly by many protesters whether they were teachers, headmen or ordinary 'tribesmen' apparently because it had no practical meaning for them.³¹ Oral testimonies maintain that, most people had blood relatives who lived across the border, as well as cattle posts where more grazing space was to be found. Furthermore, some cattle owners who had cattle on the Angolan side of the fence were unhappy with the fact that they no longer moved freely to and fro with their cattle especially during the drought season.³² The report further states, as a result, during the night of the 16th January 1972, the fence between Namibia and Angola was reportedly destroyed and cut at 21 places. The whole breadth of the Kwanyama border fence had been destroyed. In the west, the fence was destroyed up to the border area with Ombalantu and in the east up to the boundary with Kavango.³³



The second factor found was the problem of the cattle *mangas*. According to the same report, bitter unhappiness existed amongst the cattle owners as the cattle had to be counted and inspected at the *mangas* weekly.³⁴ Many people complained that they had to drive their cattle long distances for them to get their cattle to the *mangas* and the condition of the cattle deteriorated as a result. This was especially during the dry and hot season before the summer rains had fallen and while the grazing areas were still scarce. They were forced to take their cattle to the *mangas* and if they refused, they were punished. They also stated that sometimes when they arrived with their cattle at the *mangas*, they found that there were no inspections

²⁹ Kuno Franz Robert Budack was a government ethnologist from 1966-1989. He worked for the South African administration by conducting research and writing about 'ethnic' groups in Namibia to demonstrate government's 'achievements' regarding the economic, social and political organization of the people (personal conversation with Antje Otto of the National Museum of Namibia, 4/11/11).

³⁰ NAN, BAD, Box 18, File no. O.13, 1972; Owambo: Unrus in die Kuanyamagebied.

³¹ NAN, BAD, Box 18, File no. O.13, 1972; Owambo: Unrus in die Kuanyamagebied.

³² Interview with Hinananye Nehova, Windhoek West, 30.1.2009, Vilho Tchilongo, Ongwediva, 18.06.2010 and Lucas Shinedima, Onuno, 2.08.2008 and 23.06.2009.

³³ NAN, BAD, Box 18, File no. O.13, 1972; Owambo: Unrus in die Kuanyamagebied.

³⁴ Ibid.

but only counting of cattle and they had to travel back with their cattle.³⁵ This made them very unhappy as in some instances, this trek to and from the *mangas* took full two days. As a result of this unhappiness, most people lost their trust in the headmen and the South African administration, and wanted to solve their problems by themselves. The report claims that some Kwanyama people had a meeting on the 16th of January 1972, where they decided to destroy all the *mangas* and to refuse to take their cattle for inspection.³⁶

It seems that the cattle movements to the central *mangas* had long been a major problem in Ovamboland, as according to Julia Mbida, there were stories about Hahn ‘Shongola’ (when he was Native Commissioner of Ovamboland 1920-1946) asking people to take their cattle to the *mangas* for inspection on their tongues and to burn them if they were diagnosed with the lung and foot sickness, but people refused. The young men (especially headmen’s sons) who worked in the south told the elders not to accept the inspections and the burning of diseased cattle.³⁷ Moreover, the same reaction arose towards the ‘pure-blood’ bulls that were sent to Ovamboland in 1918 to improve the quality of livestock there, as the colonial administration thought Ovambo cattle were ‘dwarf’, and of little commercial value.³⁸ Mbida claims that the young men who worked as farm workers in the south, told people that if they agreed to have the bulls, the calves will belong to the white men. Also, they claimed that the white men’s cattle were too huge and Ovambo cows will not be able to give birth to the calves, as they were too big.³⁹ It seems that this was the local peoples’ discourse and vernacular understanding of colonial ‘development’⁴⁰ or betterment schemes that were introduced in the

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ NAN, BAD, Box 18, File no. O.13, 1972; Owambo: Unrus in die Kuanyamagebied.

³⁷ Interview with Julia Mbida, Odibo, 20.08.2008.

³⁸ Union of South Africa, *Administrator’s report*, 1926, p 34.

³⁹ Interview with Julia Mbida, Odibo, 20.08.2008.

⁴⁰ For a full discussion on colonial developments embarked on by British, French as well as Belgian colonial powers in the aftermath of the Second World War, as a process of “innovatory paternalism” which was aimed at bringing about “development” of their colonies, see Frederick Cooper, ‘Development, Modernization, and the Social Sciences of the Era of Decolonization: the Examples of British and French Africa’, in *Revue d’histoire des sciences humaines* 2004/1. No. 10, pp 9-38, Frederick Cooper and Randall Packard (eds) ‘Modernizing Bureaucrats, Backward Africans, and the Development Concept’, in *International Development and the Social Sciences: Essays on the History and Politics of Knowledge*, (University of California Press, 1997), pp 64-92, and Joana Lewis, *Empire State-Building: War & Welfare in Kenya 1925-52* (James Currey Ltd, 2000). Economic developments (e.g. in Kenya) were projects considered as an imposition of an unwanted modernity. Colonial governments from the late 1930s sought to assert legitimacy and foster the cooperation of colonized people via development programmes, but development quickly became politicised – a basis for claims on the resources of empire, an insistence on voice in deciding what development policies should be. This relates to the programmes implemented by the South African government in Ovamboland to promote and improve their farming techniques which later led to rebellions in these areas.

country, hence, it is important here to analyse what they meant to them. This is the malcontent with modernity.

In a separate but similar situation, Lorena Rizzo in her analysis of conflicting perceptions, understandings and ways of countering stock diseases (inoculations) in Kaoko, asserts that as early as 1938, there was already a growing reluctance shown by some inhabitants of Kaoko to have their stock inoculated and branded. She argues that this reaction was to be expected because not only did the people witness a significant increase in police in their region, but also because the control and supervision of their herds was at stake.⁴¹ What was interesting here was Hahn's narrative and logic towards the question of accepting and rejecting the inoculation, as the Herero sections in Kaoko accepted it while as the Ovatjimba and Ovahimba groups in northern parts of the region rejected it. Hahn regarded this rejection as an issue of Africans susceptibility to modernisation, undoubtedly amenable to the Herero population, but much more extraneous to those colonial subjects who lived in the remote areas of Kaoko, who continued to be perceived as wild and uncivilised.⁴²

However, according to Rizzo, the pastoralists' refusal to have their cattle inoculated or branded was possibly linked to the perception that the veterinary intervention was from its beginning linked to the limitations imposed on land use and mobility of herds, particularly across the Kunene river. Furthermore, branding of stock was meant to allow the colonial state to mark individual animals which had been inoculated and later on to identify stock kept away from inoculations – it served to count each and every animal found in the area – thus, from the pastoralists' perspective, the brands put on their livestock were beyond any doubt associated with a claim to property.⁴³ This is very similar to what was happening in Ovamboland and although earlier resistance to the inoculation and branding of cattle is not clearly represented in the archival documents, it existed. Thus, based on this analysis, it is important to stress that although the quest for modernity was strong among African people, and they wanted to be assimilated into the mainstream of modernity, new colonial development coexisted with distrust and it is evident that they only wanted it in certain ways, and on their own terms.

⁴¹ Rizzo, L. 'Gender & Colonialism: A history of Kaoko (north-western Namibia) between the 1870s and 1950s' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Basel, 2009), p 267.

⁴² Ibid, p 268.

⁴³ Ibid, pp 271-272.

The third factor found to have led to the unrest in Ukwanyama area was the collaboration between the headmen and the South African administration. According to the report, it was not only the South African government that was distrusted by the people but also the headmen, because many people saw them as ‘stooges’ who only did what the ‘whites’ asked them to do.⁴⁴ Furthermore, many Kwanyama people felt that the Ovambo Legislative Council was an instrument of the South African government especially after the appointment of Rev. Cornelius Ndjoba as the Chief Minister of the ‘Tribal’ Ovambo Executive.⁴⁵ The report further claims that, as a result of this strained relationship with the headmen, on 18th January 1972, around 300 Kwanyamas gathered at the senior headman Phillipus Kaluvi’s homestead but he was on his way to Grootfontein, where he was supposed to have a meeting as a new representative of northern labourers.

The purpose of the meeting was for the people to bring and destroy their inspection booklets and to refuse to take their cattle to the *mangas*. However, before the meeting could commence, the Police patrol arrived at the scene.⁴⁶ Witnesses reported that the Police Captain said the following words: “Headman Kaluvi had said that we can shoot five of you, if you do not go away from here now, we will do it!”⁴⁷ As the South African police apparently had names of the seven Kwanyamas who were considered forefront “trouble makers” (ringleaders), they arrested them there.⁴⁸ According to the report, some fighting followed as a result and in the process, three police officials were hurt while one Kwanyama man was seriously injured and later died at the Oshakati hospital on 21 January 1972.⁴⁹

After this incident, the report further claims that, round about 200 Kwanyama men arrived at senior headman Kaluvi’s homestead and demanded to know where he was. When they discovered that he was in Grootfontein, they told his wife that they were going to kill him because, just like his father Hamukoto wa Kaluvi, he was a ‘sell out’, because he had given 5 men to be shot by the police.⁵⁰ According to the report, by 7pm, the same day, around 40 armed Kwanyama men arrived at Oshikango police station. They were armed with bows and

⁴⁴ NAN, BAD, Box 18, File no. O.13, 1972; Owambo: Unrus in die Kuanyamagebied.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ NAN, BAD, Box 18, File no. O.13, 1972; Owambo: Unrus in die Kuanyamagebied.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

arrows, Ovambo knives, axes and pangas. They demanded that the seven men who were arrested earlier during the day be released. The South African police received information that Kwanyama men were hiding in the bushes near headman Kaluvi's homestead in order to attack him upon his return and so they informed him not to return to his homestead. Meanwhile, Kaluvi's wife apparently fled to the Odibo area. During the nights of 23-24 January 1972, Kaluvi's son's shop was burned down and Kaluvi's homestead was also burned down. Apparently, headman Kaluvi was later captured, but he was not seriously injured.⁵¹

Oral testimonies claim that after the incident at headman Kaluvi's homestead, headman Kaluvi convened a meeting on the 26 January 1972 at Omafo so that he could explain the new contract work agreement.⁵² However, a number of more less 3000 men gathered at the 'tribal' offices at Omafo and requested that all the other headmen be also present. Just at his arrival at the 'tribal' offices, according to the report, headman Kaluvi became scared and left the new agreement papers with the 'tribal' secretary and escaped through the back of the offices where the meeting was to take place.⁵³ The contract workers' committee and the people started getting restless and wanted to know where Kaluvi was. A member of the Legislative Council, Rev. Corneluis Ndjoba gave a speech and tried to explain the new agreement form and the new work issues. However, people were more interested in Kaluvi, as they wanted to confront him on the issue of the five people he supposedly offered to the police.⁵⁴ This meeting was crucial because the group demanded that headmen and the whole traditional authority come together to be questioned. They had decided to take the law into their own hands as most people questioned the institution of the council of headmen because they considered it as having been forced upon them after king Mandume's death.

Moreover, according to the report, many Ovambo people felt that the Ovambo Legislative Council and the Ovambo 'Tribal' Executive were not true representatives of the 'tribes' as their own people were not represented in these councils. They feared that people like Kaluvi did not know what their grievances were as they just sat in their offices while the white

⁵¹ NAN, BAD, Box 18, File no. O.13, 1972; Owambo: Unrus in die Kuanyamagebied.

⁵² Interview with Vilho Tshilongo, Ongwediva, 18.06.2010 and Lucas Shinedima, Onuno, 23.06.2009.

⁵³ NAN, BAD, Box 18, File no. O.13, 1972; Owambo: Unrus in die Kuanyamagebied.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

officials did all the work that the South African government told them to do.⁵⁵ The latter point is interesting because even though the Ovambo and Kavango Legislative Councils were representatives of their respective ‘homelands’ to achieve self-determination and autonomy, they were still liable to the South African government as it sent white personnel to work as administrators or even directors under which African counterparts worked. Aaron Nambadi argues that the colonial administration placed administrative staff in key positions to ensure that the Kavango Legislative Council made decisions and passed acts that were favourable to the colonial administration.⁵⁶ This also applied to Ovamboland. Thus, it is clear that people saw the Legislative Council as an extension of South Africa’s rule even though they claimed homelands were self-governing.

The fourth factor was the conflict between the Kwanyamas and Tjimbundus. According to the report, there was a large number of Tjimbundus in the Kwanyama area especially on the Angolan side of the border and their number was on the increase. This was because, most of these Tjimbundus had already worked in the south, and had technical and mechanical skills for the work in the mines.⁵⁷ As indicated earlier, these Tjimbundu men were addressed by state ethnologist Budack and the South African police, and some were sent back to their areas of origin to request more workers to go south. According to the report, more Tjimbundus had already been coming but because of the strike, they were stopped and harassed by the Kwanyama strikers. The report further claims that since the ‘olden times’, there existed jealousy between Kwanyamas and Tjimbundu and this seemed to have aggravated the clashes.

Finally, the above factors actually indicate the desire of the people wanting to break free of containment as the cutting of the fence signified.⁵⁸ The South African government’s policy which controlled both land and movement of African people, limited specific groups to ‘native reserves’ in the Police Zone and to Ovamboland and other northern regions. As a consequence, I believe political activism in Ovamboland at that time opened doors to

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Nambadi, A. “The Kavango Legislative Council, 1970-1979: A Critical Analysis”, (Unpublished MA Thesis, UWC, 2007), pp 118-119.

⁵⁷ NAN, BAD, Box 18, File no. O.13, 1972; Owambo: Unrus in die Kuanyamagebied.

⁵⁸ There is an analogy in Ben Fuller’s article on the Otjimbingwe area residents entitled: “We live in a Manga”: Constraint and Survival in Otjimbingwe, in Hartmann. W, Hayes. P, Silvester. J, Wallace. M., *Namibia under South African Rule, Mobility and containment*, (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1998).

resistance against all their grievances, whether it was the resented international border fence, the headmen's rule, or the cattle mangas.

Ovambo elections and protests in 1973

Following the recommendations by the 1962 Odendaal Commission and in open defiance of the United Nations, South Africa proceeded towards the end of the 1960s to legislate separate development in Namibia. Despite opposition, Ovamboland, still in the vice-like grip of the R17 Emergency Regulations, was proclaimed self-governing, and in June elections were set for 1 and 2 August 1973.⁵⁹ However, there was widespread opposition to this divisive scheme. When elections to a legislative assembly were prepared in Ovamboland, both SWAPO and the dominant Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN) called for a boycott.⁶⁰ The South African administration proceeded to implement its separate development policy using repression in an attempt to crush all resistance and the elections were held as planned. But they resulted in a resounding victory for the opposition organisations, as, according to SWAPO, only 2.5 per cent of those eligible to vote did so, and many of these were Bantustan policemen and officials whose very livelihoods depended on their loyalty to the South African regime.⁶¹

The argument of the government officials was of course the opposite as, according to Cockram, "in January 1975, the SWAPO call to the people of Owambo, to boycott the new elections being held there, failed dismally, and the poll increased from 2-5 per cent in the previous election to a surprising 55 per cent."⁶² The boycott, however, unleashed a severe wave of brutal repression throughout Namibia, particularly the repeated features of violent attacks, imprisonment, torture, and public floggings in response to manifestations of opposition.⁶³ It targeted, in particular, the youth and SWAPO's internal leaders. Even though SWAPO at no time was declared illegal or banned, hundreds of men and women were

⁵⁹ SWAPO of Namibia, *To be born a Nation*, p 210.

⁶⁰ Sellström T. *Sweden and National Liberation in Southern Africa: Solidarity and Assistance 1970-1994, Vol. 2* (Sweden Stockholm: Nordic Afrika Institute, Elanders Gotab, 2002), p 273.

⁶¹ See, SWAPO of Namibia, *To be born a Nation*, p 210; and Sellström T. *Sweden and National Liberation*, p 274.

⁶² Cockram, G. M. *South West African Mandate* (Cape Town, 1976), p 472.

⁶³ SWAPO of Namibia, *To be born a Nation*, p 206.

rounded up by the police, and accused of being members of the organisation.⁶⁴ It is clearly evident here that proclamation R17, as Moosage puts it, “set the basis for future assertions of power and authority, firstly, by the South African government and secondly, by the ‘tribal’ authorities, as seen with the August elections, to manipulate and assert its authority.”⁶⁵

Public Floggings in Ovamboland

Following the elections, many Ovambo men and women were arrested by the South African police in the middle of August, and held in detention without charges. However, in October-November they were ‘released’ but immediately handed over to the ‘tribal’ authorities. For many it was a question of walking out of one detention centre and into another. According to several news reports, after the Ovambo elections in August 1973, an undisclosed number of Ovambo men in the homelands of the Kwanyama and Ndonga ‘tribes’ were publicly flogged for offences which one tribal authority described as “most serious”.⁶⁶ The *Cape Times* reported the ‘tribal’ authority’s spokesman as stating:

...the men ignored repeated warnings by ‘tribal’ chiefs not to hold political meetings without first consulting the ‘tribal’ authorities concerned. It was not only contemptuous, but was aimed at breaking down the authority of the chiefs. Any attempts to disturb peace and quiet in the homeland as well as attempts to intimidate people or to incite them to undermine the authority of the chiefs, would not be tolerated. The ‘tribal’ authorities would continue to punish offenders according to the ‘tribal’ system “as is our right”, he stated.⁶⁷

It is clear from this discourse that the headmen of the various ethnic groups in Ovambo at the time, viewed the action of the men calling and holding unlawful political meetings as “a most serious charge”. They thus tried to qualify their beatings of men and women who refused to follow their laws and warnings by claiming that they would not tolerate people who undermined their power. However, in most of the cases, membership of SWAPO was stated as the ‘crime’ which was ‘punished’ by flogging. Other crimes leading to twenty or thirty strokes were the singing of SWAPO songs, using the name Namibia, wearing a SWAPO flag on one’s shirt, or simply wearing a shirt in SWAPO colours (red, green and blue). The

⁶⁴ Sellström T. *Sweden and National Liberation*, p 274.

⁶⁵ Moosage, R. ‘*Epokolo*, The 1973-4 Public Floggings’, pp 12-13.

⁶⁶ See, Correspondent, ‘Flogging – call backed by SA General’, *Cape Times*, Johannesburg, dated 13/11/1973; ‘More Public Beatings’, *Cape Times* dated 13/11/1973; ‘Inhuman and Degrading punishment’, *The Times*, dated 24/11/1973; The Agony of a Public 21/11/73 *Rand Daily Mail*.

⁶⁷ ‘More Public Beatings’, *Cape Times*, dated 13/11/1973.

floggings were carried out with the broad rib of the *makalani* palm, where in some cases men were ordered to strip for the beatings, while the women were told to lift their dresses and to crouch over stools. According to media reports, men got between 18 to 31 lashes on the buttocks with this palm branch and the majority of the culprits were men who had been held incommunicado and without charge under the “quasi emergency proclamation”.⁶⁸ Therefore, membership of SWAPO, the symbolic act which led to such a humiliating punishment, and the fact that SWAPO stood for the unity of all Namibia, were very important factors in the situation because they were forcefully challenging the whole basis for South Africa’s apartheid policy applied in Namibia.

However, prior to these floggings in the 1970s, there were other floggings meted out to SWAPO members in the early 1960s. According to the current President Hifikepunye Pohamba, he was flogged because he was apparently interfering with the stability of the government of South Africa administered by the chiefs or headmen.⁶⁹ President Pohamba claims that he was the first person to be flogged in Ovamboland by a man called Phillipus, stating: “I was the first person to be arrested and flogged in the north, in June 1961 after having been chained, because there were no prisons...no jails. I was in chains for a week at Ohangwena and this is the place where Eliaser Tuhadeleni Kaxumba ka Ndola used to be chained too, ...I was chained there. Kaxumba was however not flogged, but I was flogged. I was given 24 strokes on the buttocks. It was tough.”⁷⁰ Note here that possibly in the absence of prison facilities in Ovamboland at the time, offenders were chained up for days before they were sentenced to flogging. This is in contrast to what was happening later in the 1970s where people were imprisoned incommunicado for weeks or even months before they were released to the ‘tribal’ authorities for a publicised flogging. The issue of publicising the flogging and the idea of a spectacle will be covered in more detail in the course of the chapter.

Another news report suggested that chiefs and headmen in Oukwanyama and Ondangwa areas were motivated by strong feelings of hostility and anger towards all persons who differed from them in their political thinking particularly members of SWAPO and

⁶⁸ ‘Inhuman and Degrading punishment’, *The Times*, dated 24/11/1973.

⁶⁹ Interview with His Excellency President Hifikepunye Pohamba, State House, Auasblik, Windhoek, 31.2.2010.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

DEMKOP⁷¹, two legal political organisations in South-West Africa/Namibia and Ovambo.⁷² The reason attributed to this was obviously because, chiefs in four areas of South West Africa, including Ovamboland, had much wider powers of trial and punishment than chiefs in other parts of SWA and the Republic. Actually, *The Star* noting the legacy of indirect rule, states that Proclamation 348 of 1967 gave chiefs in Ovamboland, the Okavango, the Kaokoveld, and Zessfontein “exclusive and original jurisdiction” in all civil and criminal matters between Africans – except treason, murder, rape, culpable homicide, and public violence. Fines may be imposed “in accordance with native law and custom”.⁷³ The chiefs and headmen were also given increased power, and increased pay. Thus, for them, SWAPO was a serious political threat as they were made to believe that if SWAPO became victorious, they would lose their positions and therefore, their benefits.⁷⁴ To the South African authorities, the presence of an active SWAPO movement who called for a unified Namibia threatened their whole political system, not only in Namibia but eventually in South Africa as well.

Therefore, a seemingly symbiotic relationship developed between the South African government and the Ovambo ‘tribal’ authorities in relation to the legal dualism. The legal dualism here continues the issue of indirect rule analysed particularly in Chapters Three and Four of this thesis. Mahmood Mamdani argues that the colonial state in Africa was ‘bifurcated’, with different modes of rule for urban ‘citizens’ and rural ‘subjects’. The colonial strategy of ‘divide and rule’ took two related forms: an enforced division of Africans along ethnic lines, and an enforced division between town and countryside.⁷⁵ Thus, Africans were contained, not as ‘natives’ or indigenous Africans, but as a ‘tribesmen’. According to Mamdani, colonialists justified ‘indirect rule’ on the basis that ‘tradition’ and ‘custom’ were indigenous forms of social organization. Moreover, civil power claimed to protect rights,

⁷¹ DEMKOP stands for Democratic Co-operative Party. DEMKOP was led by Johannes Nangutuuala, who headed the ad hoc contract workers committee in 1972. DEMKOP had some following in Ovamboland and amongst the contract workers but after a short time it became defunct and its leader Nangutuuala worked for the Ovambo Legislative Council for a short while. Mr. Nangutuuala was one of the people who were publicly flogged in 1973 following his release from the police cells at Ondangwa, , where he was being held incommunicado, without charge, and was handed over to the ‘tribal’ council by the South African Police. He was then publicly flogged, being given 21 lashes with the rib of a palm branch.

⁷² ‘Judge orders curb on SWA floggings’, *Cape Times Africa*, dated 15/11/1973.

⁷³ ‘Some Chiefs more powerful’, *The Star Bureau*, dated 24/11/1973.

⁷⁴ Interview with Hinananye Nehova, Windhoek, 30.1.2009.

⁷⁵ Mamdani, M. *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the legacy of late colonialism* (Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton: University Press, 1996), p 18.

customary power pledged to enforce tradition. The former was organized on the principle of differentiation to check the concentration of power, the latter around the principle of fusion to ensure a unitary authority.⁷⁶ But they reinforced and used these identities to divide and manage rural Africans. In order to enforce their dual policy of ‘ethnic pluralism’ and urban-rural division, colonialists, Mamdani emphasizes, exercised ‘force to an unusual degree’.⁷⁷ In this way, colonial despotism was highly decentralized.

In practice, according to Mamdani, direct rule meant the reintegration and domination of natives in the institutional context of semiservile and semicapitalist agrarian relations”.⁷⁸ He argues that direct rule was the form of urban civil power and for the uncivilized who were excluded from the rights of citizenship, direct rule signified an unmediated – centralized – despotism.⁷⁹ In contrast, indirect rule indicated a rural tribal authority. As he argues, “indirect rule” came to be the mode of domination over a “free” peasantry.⁸⁰ In this case, since the administration of Ovambo took the indirect form in the inter-war years, the people were governed by their chiefs and headmen, and laws remained customary, even though they came under the supervision of the Native Commissioner of Ovamboland and then later fell under South African military administration during the war from 1966 to 1989. In short, it was about incorporating ‘natives’ into a state-enforced customary order.⁸¹ For the subject population of ‘natives’, argues Mamdani, indirect rule signified a mediated – decentralised – despotism. Thus, this legal dualism consisted of South African legislation and Ovambo tribal authority ‘customary’ law. And it was this dichotomy of legal dualism that raised the question of legitimacy of the authority granted to the tribal authorities, considering the dismissal of public floggings as an old customary practice of the Ovambo by the South African government discussed later in this chapter, further illustrating the divide between the centralized and decentralized power of the colonial state.

It was the linkages and ruptures between urban and rural power, authority and legitimacy through a mutual collaboration that both the South African government (urban power) and the tribal authorities (rural power) benefitted from their relationship. However, Mamdani argues,

⁷⁶ Ibid, pp 16, 17 and 18.

⁷⁷ Ibid, pp 22-24.

⁷⁸ Ibid, p 17.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Mamdani, M. *Citizen and Subject*, p 17.

⁸¹ Ibid, p 18.

it should not be surprising that custom came to be the language of force, masking the uncustomary power of Native Authorities. The day-to-day violence of the colonial system was embedded in customary Native Authorities in the local state, not in civil power at the centre.⁸² Yet, he further argues, we must not forget that customary local authority was reinforced and backed up by central civil power.⁸³ Evidently, the Ovambo tribal authorities may have looked like the only ones responsible for the floggings but the South African government was actually in charge of formulating the legislation for floggings to be administered. And so, it is important to analyse this reciprocal relationship that existed between the ruling groups in Ovamboland and the South African government with regards to corporal punishment.

Floggings as an established ‘tribal’ custom?

The fact that the majority of the flogging victims were first detained without charges for a couple of months and then were handed directly to the ‘tribal’ authorities, indicated that the South African authorities formulated the flogging policy and the Ovambo ‘traditional’ authorities implemented it. However, the South African government was able to detach itself from the floggings by claiming that they were an old ‘tribal’ custom of the Ovambo and they had nothing to do with it. Yet, the myth about flogging being a ‘traditional’ way of punishing offenders was very effectively exploded in the affidavits included in the application for interdicts by Bishop Richard Wood,⁸⁴ in a quest to halt any form of corporal punishment against members or sympathisers of SWAPO and DEMKOP.⁸⁵ Bishop Wood collected affidavits from people who claimed to have been flogged and used the affidavits to support his applications to the Windhoek Supreme Court. I come back to some of these affidavits later on.

⁸² Ibid, pp 22-23.

⁸³ Ibid, p 23.

⁸⁴ Reverend Richard Wood was the Bishop of the Anglican diocese of Damaraland in Namibia for two years until his expulsion in 1975. He was elected following the expulsion of Bishop Colin Winter, whose stance against apartheid had won international acclaim. Wood was accused of being the author of political statements issued by the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) in a legal action over the public flogging of male and female SWAPO supporters in Ovamboland.

⁸⁵ See, NAN, AACRLS.235, Vol.1 and Vol.2, Affidavits submitted to the Supreme Court of South Africa by Richard James Wood, Leonard Nangolo Auala and Thomas Ndalikutala Kamati against the Ondonga ‘Tribal’ Authority and the Oukwanyama ‘Tribal’ Authority on 22 March 1974.

The two organisations, SWAPO and DEMKOP, had been critical of the South African government's policy of creating African homelands in the disputed territory and thus their members were targeted by the floggings. Bishop Wood's application asked the South African government to stop the floggings inflicted on members of the opposition organisations carried out by the 'traditional' authorities in Ovambo. This was because the jurisdiction of the 'traditional' authorities was derived from the South African government and as a result gave them legitimacy to hand out sentences of public floggings. *The Star* reported that a proclamation in the quasi-emergency regulation of 1972, noted earlier, allowed maximum fines and terms of imprisonment which could be imposed by chiefs for offences under the regulations, but it did not curb their right to inflict "corporal punishment in accordance with 'native' law and custom".⁸⁶ As a result, according to *The Star*:

Chiefs in South Africa and in other parts of South West Africa do not have jurisdiction automatically; it must be conferred on them by the Minister of Bantu Administration. The Bantu Administration Act of 1927 says that South African Chiefs may be given power to try and punish any offence at common law or under Bantu law and custom and under criminal law except for 35 specified offences. These offences range from murder and treason to witchcraft and faction fighting and include most common law crimes. Customs in conflict with public policy may not be enforced through the application of native law and custom in chiefs courts. The infliction of corporal punishments by chiefs in South Africa is regulated by the Criminal Procedure Act. This lays down that not more than 10 lashes may be given, and that whippings must be given in private and in accordance with the regulations of the Prisons Act. South African Chiefs may impose corporal punishment only on unmarried men under the age of 30. None of these restrictions apply to corporal punishment imposed by chiefs in Ovamboland.⁸⁷

Even so, flogging remained a legal punishment, although it was not supposed to be in public or to consist of more than 10 strokes. In apartheid South Africa, lashes with a cane were an accepted form of judicial punishment – but there were certain statutory rules and conditions laid down which ensured they were not abused.⁸⁸ However, 'tribal' courts in African areas were traditionally independent as far as their own law and custom were concerned. Only when they inflicted punishment found to be unnaturally cruel or repugnant could the South

⁸⁶ Jean Le May, 'Chiefs' right on floggings unlimited', *The Star*, dated, 17/11/1973.

⁸⁷ 'Some Chiefs more powerful', *The Star*, dated 24/11/1973.

⁸⁸ Staff Reporter, 'SA law lays down rules for caning' *Rand Daily Mail*, dated, 13/11/1973.

African authorities intervene in terms of the Native Administration Act of 1972 and declare such forms of punishment illegal.⁸⁹ This is very important to think about when looking at flogging as a form of cruel or repugnant punishment. I come back to this issue later. The maximum number of lashes which could be administered under South African laws was 10 – although in practice, no more than six with a heavy cane.⁹⁰ In Ovambo, however, up to 31 lashes had been inflicted on political detainees.

In this light, it is important to question the history of punishment in Ovamboland. Was there a limit to a number of lashes one is supposed to receive? This is because the media reported on what the lawyers in South Africa were arguing regarding the maximum number of lashes a person was believed to get as punishment. The fact is, the history of punishment or the forms of pre-colonial enforcement of laws and administration of justice in Ovambo are vague and fuzzy. According to Loeb, there were a number of procedures that included fining and in some cases forms of torture used in order to extract confessions.⁹¹ During his term as Kwanyama king, Mandume used a variety of punishments⁹² which were educational and symbolic. He is represented in both written and oral accounts as having court hearings at his palace at Ondjiva where local people used to attend the hearings, but were not allowed to say anything during the proceedings. Only the people with authority had the right to ask questions or to comment.⁹³ Mandume came up with several decrees.

Firstly, he stopped the picking of fruit until it was ripe, people were told to wait until the ripe fruit fell to the ground. Secondly, he prohibited random shooting as he advised that ammunition be spared for the war against the white men, and also that guns were being fired unnecessarily in the country resulting in deaths. He told people who wanted to fire their guns to do it in the forest and not in the country. Once these preliminary measures were in place, Mandume began to tackle rival power bases, by curbing the powers and abuses of senior

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ For a full discussion on this issue, see, Edwin Loeb, *In feudal Africa*, (Bloomington, 1962), pp 69-79.

⁹² Mandume's punishment practices and concepts of justice reflected a variety of cultural and social forms of control which determined important aspects of penalties. These forms of control were often symbolic and physical, signalling a pre-modern ethos. See Hayes, P. 'Cocky Hahn and the Black Venus' in *Gender & History – Special Issue: Gendered Colonialisms in African history Vol. 8 Number 3* (Oxford UK & Cambridge USA: Blackwell Publishers, November 1996), p56.

⁹³ Hayes, P. *Healing of the land, Kaulinge's history of Kwanyama*, (Duisburg: Rudige Koppe Verlag, 1997), p 33.

headmen who were accused of culling the ‘naturally rich’ people of Oukwanyama, in order to appropriate their crops and cattle.⁹⁴ People found breaking these laws were punished severely and their punishments served as examples to the society.⁹⁵

However, McKittrick’s sources contradict Kaulinge’s account. She argues that mission records claim that Mandume was hostile towards the missions and he killed people at random, executing suspected witches and grazing his horses in commoner’s crop fields. This obviously constructs him as ‘barbaric’ which fits the floggings of 1973. Mandume allegedly targeted largely aristocrats and those associated with missionaries as he apparently commonly used forced labour as a form of punishment against Christians.⁹⁶ It is important to note here that there are polarised views about Mandume and records about him being violent towards Christians are very disputed by many Kwanyama historians. According to Philippus Shilongo’s affidavit,⁹⁷ he claims that the Oukwanyama and the Ondonga laws and custom provided for proceedings of a civil or criminal nature to be conducted in such a way that the accused persons or defendants were entitled and permitted to challenge accusations made against them, and to call witnesses in order to prove their innocence.⁹⁸ However, although there were arguments that according to Kwanyama custom, only men were flogged and there were no cases of men receiving more than ten lashes, I do not think there was a fixed precedent as to the number of lashes given as punishment.

This history needs much more careful analysis as according to Hayes, Manning and Hahn inflicted floggings on the Kwanyama. She asserts that there was a show of unity between Hahn and Kwanyama headmen after Mandume’s death in 1917 through flogging of ‘radicals’, with all parties present at the spectacle.⁹⁹ Hayes further argues that this ritualised

⁹⁴ Hayes, P. ‘A History of the Owambo of Namibia, 1880-1930’ (Unpublished PhD thesis, vol.1, Cambridge, 1992), p 161.

⁹⁵ For a full account on the punishments meted out to the offenders of Mandume’s decrees see, Hayes, P. ‘A History of the Owambo’, pp 164-166; idem, “When You Shake a Tree” The Precolonial and the Postcolonial in Northern Namibia in Derek Peterson & Giacomo Macola (eds) *Recasting the Past* (Athens OH: Ohio University Press, 2009).

⁹⁶ McKittrick, M. *To dwell secure: generation, Christianity, and colonialism in Ovamboland*. (Portsworth, NH: Heinemann, 2002), pp 140-141.

⁹⁷ Bishop Richard James Wood, Bishop Leonard Nangolo Auala and Thomas Ndalikutala Kamati collected affidavits from people who claimed to have been flogged and used them against the Ondonga ‘Tribal’ Authority and the Oukwanyama ‘Tribal’ Authority on 22 March 1974 to support their applications to the Windhoek Supreme Court.

⁹⁸ NAN, AACRLS.235, Vol.1 and Vol.2, ‘Affidavits submitted to the Supreme Court of South’, pp 52-53.

⁹⁹ Hayes, P. ‘Cocky Hahn and the Black Venus’, p56.

sharing of authority represented a displacement to a new central power far away, mediated through the bodies of young Kwanyama men undergoing this punishment.¹⁰⁰ This display thus strengthened the relationship between Hahn and the headmen, as according to colonial official correspondence, it is claimed that when the South African administration embarked upon the active government of Ovamboland a few years after 1915, it found the several ‘tribal’ Chiefs in Ovamboland holding almost complete sway and, in the punishment of criminal offences, resorting frequently to methods ‘barbaric’ in the extreme.¹⁰¹ It became, therefore, an important part of the officers to whom the immediate supervision of Ovamboland had been assigned, to bring about a ‘more civilised policy’ which gradually introduced an understanding between the Native authorities and the Administration whereby cases of murder and rape (probably the three capital offences – treason, murder and rape were intended) should be subject to the other criminal offences would be left to the chiefs and councils of headmen to dispose of.¹⁰² Of course, for a time such punishment or lashes were stopped altogether but according to the same correspondence, ‘ruling natives’ apparently always asked that some form of deterrent should be re-established and that lashes might be given in serious cases.¹⁰³

The latter argument suggests something of importance when thinking about the history of punishment in Owambo as according to oral testimonies, lashes stopped crime because of the fact that an offender who was not in a position to pay compensation or a fine (which was the usual form in which cases were settled) and could not rely on his family for assistance, was given a few lashes.¹⁰⁴ Oral testimonies insist that floggings were happening in Ovamboland before the 1970s. According to Lucas Shinedima, “public floggings were only carried out on people who had done wrong or could not pay their fines. It was not only the time of *omapokolo* that people were beaten, but also during Ndjukuma and Nehemia’s time, but it was mostly done when someone was denying her/his crime.”¹⁰⁵ It is important to note that Omhedi was at the centre of corporal punishment. Thus, corporal punishment had to do with headmen being headmen, *omalenga*, punishing people who had done wrong, by either fining

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ NAN, A266/19/1 – Indirect Rule in Ovamboland : Jurisdiction in Capital Cases: A letter addressed to His Honour The Administrator (undated).

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Vilho Tschilongo, Ongwediva, 18.06.2010.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Lucas Shinedima, Onuno, 02.8.2008 and 23.06.2009.

them or if one could not afford it, being beaten instead. This is important with regards to ‘making confess crime’ as it seems that people were made to understand that punishment would be meted out unless or until they confessed, as demanded by the ‘persecutors’. Thus, in this manner, the offenders usually confessed the crime to conform to the demands of their persecutors.

In continuation with the history of punishment in Ovambo, Pastor David Shihepo’s affidavit gives even more insight. According to Pastor Shihepo, he was born around the year 1885 and was a young man of about twenty at the time of the fighting between the Germans and the Ovambos¹⁰⁶ and in particular at the time of the fall of Fort Namutoni in 1904. He claims that he became familiar with the law and custom of the Kwanyama people in 1912 when he attended sessions of the ‘tribal’ courts. He maintains that prior to his leaving Oukwanyama in 1912, he noted that sentences imposed for crimes involved the imposition of death or the payment of fines with cattle and that flogging in no way formed a part of the punishment imposed upon offenders punished in terms of ‘Tribal’ Law and Custom.¹⁰⁷ He further stated that, at no stage prior to the 1940s was flogging ever imposed as a punishment by the ‘tribal’ court. In the case of Ondonga, he says, “it was only during the reign of King Johannes Kambonde Namene also known as Shihepo, that flogging was meted out to persons convicted of crimes, but it was after instructions had been received from a government official by the name of Hahn, to impose floggings on offenders. As a result of the new policy introduced by Hahn, he became generally known in Ovambo as “Shongola Hahn”. However, he further claims, the number of strokes imposed on offenders, did not exceed six strokes, even though the offences in question might have been very serious.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ On 28 January 1904, the breakaway chief of eastern Ondonga, Nehale IyaMpingana, sent forces armed with rifles and traditional weapons to attack the German fort at Namutoni. The attack resulted in many casualties on both sides and saw the German Schutztruppe fleeing the Namutoni fort to Tsumeb while Nehale’s warriors burnt the fort to the ground and drove off with the livestock. For a full discussion on this see Eirola, M. *The Ovambogefahr: the Ovamboland Reservation in the Making: Political Responses of the Kingdom of Ondonga to the German Colonial Power 1884-1910* ((Studia Historica Septentrionalia 22), Jyväskylä, Finland: Pohjas-Soumen Historiallinen, Yhdistys, 1992) and Oermann, N. O. *Mission, Church and State relations in South West Africa under German rule 1884-1910* (Franz Steiner Verlag, 1999).

¹⁰⁷ See, NAN, AACRLS.235, Vol.1 and Vol.2, Affidavits submitted to the Supreme Court of South’, pp 94-98, and ‘Caetano yesterday, Vorster tomorrow – SWAPO mobilizes for Independence’, *Namibian News*, Vol. 7, No. 6 & 7 (South West Africa People’s Organisation of Namibia (SWAPO) June/July 1974), Basler Afrika Bibliographien (BAB).

¹⁰⁸ ‘Caetano yesterday, Vorster tomorrow – SWAPO mobilizes for Independence’.

The issue of women being flogged publicly was also highlighted in the media where it was claimed that, under South Africa laws, no woman could be sentenced to strokes, whereas women were known to have been flogged in Owambo.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, according to *The Star*, caning under South African law was only administered in private, but in Owambo, the floggings were made public. The *Rand Daily Mail* also suggested that when a South African court sentenced a man to strokes, he was always examined before by a medical officer – usually a district surgeon – who had to declare him fit to receive this form of punishment.¹¹⁰ However, according to affidavits submitted by Bishop Wood from several people flogged in Ovambo, no medical officer was in attendance and medical attention immediately after the flogging was refused.¹¹¹ There were also arguments that in Ovamboland, getting a district surgeon to do tests on the accused before flogging was impractical.¹¹² Bishop Wood submitted that the floggings were not only illegal in law, but also in terms of African law and custom in Owambo.

In light of public condemnation that was propagated by domestic as well as international media, the South African government came under enquiry. This came after the South African Minister of Bantu Affairs, Mr Michael Botha, refused to intervene after the protests of many South African politicians over the barbaric spectacles being enacted in Ovamboland.¹¹³ The *Rand Daily Mail* reported that he had stated that the floggings were a tribal concern and that the South African government wanted “nothing to do with the matter”.¹¹⁴ The cruel and revolting way in which the floggings were carried out, was ‘not only repugnant to every sense of natural justice, but also to all standards of Western civilisation’,¹¹⁵ and many people called a halt to the beatings. The latter was the strongest argument in effecting an end to the punishing of opposition members by the South African government through the Ovambo

¹⁰⁹ Note that the media, especially *The Rand Daily Mail*, *The Cape Times*, *The Star*, were more against racism and inequality than any other newspapers in South Africa at the time. As a result these papers came under scrutiny, government censorship and financial pressure, because they were more liberal and critical of the apartheid South African government, and later led some of them to close down in the 1980s.

¹¹⁰ Staff Reporter, ‘SA law lays down rules for caning’, *Rand Daily Mail*, 13/11/1973.

¹¹¹ See, NAN, AACRLS.235, Vol.1 and Vol.2, Affidavits submitted to the Supreme Court of South Africa, and Staff Reporter, ‘SA law lays down rules for caning’, *Rand Daily Mail*, 13/11/1973.

¹¹² Cape Times Correspondent, ‘Flogging – call backed by SA General’, *Cape Times*, Johannesburg, dated 13/11/1973.

¹¹³ ‘Inhuman and Degrading punishment’, *The Times*, dated 24/11/1973.

¹¹⁴ Staff Reporter, ‘Government slated over SWA beatings’, *Rand Daily Mail*, dated 15/11/1973.

¹¹⁵ ‘Judge orders curb on SWA floggings’, *Cape Times Africa*, dated 1973.

chiefs and headmen. Coming back to the issue of flogging as punishment, and the South African government's argument that it only intervened in 'tribal' matters when punishments inflicted were found to be unnaturally cruel or repugnant, one needs to question the government's reluctance to intervene in the Ovambo floggings at the time. The media reported that politicians in Namibia and South Africa, both nationalist and opposition, held the government responsible and called for an end to floggings.

As one reporter argues, "...the South African authorities have never hesitated to meddle in 'tribal' affairs when it suits their ideological aims. It had always been the South African tradition, and in some cases, the law, that if old African customs and laws offended the principles of public morality and natural justice they should be void and unenforceable".¹¹⁶ It is therefore necessary to examine the years of colonization in Ovamboland especially with reference to the precolonial, 'tribal' or customary laws that Native Commissioners and colonial officials kept as custom and did not disagree with their views of what a 'tribalised' Ovambo should be. Thus, seemingly, some of the repugnant 'tribal' laws were retained or invented.

Further, a report by *GN Pretoria*, quoting Dr David Welsh, a lecturer in African law at the University of Cape Town at the time, commented that "although there is a long tradition of recognition for African law and custom, a South African court can rule that it is illegal for a 'tribal' court to inflict this type of punishment."¹¹⁷ Additionally, *The Cape Times* argued that:

As long as the government tolerates the imposition of public floggings as a punishment by 'tribal' courts in Ovamboland it must bear full responsibility for such barbarities. If flogging is an Ovambo tradition, then it should be eliminated. The government has impressive powers in Ovamboland which it does not hesitate to use against opponents of its own political protégés. It is involving itself more often than not in "domestic matters". Here is an opportunity to use those powers to good effect by robbing 'tribal' courts of the power to impose sentences that went out to fashion with the thumbscrew, the stocks and the public gallows. It should, at the very least, institute an inquiry into the scale of 'tribal' punishments.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Staff Reporter, 'Government slated over SWA beatings', *Rand Daily Mail*, dated 15/11/1973.

¹¹⁷ 'No move to stop Ovambo floggings', *GN Pretoria* dated 15/11/1973.

¹¹⁸ 'Stop the floggings', *The Cape Times* dated, Wednesday October 31, 1973.

David Loshak argues that the official South African attitude towards the public floggings in Ovambo, by stating that it was a domestic affair of the Ovambos, was in line with the Government policy of “separate development” for the various ethnic groups in South-West Africa.¹¹⁹ The Ovambos and others were granted a limited measure of autonomy as part of the government’s plan for “self determination” which, it was argued, would eventually lead to complete independence.¹²⁰ As noted throughout this study, Ovamboland was run – indirectly by colonial officials - through ‘tribal’ chiefs and councils of headmen appointed by the South African Government. And since most of the floggings had been ordered by the chiefs and headmen, the government was clearly responsible for the floggings since all powers of the tribal authorities were delegated by the government. Thus, the disowning and the calling of public floggings an old ‘tribal’ custom of the Ovambos by the South African government, was clearly linked to the struggle of ownership over this form of punishment, because the floggings gave ‘traditional’ authorities legitimacy and authority over their subjects which was obviously non-existent. What is clear, however, is that the floggings were not locally initiated as both parties argued, but were a South African government policy.

It is also important to think about Major Hahn, ‘Shongola’, who as indicated earlier had been known in his sphere of work to have used the sjambok on any ‘native’ who misbehaved. Some argue that he is the source of the ‘tradition’ of flogging as Hayes further claims that references are sprinkled around oral history regarding Hahn’s beatings of Ovambo men, particularly at road and other construction sites. The discourse emerges from Ovambo historical construction around the figure of Shongola himself, as it is believed that the flogging system originated with him.¹²¹ I argue that although flogging existed in precolonial times, it became legitimized in the colonial time, because colonial nuances accompanied this form of disciplining young political activists as they shifted to liberate themselves.

Making sense of the public floggings – the idea of ‘spectacle’?

As noted earlier, individual men and women were first arrested by the South African police and held incommunicado for some time before they were handed over to be flogged by the

¹¹⁹ David Loshak was a *Daily Telegraph* and *Sunday Telegraph* Resident staff correspondent in South Africa in the 1970s. He is the author of two paper back books, *Daily Telegraph Guide to Retirement* and *Pakistan Crisis*. After his stint in South Africa, he returned to London to become the *Daily Telegraph*’s Health correspondent.

¹²⁰ Loshak, D. ‘Floggings A Domestic Affair’, Tel. in Cape Town dated, 31/10/1973.

¹²¹ Hayes, P. ‘Cocky Hahn and the Black Venus’, p 57.

Ondonga and Oukwanyama ‘traditional’ authorities. This was for belonging to SWAPO, or having ‘shown sympathy’ to anti-government causes, or even to have displayed an interest in political affairs. However, what is interesting here is, as Moosage argues, ‘the disciplining and punishment, which is shifted from a private space (prison) to a public space’.¹²² By releasing the accused from prison where they were in a privacy of a prison cell to the ‘traditional’ authorities who publicised the floggings, this served to legitimate the spectacle and hence the power of the tribal authorities. The range of severity of pain that accompanied such punishments brings to light a few things about the event being made spectacular. First, people were invited to witness and therefore participate in the flogging. It may be important to consider the effect of familiarising the public with such events, and whether this was done for a purpose.

According to Foucault, with reference to pre-modern punishment, ‘public torture and execution must be made spectacular’.¹²³ The beatings were to be seen by all as humiliating and degrading, and the intention to repeatedly publicize them was evidently linked to a ‘spectacle’. What matters here in the realm of a spectacle is what can be seen. At occasions of public floggings in Ovambo, large numbers of spectators always turned up to witness the beatings.

However, in a rather interesting case, President Pohamba claims that the Kwanyama council of headmen did not want to publicise his flogging in the 1960s as was the case in the 1970s. He claims; “...when I was flogged, it was not such a big affair, people got scared, the authorities were so afraid. They were afraid that if they announced that I was going to appear, all the SWAPO people would have travelled to Ohangwena. So what they did was, they just called Vilho ya Weyulu, Nehemia Shoovaleka, Vatilifa from Okelemba, Gabriel Katamba...these were the people who were called.”¹²⁴ Although the authorities did not announce the flogging of the man who became President Pohamba, onlookers obviously

¹²² Moosage, R. ‘*Epokolo*, The 1973-4 Public Floggings of Ovamboland’, p 9.

¹²³ Foucault, M. Translated by Alan Sheridan, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Random House), p 34.

¹²⁴ Interview with His Excellency, President Hifikepunye Pohamba, State House, Auasblik, Windhoek, 31.02.2010.

turned up to witness the punishment. This is because there are accounts of the alleged witnesses who claim that they were amongst the people who saw Pohamba being flogged.¹²⁵ It is important to analyse why the council wanted to keep the flogging at this time low key. Was it really because they were afraid that upon hearing that one of its members was being flogged that SWAPO would retaliate? I believe at this time only the South African police had some presence, and the military was not yet established in Ovamboland at that time, as the idea of homeland self-determination was yet to be implemented. Thus, this probably left the ‘tribal’ authorities to their own devices. It could also be that the ‘tribal’ authorities were still practising the pre-modern symbolic punishments which were not always made into big spectacles. Following President Pohamba’s account, he claims that normally the judgement was carried out by the chairman of the court, who used to be Lazarus Nafidi but at that time he was not there. Thus, Nehemia Shoovaleka was the person who passed the judgement to have him flogged. He states: “Yes, he gave the judgement..I was flogged by a gentleman called Philipus from Onamutayi, he was a police officer”.¹²⁶

Typically, a flogged victim was forced to strip down to their underpants or nakedness if it was a man or to pull up their dress if it was a woman. He/she was then required to bend over a stool or chair while as many as twelve men pinned down his/her arms and legs. The weapon used was a broad *makalani* rib, a rather long (possibly 5 or 6 feet) piece of a very strong, freshly cut branch from a palm tree. The person who delivered the blows stood, and would use the full force of his weight, all his leverage, to deliver each stroke, cutting into the victim’s flesh with each delivery. Also, he typically spaced the blows, to prolong the agony of punishment, as a victim might receive two or three blows, then be forced to wait one minute before the flogging continued.¹²⁷

According to a collection of affidavits by Richard Wood, four women (student nurses) were summarily accused by the ‘Tribal’ Court at Ohangwena of having been absent from duty without leave and sentenced to six strokes of the *epokolo*. They were Elise Nghilwamo, Ottilia Nangolo, Rachel Shaduka and Esther Kalola. The Oukwanyama ‘Tribal’ Court

¹²⁵ Interviews with Ndahafa ya Kakonda, Onuno, Omalyata, 24.11.2008 and 7.02.2009 and Elia la Haikali, Eengwena, Endola, 16.08.2008.

¹²⁶ Interview with His Excellency, President Hifikepunye Pohamba, State House, Auasblik, 31.02.2010.

¹²⁷ See, NAN, AACRLS. 235, Vol.1 and Vol.2, Affidavits submitted to the Supreme Court of South Africa, p 12.

accused them of being members of SWAPO and they were then sentenced to floggings. However, in contrast with the President's flogging, this punishment was administered in the presence of the 'Tribal' Authority and of a big crowd of men and women belonging to the public.¹²⁸ Following on these accounts collected by Wood and lawyers where these nurses feature, two interviews were conducted with one of the four nurses, who talked about her experience.

Ndaiponhofi Nehova (referred to as Rachel Shaduka in her affidavit) narrates her ordeal at the hands of the 'tribal' authority of Oukwanyama who at the time, according to her testimony and other victims' affidavits, comprised the following headmen: Gabriel Kautwima, Gabriel Katamba, Nathaniel Ndjuluwa, who was secretary of the Council, Phillipus Kaluvi, Walombola Kalomo, and Vilho Weyulu.¹²⁹ She narrates:

I joined the SWAPO Youth League in 1970 and while studying at Odibo. Political uprising started in earnest in 1971-72, as workers all over Namibia went on strike and people started burning down cattle pens. In 1973, I was arrested because I attended a meeting of the SWAPO Youth League in Windhoek. I lied about attending the Students Christian Movement (SCM), but instead went to attend the SWAPO Youth League's meeting. After the meeting in Windhoek, we started mobilizing other people and we were arrested at Odibo while at work. When we got back from Windhoek, we also decided to go on strike, we didn't go to work, so the police arrested the four of us. We were all members of the SWAPO Youth League then, we were taken to the Oshikango prison, where we stayed for a week. After that, we were taken to court at Ondangwa, but were returned to Ohangwena and later to Omhedi at Gabriel Kautwima's house where we were sentenced to hard labour. We were imprisoned at Omhedi for two weeks while doing all kinds of hard work, such as ploughing, cutting grass, pounding *mahangu* millet in the sun and also brewed beer. It was really hard work. After the two weeks we were taken back to prison to wait for our trial at Ohangwena where *oshidano* was to take place – *oshidano* was an annual public festival – and where many people from different areas meet at Ohangwena. I was tried first, it was all political so some things were just made up to implicate us. I was sentenced to pay 2 cows but I told them that I didn't have cattle. They said that I was disrespectful because I was answering back. Headman Vilho Weyulu decided that since I didn't have cattle and it will be my parents' responsibility to pay for them and not me, they should decide on something that will hurt me

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Interview with Mrs Ndaiponhofi Nehova, Windhoek West, 31.01.2009 and 15.07.2010; and also see, NAN, AACRLS.235, Vol.1 and Vol.2, Affidavits submitted to the Supreme Court of South Africa.

personally. Thus, they decided to flog me publicly, in front of all the people. All the headmen agreed on my judgment, so people were then called and invited to come and see us being flogged publicly. It was around 2 o'clock midday, so the prospect of women getting flogged publicly attracted a lot of attention. We were put in a line and I was flogged first. About 5 men held me down, some held my legs, some my head and some my arms. I was wearing long pants so they just pulled up my blouse and started beating me, I got 6 strokes. The rib of the palm leaf was still fresh so it was really painful. My buttocks were bruised. This was in 1973.¹³⁰

Nehova's account highlights a lot of issues here. The issue of a public spectacle is brought to light, as in this case the floggings took place at the *oshidano* gathering where many people from all over Ovambo came together. This was called Ohangwena show and it later became an annual event. There were competitions for the best runners, horse racing, dances, best crafted Ovambo knives, pots, and baskets which were made for this event and then sold afterwards. It also included the most impressive and plentiful harvests, such as pumpkins, mahangu and sorghum. There were many other activities and more items of interest. For this occasion a number of people from all over Ovamboland took part and it sometimes happened that the event lasted a number of days. It also happened that during this kind of gathering, court hearings also took place with cases from sub-districts, which the headmen and sub-headmen could not resolve in their own respective districts and as a result they were brought to Ohangwena during this event.

Foucault's conceptualisation of why torture was performed as a public spectacle suggests that 'the public execution belongs', as in this case, 'to the ceremonies by which power is manifested'. He further claims that it did not re-establish justice; it re-activated power.¹³¹ In events such as this, people's presence is required for the performance, to make an example. As Foucault argues, 'Not only must people know, they must see with their eyes. Because they must be made to be afraid; but also because they must be the witnesses, the guarantors, of the punishment, and because they must to a certain extent take part in it'.¹³² With the public floggings in Ovambo, the media reported that when the accused were flogged, spectators,

¹³⁰ Interview with Mrs Ndaiponhofi Nehova, Windhoek West, 31.01.2009 and 15.07.2010.

¹³¹ Foucault, M. Translated by Alan Sheridan, *Discipline and Punish*, pp 47 and 49.

¹³² Ibid, p 58.

especially women, were crying and covered or averted their eyes from the flogging.¹³³ It gives an impression that confirmed that spectators wanted to see the ‘performance’ but yet they were also afraid to see it happening. Thus, the use of public space for public floggings served to enforce fear and power for both the South African authorities and ‘traditional’ authorities, in this case the Oukwanyama ‘traditional’ authority, but definitely not legitimacy. According to David Shihepo’s affidavit, he states that, in cases of floggings during Ondonga Chief Hashikoto’s reign, the execution of flogging took place in the privacy of the king’s kraal and in the presence of men only. Women and children were not admitted to the sessions of the ‘Tribal’ Court and also thus were not permitted to be present when floggings were administered.¹³⁴ Mandume’s cases of execution usage of spectacle were not always done publicly, they were taken somewhere where they were executed by firing squad. People only heard the shooting at the palace but had not actually seen it happen or took part in it although there was also a general parade.¹³⁵

It is however clear, from the above account, that the colonial and ‘traditional’ authorities were set on legitimating their power and authority with a spontaneous public acknowledgement. This reflected the narrowing or shrinking down of culture as their punishments became standardised and bureaucratized. At least King Mandume had a variety of punishments for different offences, but the headmen’s punishment was being narrowed down to one form which was public floggings, and this was a reinvention. I argue that spectators expressed much interest, firstly, because the people being flogged were women (which I believe was a taboo in Ovambo) and secondly, because *oshidano* (which apparently hosted hearings for all people that were accused that year) attracted a large number of people who were already in the vicinity of Ohangwena to attend the event. The announcement of the floggings was made with a loudspeaker and was purposefully broadcast very widely.

From prison to re-enactment of polygyny at Omhedi

Nehova’s account also brings together many of the points made in previous chapters, particularly the analysis of public events and work at Omhedi. It shows how the headmen

¹³³ See, ‘Beatings described’, *The Star* Windhoek, dated 24/11/1973; Staff Reporter, ‘Priest describes public floggings’, *Rand Daily Mail*, dated 15/11/1973.

¹³⁴ See, Affidavits submitted to the Supreme Court of South Africa, p 98.

¹³⁵ Hayes, P. *Healing of the land*, p 49.

were using women's 'bodies' to legitimate their rule by using them as labour units. This is because by sentencing the four nurses to hard labour and all kinds of domestic work at Omhedi, Kautwima engaged in a re-enactment of polygyny as these nurses were treated like traditionalised wives. This brings me back to the issue I covered in Chapter 4 which analyses the productive and symbolic aspects of polygyny and pastoralism in Oukwanyama and Omhedi. It specifically examines the labour of women and production by looking at related colonial texts on polygamy with numerous wives of Nehemia Shoovaleka at Omhedi. I argued that polygyny was crucial for production not only in relation to the size of the production unit, but also in terms of the external labour during activities like planting and harvesting. The overall effect of the mission influence, using Hahn's argument, broke down social, political and economic structures in Ovamboland as it undermined the self-sufficiency of the family as a productive unit and turned the Christian converts into a 'weak link' in all important organization of food production and their homesteads into an "eye sore". As indicated by a short biography in Chapter Two, Gabriel Kautwima was a Christian and was married to only one wife, Netumbo la Kanenge.¹³⁶ Thus, the idea of a sizeable external labour force during activities like planting and harvesting associated with polygyny, does not apply in his case. Nehova estimates that the time they were sentenced to hard labour at Omhedi was in September 1973, which was a time of preparing and clearing the fields for ploughing.

The crucial question of the control over means of production in precolonial Ovambo is referred to by many Ovambo historians who suggest that all means of production in precolonial Ovambo were owned by the king, who exacted corvée labour to dig the large reservoirs to store the floodwaters, and it was he who took the decision of when to start planting, harvesting etc judging whether the rainy season had started. According to Clarence-Smith and Moorsom, corvée labour was also demanded for limited work in the king's field and for moving the royal homestead, apart from the reservoir digging mentioned earlier.¹³⁷ Therefore, in certain seasons, especially when homesteads required renewal or to be re-built, chiefs and headmen called out to their subjects to assist in work. Oral testimonies suggest that

¹³⁶ Interview with Mirijam Kautwima, Ongha, 26.06.2009.

¹³⁷ See, Clarence-Smith, W.G. and Moorsom, R. 'Underdevelopment and Class Formations in Ovamboland, 1845-1915', in *Journal of African History*, XVI, 3 (1975), pp 365-381; Moorsom, R. 'Contract Labour System 1900-1926' in *Underdevelopment and labour migration: the contract labour system in Namibia* (Bergen, Norway: Working Paper, Chr. Michelsen Institute, 1997), p 3; and Hayes, P. 'Famine of the Dams' in Hartmann, W, Hayes, P, Silvester, J, Wallace, M., *Namibia under South African Rule, Mobility and containment* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1998), p 144.

even after the fall of Oukwanyama kingdom, the council of headmen continued to exact corvée labour, particularly during Nehemia's term at Omhedi.¹³⁸ This is because headmen were principally encouraged to build bigger and more substantial kraals. According to Hahn, this was in keeping with the 'native' order that the chief and headmen lived in big and strongly built kraals which their standing and position demanded.¹³⁹

An example of such corvée labour took place when, according to oral accounts, the Oukwanyama Council of headmen requested all Kwanyama men in the area to assist and to also provide materials for the construction of *eumbo loshlongo laUkwanyama* the Oukwanyama 'traditional' homestead at Ohangwena in the early 1950s. Everyone was asked to bring wooden poles and smaller sticks to the site and help with the erection of the homestead. The decision apparently came after Gabriel Kautwima was told to move into the new homestead. This was after he became interpreter and secretary of the Kwanyama council of headmen after Kashala's death, since he did not own his own *omukunda* or district.¹⁴⁰ It was only after Nehemia's death in 1966 that he finally moved to Omhedi. Thus, I argue that Gabriel Kautwima, a senior headmen at Omhedi, probably without the necessary human labour to carry out all the seasonal work required at the time of planting and weeding, used his power and authority to sentence people such as Nehova and her colleagues to hard labour at Omhedi.

Turning to another whole debate here, it could also be that the headmen wanted to re-traditionalise educated women, because as nurses, they were becoming modernised. They were obviously punished for being educated, modern, independent and mobile. This form of punishment can also be related to what Vilho Kaulinge described about Mandume's justice practices, some of which were public and educational.¹⁴¹ This is because in a similar way, the headmen's punishment compelled women to remain traditional. As mentioned earlier, women's movement to the urban areas especially the south was highly controlled as they were thought to bring about prostitution and the spread of venereal diseases and were

¹³⁸ Interviews with Foibe Shoovaleka, Omhedi, 04.2.2009 and Olivia Naikuva, Onekwaya-East, 24.6.2009.

¹³⁹ NAN, Native Affairs, File 11/1, Vol. 8, Monthly and Annual Reports, 1935: p 11-12.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Olivia Nghiyolo Naikuva, Onekwaya-East, 24.6.2009 and Vatilifa Hangula, Okelemba, 04.2.2009.

¹⁴¹ Hayes, P. *Healing of the land*, pp 26-27, 33, 48 and 49.

perceived to be at the risk of detribalization and demoralisation.¹⁴² The men were the only ones that were allowed to migrate to the south for contract labour and it was allowed under certain conditions. Passes were only awarded to women to travel to the south under exceptional circumstances. There were administrative instructions and also ‘tribal’ instructions that they were not to leave without permission, or they would be punished under ‘tribal’ law and custom if they disregarded the instructions.¹⁴³

As for the nurses under discussion, they had gone to Windhoek under the pretext of attending the Student Christian Movement (SCM) meeting as they had travelling documents stating that they were going to Windhoek for that purpose. The SCM branch in Windhoek had sent out invitations to the smaller branches around the country, so that they could attend the overall meeting in Windhoek. Although they followed the procedures of going to the Assistant Native Commissioner at Oshikango/Ohangwena and then to Ondangwa to get a travelling pass to the south, they did not attend the SCM meeting but the SWAPO Youth League meeting instead, and that was why they were arrested and later flogged. This is how women in this case manipulated the system of passes to travel from Ovamboland to Windhoek.

Another reason for sentencing the four nurses to hard labour at Omhedi could be that the headmen thought these young people were misguided and misled by SWAPO ‘terrorists,’ and they wanted them to apologise for disobeying the elders and to promise not do it again. In this manner, they were disciplining disobedient children, since there was obviously an idea of infantilization – they were treated as children in order to humiliate them. According to Elise Ngiilwamo’s affidavit, she was asked who recruited her to join SWAPO, and who was teaching her politics.¹⁴⁴ Nehova claims that the headmen’s council decided to especially hand them over to Gabriel Kautwima, because since he resided at Omhedi and owned the whole district, he should be allowed to talk to them because they were his subjects and needed to advise them accordingly.¹⁴⁵ They were also threatened as according to Namholo’s¹⁴⁶ affidavit, he states: “I was also told by a member of the ‘Tribal’ Authority that, that should be the last

¹⁴² McKittrick M. *To dwell secure*, pp 186-190; and Wallace M. ‘A person in never angry for nothing’ in Hartmann. W, Hayes. P, Silvester. J, Wallace. M., *Namibia under South African Rule, Mobility and containment* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1998) and NAN, NAT: file 31/1, Native women – Influx of women to Tsumeb, 1938.

¹⁴³ NAN, NAO 52, file 4/9 Travelling Passes: Northern Native Territories 10 July 1948.

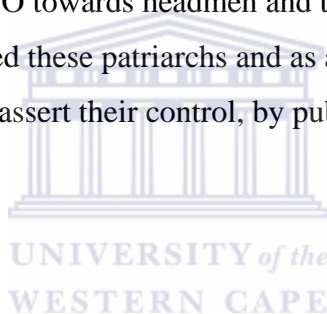
¹⁴⁴ Affidavits submitted to the Supreme Court of South , p 173.

¹⁴⁵ Interview iwth Mrs. Ndaiponhofi Nehova, Windhoek, 15.07.2010.

¹⁴⁶ Charles Namholo was also one of the people flogged at Ohangwena at that time. He was also a member of the SWAPO Youth League and held meetings around Oukwanyama mobilizing people to join SWAPO.

day that I would be a member of SWAPO and that if it was ever heard of again that I was still a member, I would receive an even greater punishment".¹⁴⁷ This can be analysed against the background of the generational conflict¹⁴⁸ that existed between older men and young men in Ovamboland.

The increase in political uprising in the country did not only enhance the tensions between older men and young men as the authority of senior (older men) headmen privileged the subordination of junior men, but it also offered the young SWAPO activists new opportunities to challenge patriarchal authority. Initially, migrant labour and Christianity offered opportunities to young men to move away from the influence and authority of older men and father figures. SWAPO affiliation later followed. Consequently, the culture of obedience and subordination towards parents and senior men had especially begun to break away. Thus, opposition by SWAPO towards headmen and the South African colonial administration further marginalised these patriarchs and as a result they joined forces with the colonial officials in an effort to reassert their control, by publicly flogging young men and women to command respect.



Voicing and Silences

The latter sentence brings me to the question of forms of voicing and silences within gendered contexts, especially where there are subsequent marginalization of the woman's voice in historical narratives. Out of the four nurses who were publicly flogged at Ohangwena in 1973, I only managed to interview one. Although I could not get hold of two of them, one woman was not willing to talk about her experience to me. Thus, in order to understand this reluctance and silence, and also analyse social constructs that exist within a culture, such as gender, one must examine the varying manners in which women narrate or do not narrate history. One should note that as people just emerging from a period of conflict, gender inequality is augmented because men and women experienced violence in different ways. This woman not willing to speak about the traumatic experience of flogging shows just how

¹⁴⁷ Affidavits submitted to the Supreme Court of South Africa, p 81.

¹⁴⁸ See McKittrick, M. *To dwell secure*, for a full discussion on the question of generational conflict between older men and young men in Namibia. McKittrick argues that such conflicts were enhanced by processes of royal authority centralization, Christianity, migrant labour and colonial rule, which allowed young men new scope to redefine prevailing notions of masculinity, reduced young men's dependence on fathers in some respects, and yet ultimately reinforced the dominance of an elite group of men over other men and women.

severe the colonial system was against women who were educated and independent. When considering the position of African women under apartheid, their plight was doubly inevitable, for they were the victims of discrimination both as Africans and as women. However, even in precolonial times, African women suffered certain disadvantages in relation to men, especially in their capacity to act independently of their nearest male relatives. Broadly speaking, the disadvantages suffered by African women in precolonial times had been retained in the colonial period and made more rigid as the colonial system worked to stop women from becoming educated and ‘modern’.

As I have argued in Chapter Four, there exists a perception that there is difference in the ways in which women tell stories and how their narratives compare with those of men. According to Hofmeyr, women’s stories were often regarded as a rather frivolous pastime that dealt with the imaginary and fictional while male storytelling was seen as more important, partly because of its content which dealt with the ‘real’ world and because of its more sober performance, which was enacted in a prestigious, public, male space and concerned itself with the socialization of men.¹⁴⁹ However, I argue that women’s stories are not frivolous or fictitious, but rather are told within master narratives of gender, race, class and sexuality. This brings us closer to understanding how social structure, and culture constrain women’s lives and stories. According to Romero et al “women’s stories can not be fully comprehended without first considering specific power structures (economic, political and social institutions, and dominant ideologies) in which they are constructed and told”.¹⁵⁰ Anthropologists have observed, according to Gluck and Palai, how the expression of women’s unique experience as women is often muted, particularly in any situation where women’s interests and experiences are at variance with those of men.¹⁵¹ They further argue, that a woman’s discussion of her life may combine two separate, often conflicting perspectives: one framed in concepts and values that reflect men’s dominant position in the culture, and one informed by the more immediate realities of a woman’s personal experience.¹⁵² Where experience does not “fit” dominant meanings, alternative concepts may not be readily available. Hence, inadvertently, women

¹⁴⁹ Hofmeyr, I. “*We spend Our Years as a Tales That is Told*”: *Oral Historical Narrative in a South African Chiefdom*, (South Africa: Witwatersrand University Press, 1993), p 30.

¹⁵⁰ Romero, M. and Stewart, A. J. *Women’s untold stories: Breaking silence, talking back, voicing complexity* (Routledge, 1999), p xiv.

¹⁵¹ Gluck, S. B. and Patai, D. *Women’s Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, (Routledge, New York and London: 1991) p 11.

¹⁵² Ibid.

often mute their own thoughts and feelings when they try to describe their lives in the familiar and publicly acceptable terms of prevailing concepts and conventions.¹⁵³

What is left repressed, or what cannot be uttered, is often as significant to the whole narrative as what is said. In understanding the ways that individual lives are shaped by larger cultural frameworks of culture and gender or what people say or tell, it is often that women do not want to talk about humiliating and traumatic events. Normative gender roles help to shape their narratives.¹⁵⁴ This is because gender is a key example of a dimension along which voice and versions of truth may differ. Therefore, the way that trauma is voiced or silenced impacts on the ability to develop an integrated sense of self.¹⁵⁵ Traumatic events, for example abuse and in this case, a public humiliation, may be silenced both by others and by the self as too dangerous to even think about.¹⁵⁶ Also, there is women's subjective experience of remembering and forgetting the trauma. Elise Nghiiwamo for example claimed that she had forgotten the dreadful flogging experience and would not be of much help to my research. Furthermore, another main reason for this continued need for silence can be attributed to the fact that victims of public floggings such as these women under discussion, continued to live with the people or relatives of the people who had perpetrated violence against them. In postcolonial Namibia, not only did the government implement the policy of national reconciliation, but it also extended amnesty to those who had fought on either side during the liberation war. All human rights violations committed in the past remain just there, in the past.

Lastly, although I approached these women with a genuine interest in their life experiences, I now see that my approach determined their reaction to my request for an interview. I should have approached them with much more sensitivity to the emotionally laden issue of public flogging. However, their reluctance to talk also gave me valuable insight and it also suggested something of importance about how one should interpret what women do or do not say.

¹⁵³Gluck, S. B. and Patai, D. *Women's Words*, p 11.

¹⁵⁴ Fuvish, R. "The silenced self: Constrcuting Self from memoris spoke & unspoken ", in. Beike, D. R., Lampinen, J. M., and Bihrend, D. A. (eds) *The self and memory* (New York, Hove: Psychology Press, 2004), p77.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, p75.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, p83.

Moreover, the question is, why did Mrs Nehova speak? Was it because she wants her story represented in the liberation struggle discourse? I refer to Aisha Fofana Ibrahim's analysis of women's warfare narratives in Sierra Leone, as she argues that for a long time, narratives of warfare were written mainly by men and from a male perspective; women rarely figured in these narratives, and if they did, it was mainly from a male perspective. But, more importantly, war narratives written by women often do not get the same leverage as those written by men mainly because women are seen as not participating in war or engaging in the fighting. She claims that this is the case because the war is masculinised and the narration of war stories has always been in men's domain.¹⁵⁷ I therefore argue that perhaps for women like Mrs Nehova, who have the opportunity to narrate their own experiences, it is an opportunity to challenge dominant discourses of the liberation struggle. The aim is not to discard or overturn dominant liberation discourses that are at hand, but to show that there are silences that relegate women's experiences to the margins of struggle discourse and that narratives like that of Mrs Nehova expose women's active role and suffering in the liberation struggle.

Conclusion

The general contract workers strike of 1971-72 and the boycott of the Ovambo 'bantustan' elections of 1973 unleashed a wave of public floggings in Ovamboland. In most of the cases, membership of SWAPO, singing of SWAPO songs, using the name Namibia, wearing a SWAPO flag on one's shirt, or simply wearing a shirt in SWAPO colours, was enough to get one flogged publicly by the Ovambo 'traditional' authorities. This chapter highlighted the role of the Oukwanyama 'traditional' authorities in the public floggings as they attempted to assert their non-existent legitimacy. The Ondonga and Kwanyama Headmen's Councils claimed that they were flogging men and women who refused to follow their laws and warnings by undermining their power. Although the South African government was able to detach itself from the floggings by claiming that they were an old 'tribal' custom of the Ovambo and they had nothing to do with it, evidence pointed to a reciprocal relationship between them and the Ovambo 'traditional' authorities with regards to the punishments.

¹⁵⁷ Ibrahim, A. F. 'Decentering a "Traditional" Classroom Through War-Talk and/or Trauma', (Paper presented at the Second Annual Feminist Pedagogy Conference at the CUNY Graduate Centre I New York City October 12, 2007), pp 2-3.

Floggings obviously gave ‘traditional’ authorities much more authority over their subjects but further lost their legitimacy, since the South Africa government was actually in charge of formulating the legislation for floggings to be administered. What is clear, however, is that the floggings were not locally initiated as both South African government and ‘traditional’ authorities argued, because based on the discourse around the figure of ‘Shongola’ ‘Cocky’ Hahn, it is believed that the flogging system originated with him and became legitimized in the colonial time. This suggests that the putative precolonial had become colonial and vice versa.

The chapter argued that the ‘traditional’ authorities made public floggings a spectacle as they were set on legitimating their power and authority with a spontaneous public acknowledgement to enforce fear in the people who witnessed the floggings. This chapter also highlighted the dynamics of gender, by examining the control of modern educated and mobile women who also became victims of public flogging. I argue that the colonial diversion of men into migrant labour defined women’s place in the rural reproduction sphere and not in urban areas. Emphatic control of women’s mobility was based on the fear that women easily became ‘detrilled’. This was because women were becoming much more concretely the ‘bearers of culture’, and that fed into narratives around ‘tribe’. I also argue that by sentencing women to hard labour at Omhedi, the headmen were using women’s ‘bodies’ to legitimate their rule by using them as labour units. Furthermore, this also pointed to a re-enactment of polygyny as women were treated like traditionalised wives. Also, headmen punished and tried to re-traditionalise women for being modern, educated and mobile.

In conclusion, a direct result of the floggings, mass arrests, detentions and political trials in Ovamboland and Namibia more generally, was the flight of large numbers of Namibians who crossed into Angola in 1974. The exodus was linked to the coup d’état in Lisbon which saw the collapse of Portuguese rule in Mozambique, Guinea Bissau and Angola. This also made it possible for SWAPO members to use the northern border between Namibia and Angola to go into exile. In a reaction to the large numbers of young men and women leaving Ovamboland, the Ovambo Legislative Council passed a special motion to thoroughly look into the causes and consequences of the exodus. The next chapter will examine the role and powers of the Ovambo Legislative Council by linking it to the exodus and shift in the liberation struggle.

Chapter 8

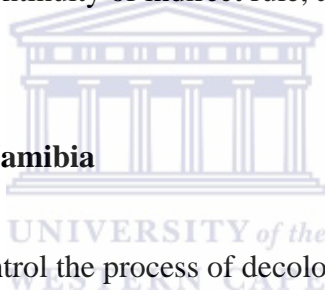
The Ovambo Legislative Council

Introduction

In an effort to legitimise its authority through indigenous chiefs and headmen, the South African regime established a structure of self governing Bantustans. As we shall see, these failed to gain widespread or meaningful support amongst many Namibians. This chapter specifically looks at the Ovambo Legislative Council, which was opened and had its first session on the 17th of October 1968, in Oshakati, when Ovamboland was officially declared a self-governing homeland. As indicated briefly in the previous chapter, Ovamboland became a homeland following South Africa's pursuance of its policy of separate development for the country's indigenous peoples. This followed the 1964 report of the Odendaal Commission, which recommended establishing eleven self-governing Bantustans in Namibia to house each official ethnic group. The idea was to have separate self-governing units that entailed the establishment of a central administration, which was to supplement and replace the institution of chiefs and headmen under which each of the 'tribes' had operated as a separate political entity, indirectly under the control of the South African government. Members of the Legislative Council were given positions that extended from their previous 'traditional' administrative and political duties at the local level.

For this chapter, it is important to examine the means of 'native control' that the South African regime used to control the African population through their own ethnic institutions by pushing them back into the confines of traditional institutions, therefore restricting their 'independence'. Thus, the role of Ovambo chiefs and headmen will be analysed, especially the Kwanyama senior headman Gabriel Kautwima, a resident of Omhedi, upon his becoming Speaker and Chairman of the Ovambo Legislative Council. This is directly important in terms of analysing people's sentiments towards traditional leaders, principally Kautwima, but other Kwanyama headmen more generally. As discussed earlier in the previous chapter, many local people displayed much disillusionment and discontent with their traditional leaders, which led to the exodus of many young people into exile to join the liberation struggle. In the

1980s, in fact, Omhedi became a scene of fighting between the Ovambo Battalion¹ troops and SWAPO PLAN² fighters, where cases of shooting and explosions of land mines were reported. Reacting to this, South Africa employed precautionary measures in a bid to protect the ‘traditional’ leaders and headmen. This chapter investigates this process which aimed at curtailing SWAPO and other political parties from expanding their movements on a national level. As a continuation to the preceding chapter’s discussion on the intimidation and public floggings of SWAPO members and supporters, this chapter analyses the position of traditional leaders and the Ovambo Legislative Council and SWAPO, by examining the composition of the Legislative Council and the powers that ‘traditional’ leaders accrued or lost within this self-ruling structure. This is important because there was deep-seated resentment towards collaborating traditional authorities and a series of attacks against them were blamed on SWAPO. Lastly, this chapter analyzes the implications of the Ovambo Council from its inception in 1968 to its demise as Namibia prepared for independence in May, 1989. It was based on the continuity of indirect rule, and its legacy continues to exist in the present day.



The creation of Homelands in Namibia

South Africa in its attempts to control the process of decolonisation in then South-West Africa,³ insisted on its policies of ethnic fragmentation and self-determination for different areas. The establishment of ‘homelands’ saw Ovamboland becoming one of the ten areas called ‘homelands’ allocated for black occupation by the South African government. The ten areas which the South African government intended to declare independent were Bushmanland, Damaraland, East Caprivi, Hereroland, Kaokoland, Kavangoland, Namaland, Ovamboland, Rehoboth, and Tswanaland. However, of the ten homelands established in then South West Africa, only Ovamboland, Kavangoland and Caprivi were granted self-government. During 1968, the South African government drafted a bill enabling the development of self-government for ‘native’ nations in South West Africa which later

¹ Ovambo Battalion was one of eight South West African military units that made up the South West African Territorial Force (SWATF) established in the 1970s and was recognized as a ‘specialised force’ unit.

² People’s Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN) was SWAPO’s military wing formed in 1962.

³ This was because in June 1971, the International Court of Justice in The Hague declared South Africa's presence in South West Africa illegal and demanded its withdrawal. It further declared invalid all South Africa's acts on behalf of or concerning South West Africa. The Commission's analysis of the situation in South West Africa was informed by this position in international law, and that South Africa should grant Namibia her independence.

became Act No. 54 of 1968. This was implemented following the Odendaal Plan, which aimed at establishing various ethnic groups as separate nations, each with its own territory and political system. Consequently, a Legislative Council and an Executive Committee for the Ovambo homeland was established.

The new Ovambo central administration was to retain some of its hereditary features existing in its traditional system by functioning according to 'tribal' laws and customs. Thus, initially only traditional leaders were allowed to be representatives of specific 'ethnic' groups in Ovamboland as they were recognized as having valid political authority and were considered to represent the majority of their people. Kooy suggests that this was because the South African government, operating under a system of indirect rule, was naturally anxious to maintain a strong link with those segments in the Ovambo administration from which it derived a large measure of support.⁴ Thus it made sense for South Africa to turn to traditional authorities who benefited from their collaboration than to have representatives who were critical of their colonial system. There is a long history of the relationship between the traditional leaders and the colonial state via indirect rule as it had essentially functioned in Ovamboland since 1917 through the various Native Commissioners, Major C.H.L. Hahn, Harold Eedes, and the Afrikaner administrators that came after them. Therefore, a rather fabricated Ovambo Council had been constructed based on the continuity of indirect rule through the local chiefs and headmen under the supervision of the Native Commissioner.

In theory, the system of traditional rule continued, but some functions remained in the hands of the South African Government as although the Ovambo Legislative Assembly and Executive Council had authority in respect of the administration of their territory, they were subordinate to the South African minister of Bantu Administration and Development. As Töttemeyer points out, the role of the South African government as initiator and guardian came strongly into prominence, and in the process of constitutional development the power was – part directly and part indirectly – in the hands of the South African government.⁵ This was because the Ovambo 'homeland' as a system based on appointed men to posts for which they were not hereditarily eligible and who had acquired little or no educational qualifications, relied entirely on the South African government. The Council also had few

⁴ Kooy, M. 'The Contract Labour System and the Ovambo Crisis of 1971 in South West Africa' *African Studies Review*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (Apr., 1973), pp 83-105.

⁵ Totemeyer, G., *Namibia old and new: Traditional and Modern Leaders in Ovamboland* (London: C. Hurst & Company, 1978), p 55.

resources, so they depended mainly on the support and protection given by the South African government, which led to the shrinking of traditional leaders' 'customary' authority and support among their own people.

Composition of Ovambo Legislative Council and allocation of duties

According to Töttemeyer, each of the seven 'ethnic groups' in Ovamboland were given six representatives on the Legislative Council, constituting a maximum of six members from the seven 'ethnic groups', appointed by the various 'tribal' authorities in accordance with their custom.⁶ These were a mainly chiefs, headmen and a minority of elected representatives. One of these six representatives (mainly the leader of the traditional community) was appointed to serve on the Executive Council, which functioned as a cabinet. The initial Executive Council consisted of the individuals with their respective portfolios, they were:

Uushona Shiimi, Chief Councillor, Department of Authority Affairs and Finance
 Fikameni Silas Iipumbu - Department of Community Affairs
 Wilipard Kanyeke - Department of Works
 Phillipus Kaluvi - Department of Education and Culture
 Kaimbi Mundjele - Department of Economic Affairs
 Filemon Elifas - Department of Justice
 Josia Shikongo Taapopi - Department of Agriculture.⁷

The above portfolios highlight the 'fake' furnishings for social displays involved in the establishment of the Ovambo Bantustan. Indeed, departments such as the Authority Affairs and Finance Department do not seem to mean anything. In particular, I argue later in this chapter that the awarding of portfolios, symbols and 'mediocre' developments to the Ovambo Council by South Africa was a way of manipulating traditional leaders into thinking that they had authority over their own development. Such methods were not so much for South Africa's efforts to control the Ovambo Council but were an instrument for curbing African nationalism that was prevalent at the time. However, the initial central personnel changed later as some members died and new ones were appointed or reshuffled. South Africa argued that the main important task of the newly established Ovambo government was now to build

⁶ Totemeyer, G. *Namibia old and new*, p 57.

⁷ Cooper, D. A. *Ovambo Politics in the Twentieth Century* (New York: University Press of America Inc. Lanham, 2001), p 280.

up the economic potential of the country, so that it could be self-reliant. Rather, it seemed that the insistence on self-determination through material advance, forcing people's submission to authority and channelling people's political opinions were central to South Africa's motive for giving Ovamboland self-governing status. At first, the institution of a civil service became a primary concern, eventually only to consist of Ovambos, although at the beginning white officials were brought in to work. Kooy suggests that although local government departments were headed by an Ovambo Minister, they were administered on a day-to-day basis by Directors, who worked under a Chief Director who co-ordinated the work of all departments.⁸ The South African government argued that the Chief Director and his directors were only on loan from the South African Public Service and all posts in the Ovambo Public Service would be filled by Ovambos as soon as they were able. Furthermore, they believed that it was necessary to train the Ovambo people to acquire knowledge in agriculture, education, administration and to gradually extend this knowledge and eventually replace the white administrative officials with their own.

This proved a challenge for some members of the Legislative Council who resisted the idea of having South African Directors and secretaries under whom they had to work as public servants. This was raised as a concern in one of the Legislative Council proceedings by council member Immanuel Nghixulifwa:

The condition merely reminds us again of apartheid. There is no respect for a person. It just looks as if it was in the past, where one had to speak of the 'boss' in charge. Now I want to ask: This government, is it the government of the Wambos or whose government is it? If it is our government and we are the leaders, why must we be treated thus (sic)? All the decisions we have taken here over the years, have not been implemented and I request the Council that we must finish off in this week, because it is of no use to speak here, matters are not implemented as we decide here. If it is so, then we are oppressed here by SWAPO and at the offices of the Secretaries we are again oppressed by the personnel.⁹

This suggests fractures at the centre of power. Clearly relations between the collaborative Ovambo Legislative Councillors and the white officials often resulted in a struggle for authority and respect. Some other members also felt that they were not respected and they felt

⁸ Kooy, M. "The Contract Labour System", pp 83-105.

⁹ Stellenbosch Library holdings: JS Gericke – GA Publications SP, GAZ 1-17, 1973-1989: *Ovambo Legislative Council: Proceedings of the 4th Session of the 3rd Ovambo Legislative Council*, 17th April to 3 May 1978 – Ongwediva.

used as ‘things’ that only carried out orders. Interestingly, many Ovambo people regarded the Council as a mouthpiece of the South African Government to promote the policy of apartheid. According to Töttemeyer, the resentment which was found amongst many Ovambo people against the leaders was based on the allegation that they were adherents and exponents of South African government policy, which was aimed at preserving and restoring tradition.¹⁰ It seems that people hated the fact that their leaders were supporting the policy that aimed at presenting them as people who were still ‘tribalized’ and still embedded in their cultures. What is more, many people’s resentment was based on the belief that the Ovambo Legislative Council was not in touch with the thinking and wishes of the people and subscribed to the ‘homeland’ idea, whereas they called for independence for the whole of Namibia.

However, it is necessary to note that these traditional leaders acted in isolation with no understanding of ‘modern’ standards of governance. As argued earlier, this was because most members of the council (except those who were teachers by profession for example Gabriel Kautwima) had little or no educational background or experience likely to be of special value in a government structure. As a result they continued to rely on the support and protection of the South African administration, leading to the shrinking of legitimacy and support among their own people. Mainly on the basis of indirect rule, the South African regime claimed to have worked many years to assist the Ovambo people on the road towards a more modern and effective system of self-government. It is undeniable that the facilities and services which South Africa provided such as transport and agricultural services, B.B.K.¹¹ wood factory at Oshakati, Oshakati Hospital, Ongwediva Training College, and the water canal between Kunene and Oshakati amongst other infrastructural development, solved particular problems.¹² In respect of benefits that the local people received from these developments, most people were educated and trained under the South African Bantu education that gave birth to Namibia’s liberation struggle. It was this education that paved the way for many Ovambo people to access information about nationalist ideas in Africa after World War 2 and in the process strengthened their desire to liberate themselves from South African rule.

¹⁰ Totemeyer, Gerhard. *Namibia old and new*, p 60.

¹¹ B.B.K. stands for Bantoe Beleggingskorporasie or Bantu Investment Cooperation Bank . Its goal was to assist in all economical aspects of education, land conservation, establishment of training centres, farming, irrigation, cattle farming and the training of agricultural staff and farmers in the areas reserved for blacks, such as the Ovambo Bantustan.

¹² NAN, JX/0007, Vol 2-8, *Medu Letu*, Vol. VIII, No. 2, April 1971.

Ovambo Legislative Council and handing over of symbols of sovereignty

According to the verbatim reports of the Legislative Council's proceedings and other government reports, a day before the opening of the first session of the Legislative Council, the 16th of October 1968, Mr. M.C. Botha (a member of Parliament and Minister of Bantu Administration and Development and of Bantu Education), on behalf of the South African government handed over the mace and symbols of sovereignty to the members of the Ovamboland Legislative Council.¹³ He highlighted that Ovamboland was on the threshold of important developments and for that certain formalities needed to be dealt with prior to the meeting of the Legislative Council. The South African government considered the Legislative Council to be the highest Ovambo authority in the homeland, as it assembled the nation's leaders to deliberate and take decisions in issues that concerned the Ovambo 'nation'.

As seen in the previous chapters of this thesis, cultural performances were used by Hahn to legitimise indirect rule at Omhedi through photography. Here too, it is highlighted how performance was utilised by the South African administration to garner legitimacy for the Ovambo Council. This was done through the handing over of symbols and gowns to the Ovambo Council which allowed and encouraged a liaison that associated the Council with the colonial administration. These were not so powerful in terms of the actual symbolism they seemed to contain but because they legitimised the Council's authority and its activities. In order to attain higher status and to progress along the path of autonomous development, Minister Botha claimed that a homeland needed to invest in certain tokens that are recognised and accepted throughout the world as symbols of government and authority.¹⁴ Specific gowns and uniforms were handed over to the Ovambo Legislative Council's Chairman, the Orderly, and messengers. The gown and uniforms were given for the purpose of high status attached to their respective duties and for the members and public to recognise them. This formal attire, as Botha claimed, symbolised the positions which the respective people occupied. He further stated, "people who are dressed in formal attire, are the ones that carry out important functions when the Legislative meets."¹⁵ It was expected that when the Chairman entered or left the assembly hall, all members and the public who were present in the hall, rose as a token of respect. Thus, during these formal occasions the Chairman was gowned.

¹³ NAN, A.H.E. (66) file N1/11/3, Address by the Honourable M.C. Botha, on the occasion of the handing over of the mace to the Ovamboland Legislative Council on Wednesday, 16th October, 1968.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.



Fig: 16. The Chief Councillor, Department of Authority Affairs and Finance Uushona Shiimi (right) and Senior Headman of Oukwanyama, Gabriel Kautwima (left) and Frans Iihuhua who carried the Ovambo Mace (centre - front). Source: NAN, JX/0007, Vol 2-8, *Medu Letu*, Vol. VIII, No. 2, April 1969.

There seem to be a number of possibilities why the South African regime resorted to the gowning and the giving of symbols to the Ovambo Council as the above example illustrates. It is apparent that there were manipulating strategies (mentioned earlier) that the South African government utilised, as it engaged in demonstrating its so-called knowledge of what was perceived to be appealing to the traditional leaders. The issue here is obviously that of legitimacy as it has been tied to traditional authorities and their claims to represent ethnic groups of the Ovambo population. I argue that the gowns represented a view of an irreversibly progressive Ovambo, and the whole performance of members of the Council dressed up, creates a sense of importance and a belief that the Council was in control of its government, whereas as in reality they had no power. Thus, it makes sense that South Africa was willing to pour resources into efforts to make the structure of Bantustan look legitimate, given that it was so unpopular amongst the Ovambo people.

The Ovambo Legislative Council was also presented with the Chairman's gavel and the casket in which it was kept. This is because during sittings of the Legislative Council the Chairman was expected to control the meeting and maintain order. He attracted the members' attention by striking the chairman's bench with a gavel, and this was seen as a symbol of authority in the hand of the chairman, to ensure that the attention of the members and of the public was directed to the Chairman. Another token of importance was the Mace, which was

given as the symbol of the authority of the Chairman of the Ovambo Legislative Council. South Africa's views of the Bantustans as legitimate cultural constructions were represented in a discourse which demonstrated a paternalistic view of Ovambo cultural systems. The colonial state promoted a discourse carrying a paternalistic ethos endured since colonial occupation in 1915, as can be seen in Botha's analysis of what the Mace's design is representing the whole of Ovamboland:

The mace of the Ovamboland Legislative Council, is designed and personified with the four facets that are considered indigenous to Ovambo culture. At the lower end of the mace (which is cast in bronze) is the ear of the mahangu plant. Mahangu plant is an important source of food and it is widely cultivated in the whole Ovamboland. The South African government consider the omahangu ear as a symbol of the economical organisation of the Ovambo nation. On the ear, is a ring, also in bronze, inscribed 'Ovambo'. From this round ring, emerges the shaft of the mace which is carved out in kiaatwood. The shaft is designed in a way to symbolise seven pillars which depicts the seven 'ethnic' groups of Ovamboland. The pillars are joined together with a band on which names of the seven groups appear.¹⁶

It is important to explore the development of an Ovambo nation in the awarding of symbolics discussed above and how the role of government ethnologists such as K.F.R. Budack¹⁷ prompted South African colonialists to craft and implement the policy of homeland government in Ovamboland. There is an important issue around groups identified on the mace as only the seven 'official' ethnic groups were represented, those that had chiefs at the time. This is very indirect rule, as chief-less groups such as Eunda and Ombadja were not represented. I believe this was not aimed at achieving cultural uniqueness but as a vehicle for ultimately strengthening indirect rule in an updated version. This was largely a colonial appropriation of the Ovambo cultural identity as it contributed to the government's claim to know the 'other'. The argument here is that the essential aim of segregation was based on ethnic and cultural difference and thus necessitated the creation of both difference and politico-cultural sameness across northern Namibia, using the Ovambo cultural as well as symbolic significance as reference.

¹⁶ NAN, A.H.E. (66) file N1/11/3, Address by the Honourable M.C. Botha.

¹⁷ As indicated in the previous Chapter, Budack was a government ethnologist from 1966-1989, who conducted research and wrote about 'ethnic' groups in then colonial Namibia to demonstrate the government's 'achievements' with regard to the needs of the people.

Botha's discourse regarding the handing over of gowns and the mace needs analysis as a number of issues come to the fore. Ovamboland was getting what is termed 'fragmented' modernisation, as in terms of a legislative assembly, symbols and gowns and infrastructures that will garner the highest legitimacy, these are based on a specific conception of what an African people wants. It is clear that Botha's discourse depended on the data and findings of government ethnologists who presented synchronic accounts of the culture and customs, institutions, beliefs and symbols of indigenous groups. Government ethnologists easily generalised as one group may become representative of the entire language-group therefore creating the impression that the Ovambo traditions are static, unchanging, and above all, unitary.

The Mace also conveniently represented certain institutions and instruments of the Ovambo government that were in turn symbolised by the seven spear points on which its authority rested. Botha claimed that the spear on the mace represented the fact that Ovambo forefathers used the spear to enforce their authority in the territory and the ivory rings and the spear point symbolised the political organisation of the Ovambo nation.¹⁸ Botha further claimed that the seven palm leaves which emerged from the ivory rings on the Mace, represented the palm tree which is known by all in Ovamboland and it is considered a very important source of food and usable materials. The fact that the Mace included the palm leaves in its design is very important here because as discussed in the last chapter, 'tribal' courts used the branch of the palm *epokolo* to inflict corporal punishments in cases of transgression. Thus for it to be represented on the Mace as an instrument for the maintenance of law and order is very interesting.

In contrast however, Botha suggested that the palm fronds on the Mace symbolised peace as they had been used to depict the religious facet of Ovambo culture. He further claimed that, the mace ensured that "religious or social practices of the Ovambos", Ovambo customary law and procedure, and the ownership and transfer of land and its resources were protected. Much of Botha's discourse was blatantly framed in Budack's paternalistic view of what the Ovambo cultural make up was and what it represented. Thus, supposedly inherent cultural differences placed the South African regime in a position to facilitate separate development for Ovamboland and other ethnic groups in Namibia at the time.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Also due to the supposedly higher status awarded to Ovamboland, a flag, a national anthem and a High court were later given in 1973. The flag was to be flown beside the South African flag on public buildings. Moreover, the Executive Council was replaced by a Cabinet, and the Chief Councillor by a Chief Minister with Ministers assisting him.¹⁹ This followed after the Ovambo Legislative Council declared that it wanted no interference from outsiders and called for a separate identity to achieve self-determination and autonomy within their own proposed territory.²⁰ This too falls under the above analysis which argues that the colonial state used specific discourses of development and cultural identity to justify their separate development system. In this way symbolism played an important role in convincing the Ovambo leaders to accept self-determination for Ovamboland. Obviously, the whole unity conception was made evident in the design, and so was the idea for a unification of the seven 'tribes' into one nation. Botha argued that the mace in its entirety depicted growth and progress and as a symbol of status, it should play an important role during the opening of the Ovambo Legislative Council and during its annual sessions.²¹ Hahn's elaboration of the Ovambo tradition discussed in Chapters Three and Four of this thesis provided frames of reference against which one can compare, as Botha's symbols of the Ovambo are in fact more fake. Hahn recreated, preserved and homogenized Ovambo tradition so that it did not 'disappear', but Botha appropriated the Ovambo symbols with the aim of fragmentation based on elements of their cultural identity so that ethnic divisions could cement racial divisions.

The colonial regime further conferred the Ovambo Council with infrastructural developments such as schools, hospitals, water canal, inspection kraals, roads, factories, and many others intended to manipulate the Council. This was much more complex because according to a report by the Legal Assistance Centre (LAC), urban development in Ovamboland started in earnest only in the 1960s, in response to the administrative and military requirements of the South African Defence Force.²² Hence South Africa's huge Kunene Hydro-electric scheme that was developed in the 1970s, the Bantu Investment Corporation (BIC) established to promote small-scale industrial and commercial development through loans to local entrepreneurs, traders and artisans, and the significant expansion of health and educational

¹⁹ Töttemeyer, G. *Namibia old and new*, p 85.

²⁰ Question of Namibia – Security Council Resolutions – Security Council Resolution 309 - report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Resolution - Container s-0902-0003: Peacekeeping - Africa 1963-1981, created 22/07/1972.

²¹ NAN, A.H.E. (66) file N1/11/3, Address by the Honourable M.C. Botha.

²² Legal Assistance Centre (LAC), *A place we want to call our own: A study on land tenure policy and securing housing rights in Namibia* (Windhoek: John Meinert Printing, 2005), p 2.

facilities (clinics, hospitals, schools and colleges) was primarily aimed at political manipulation.²³ Towns such as Oshakati were purposely segregated, with the eastern side fortified with wires, and with fully serviced residential and recreational areas for the whites. Blacks only entered for labour and had to show identification at the entrance. Numerous undeveloped informal settlements for black people were set up around Oshakati but the 1960s also saw the development of formal townships for black people for example Ongwediva, but on a much smaller scale than in the commercial areas.²⁴

The Ovambo Legislative Council's Proceedings and Role of Council members

Under the Odendaal dispensation of power, Legislative Council members, together with chiefs and headmen who worked as government functionaries, gained authority to carry out certain roles. They were concerned with the administration of welfare and education, health, roads, land allocation and tenure, as well as with local administration of justice. Thus, during the sessions of the Legislative Council, a number of social, economic, political and judicial issues in Ovamboland were addressed, but the most important issues were the legal system, land tenure, the labour problem and education. Primary attention was addressed to a proposal to introduce a uniform system of law for all Ovambo ethnic groups. According to Töttemeyer, this proposal led to a clash between the traditional leaders and the non-traditional members as the former feared that the reform would deprive them of their powers, and of some of their source of income. This was because fines which the traditional leaders imposed had always been one of their chief sources of income.²⁵ At the end, the Council decided that all fines be paid into the 'tribal' fund instead of being collected by the 'tribal' leaders, and that the fines be the same for similar offences in all ethnic groups.

Another issue that was discussed by Ovambo Legislative Council was land tenure. Töttemeyer suggests that there was a clear rejection of the system of communal land ownership and the dominant role played by the headmen and chiefs in allocating land, which the possessor only has in leasehold until his death.²⁶ The majority of Ovambo people wished for permanent

²³ See Botha C "The Odendaal Plan: Development for Colonial Namibia" (Windhoek, Department of History, University of Namibia), at <http://namibweb.com/oden.htm>, website accessed 25/10/11.

²⁴ See Herbstein D and Evenson J *The Devils are Among Us: The War for Namibia* (London and New Jersey: Zed Books Ltd, 1989), p 98-99 and Legal Assistance Centre (LAC), *A place we want to call our own*, p2.

²⁵ Totemeyer, G. *Namibia old and new*, p 76.

²⁶ Ibid, p 77.

private land ownership, while the traditional elite, who derived most benefits from the old method of land ownership, rejected the proposal that land should be removed from their control. This is because there were calls to have the old system amended, so that the land would become the property of the Ovambo government. Ultimately, according to Töttemeyer, the change did not affect the essence of the problem of permanent private land ownership as there was still adherence to the principle that land should be held in leasehold until the owner dies. The only change however, was that monies from the sales of land no longer went to the traditional leader but to the 'tribal' fund and to the Ovambo government.²⁷ This however, did not change anything as the traditional leaders were the same people that sat on the Legislative Council. This indicates a closed system which is potentially corrupt as the so-called Legislative Council was a fake institution designed to create the impression that the traditional leaders ruled the land and its people while, in practice, it was ruled by South Africa.²⁸

The question of labour and the labour unrest over the grievances of the contract system was also raised. As indicated in the previous chapter, amidst negotiations following the 1971-72 strike, an agreement was reached between the South African and Ovambo government that gave the latter government the task of recruiting workers. This, according to Töttemeyer, created problems for the Legislative Council, because the Ovambo government became fully responsible for the system which the workers regarded as a scheme for exploitation. As a result, the Legislative Council was viewed as the exploiter of Ovambo manpower.²⁹ This was evident in the way the contract workers reacted to senior headman Phillipus Kaluvi who became the representative of contract workers, as discussed in the previous chapter. Since he was the headman directly concerned with the contract system, the angry strikers took out all their frustration on him and burnt down his homestead and his son's shop. Educational questions also aroused great interest in the Legislative Council as complaints were made about the shortage of high schools, of trained teachers for secondary schools and of educational facilities more generally in Ovamboland.³⁰ This was mainly because schools were only provided by the missions and with the Bantu education system that was introduced later, it was hard for many Ovambos to get secondary school training in the region. Although,

²⁷ Ibid, p 78.

²⁸ See Mamdani, M. *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the legacy of late colonialism* (Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton: University Press, 1996), pp 72-90.

²⁹ Totemeyer, G. *Namibia old and new*, p 80.

³⁰ Ibid.

they were not effective in getting all qualified teachers and higher learning institutions, the Legislative Councillors realised that for the ‘homeland’ to progress to self-determination, such structures were needed in Ovamboland.

Concern over political activities in Ovamboland featured mostly in the Legislative Council’s proceedings. This was because SWAPO guerrillas were entering the territory from exile. Töttemeyer alleges that SWAPO guerrillas (referred to as ‘terrorists’) and their supporters were accused of undermining traditional authority, and of wanting to disturb law and order and of killing traditional leaders so that they themselves could rule.³¹ Since the allocation of self-governing status to Ovamboland did not change the hierarchical nature of South Africa’s system of indirect rule over Ovambo communities, the traditional authorities gained the right to create an Ovambo army and police structure. This came after numerous requests made during nearly every session for the establishment of an Ovambo police force. Töttemeyer claims that, in 1976 the South African Defence Force started training Ovambo soldiers at a military camp near Ondangwa.³² These trainees later formed the basis of an Ovambo army which was intended to help defend the northern border of Ovamboland alongside the South African army against possible attacks by SWAPO. As a result, the Ovambo Battalion and the Home Guards were expanded to several thousand selected men, with many young men joining to fight against SWAPO.³³ The high rate of unemployment in Ovambo and the economic prospects of a fixed salary at the time attracted many young men. The Council also had at their disposal, the South African Defence Force and the Police, who had come to help them.

The members also discussed the exodus of young people leaving the country into neighbouring countries. This led to the adoption of a motion that the Cabinet should investigate the “causes and effects of Ovambos leaving Ovamboland illegally via the northern border, and take steps to combat this, because it was in the interest of the country and of extreme importance and urgency”. According to Totemeyer, during the discussion, the exodus was explained by antagonism to the Legislative Council and the Ovambo

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid, p 129.

³³ Stellenbosch Library holdings: JS Gericke – GA Publications SP, GAZ 1-17, 1973-1989: *Ovambo Legislative Council: Proceedings of the 4th Session of the 3rd Ovambo Legislative Council, 17th April to 3 May 1978 – Ongwediva*

government, the influence of “terrorists” inside and outside Ovamboland, and the shortage of recreation facilities for young people in the country.³⁴ Another member argued,

I agree that it is not poverty that caused the children to go away but it is only to break up this house of the government of Owambo. I know there are people who hate the government, not because the government is bad but because they are told to hate the government. They have now gone to fetch the terrorists and I know that amongst us in Owambo, there are many people who are also terrorists and who send PLAN fighters to people. Let steps be taken against the terrorists who are here so that they know there are rulers who govern the land.³⁵

As an analysis on why the youth were leaving Ovamboland for exile, it is clear from the previous chapter that it was apparent that from as far back as the late 1960s, prior to the General Strike of 1971-72, the colonial regime and its traditional functionaries were faced with reasonably persuasive evidence that the campaigns to legitimise self-rule in Ovamboland was a lost cause, as many people were already dissatisfied with the traditional leaders and colonial government. However, as a plea to discourage the youth not to leave the country, the Councillors sent out a message stating that they would accept whoever wants to come back. But they also followed the footprints of those who had left or were leaving, and sometimes if they were caught, they were brought back. This precipitated a public outcry as many people asked why the Ovambo and the South African governments were going after the youth fleeing the country for Angola and shooting them. Foibe Shoovaleka recounts a demonstration they staged against this practice in the 1980s:

There were many of us, mostly women who staged a demonstration in 1987. We were wearing black clothes to signify that we were mourning. We approached the headmen and went to Omhedi to presented our grievances. We were unhappy and asked the headmen why they were going after our children when they are fleeing the country for exile. We were also unhappy about the military bases that were constructed/established near schools. There was a military base

³⁴ Totemeyer, G. *Namibia old and new*, p 94.

³⁵ Stellenbosch Library holdings: JS Gericke – GA Publications SP, GAZ 1-17, 1973-1989: *Owambo Legislative Council: Proceedings of the 2nd Session of the 2nd Owambo Legislative Council*, Vol.2, 7th June 1974 to 25th June 1974.

next to Ponghofi Secondary School in Ohangwena. Three learners, all girls were killed in shooting incidents (one learner died 10 February 1982 and the other two died 12 March and 16 April 1987 respectively) between PLAN fighters and the 'Boers'. They were accidentally caught in the gunfire as the shots were directed to the SADF military base next to their school in Ohangwena. Hence, we told the headmen to move the military base away, as the base being in the proximity of this school was endangering our children's lives. The base was later moved away. The women who took part in the demonstration came from all over Ovamboland, we really worked together as women and our pleas were heard.³⁶

The above account links to the dilemma that teachers and parents of students at most secondary schools around Ovamboland at that time.³⁷ As a way of stopping the youth from leaving the country, steps were taken against people who did not want to collaborate with the government. For example, class teachers were supposed to see if his/her learners want to leave, and then report the matter immediately. According to John Kandombo:

The South African Defence Force put up military camps close to schools. There was a camp at almost every secondary school and they were apparently trying to prevent learners from moving out and establishing contact with the freedom fighters. The parents and students rejected the camps near schools. When freedom fighters attacked a camp near the Ponghofi Secondary School in 1988, some innocent learners were killed in the crossfire. This outraged the other students who questioned the use of camps and the presence of soldiers who killed students instead of protecting them. The students demanded the removal of the camps and linked this demand to other related issues in education.³⁸

As a result, many parents and teachers in Ovamboland were harassed and arrested during that time and headmen of wards who failed to report the fleeing youth were punished because they were considered as negligent. The intention is clear as a Council member stated, "Something must be done to the owner, the foreman of a ward, or the headman of a ward if

³⁶ Interview with Foibe Shoovaleka, Omhedi, 4.02.2009.

³⁷ Ponghofi Secondary School was established in 1976 at Ohangwena situated on the east side of the main road from Ondangwa to Oshikango. It is the first Secondary School in Oukwanyama. The name Ponghofi derives from Oshikwanyama which means "situated in the middle". Due to the proximity of the school to the military base, and as part of the propaganda machinery of the then South African Defence Force (SADF), the school suffered structural damage from shelling. Learners, teachers and parents were not happy with the military base and as such organized demonstrations and school boycotts that consequently led to the killing of three learners by the SADF in 1982 and 1987 respectively. This puts Ponghofi at the forefront of the liberation struggle. The badly damaged hostels were renovated in 1996.

³⁸ "Educate to Liberate", A Proud History of Struggle, The Namibian National Teachers Union (NANTU) 1989-2000 (pamphlet produced by the Labour Resource and Research Institute (LaRRI)).

say 20 people leave and he doesn't report the matter. Tribal boards must speak to their people and warn them not to go away. All the tribal boards must be told to tell their children not to go there again because they will not come back."³⁹ According to Cooper, because traditional authorities in Ovamboland possessed criminal jurisdiction over their subjects (except in cases of murder, rape and treason), they were in a position to assume disciplinary power over SWAPO activists on behalf of colonial authorities. However, not only did this relationship cause many SWAPO members to fear the punishment levied by traditional authorities even more than colonial authorities, it also meant that traditional authorities would become military targets of the People's Liberation army of Namibia (PLAN).⁴⁰

Resistance against 'Tribal' authorities and reprisals

The 1970s and 1980s, in particular, have left an indelible mark in the memories of many people who were in Ovamboland at the time, as they were probably the most violent. This period could be regarded as the climax of resistance in the area as it shows both the form of conflict and the response of both the South African government and its functionaries towards SWAPO and its supporters in the area. In many ways, the South African government activities against the militant SWAPO have made this period very prominent.⁴¹ This study traces the displays of particular dissatisfaction against members of the Ovambo 'Tribal' Authorities by the local people and how the colonial forces crushed this opposition. According to Totemeyer, tight security control was imposed on Ovamboland in May 1976 when a virtual state of emergency was declared in the territory. Ovamboland was declared a security district in terms of new regulations which were a substitute for Proclamation R 17, which had governed Ovamboland in a state of quasi-emergency since February 1972.⁴² This came after the labour unrest and a number of guerrilla activities in the area. Emergency regulations enabled the police and later the SADF to exercise drastic powers to search and arrest without a warrant, to detain without charge or trial, to deny access to legal advice, to break up meetings, and to enforce control on the movement of people. In general, civilians

³⁹ Stellenbosch Library holdings: JS Gericke – GA Publications SP, GAZ 1-17, 1973-1989: *Ovambo Legislative Council: Proceedings of the 2nd Session of the 2nd Ovambo Legislative Council*, Vol.2, 7th June 1974 to 25th June 1974.

⁴⁰ Cooper, D. A. *Ovambo Politics in the Twentieth Century*, pp 260-261.

⁴¹ See Liebenberg, J. and Hayes, P. *Bush of Ghosts: Life and War in Namibia 1986-90* (Cape Town: Umuzi, 2010), pp 10 and 12.

⁴² Totemeyer, G. *Namibia old and new*, p 127.

were required to cooperate with the security forces in their search for “terrorist” infiltrators.⁴³ Failure to report to the police persons suspected of being in Ovamboland unlawfully constituted a criminal offence.⁴⁴ Any civilian failing to report the presence of an “insurgent” was guilty of a criminal offence, and was liable to be arrested with or without a warrant and held incommunicado until the authorities were satisfied he/she has answered all questions fully and truthfully.⁴⁵

However, despite all this, PLAN fighters received local hospitality which entailed shelter and sustenance because many people supported them.⁴⁶ As a result of the guerrillas entering Ovamboland, the South African government unleashed severe repression on the local people who had been or were suspected of having been in contact with the guerrillas.⁴⁷ What normally followed was a veritable witch-hunt for contacts, suspects and firearms and many people’s crops and property were destroyed in the process. Killings, torture and other forms of brutal activities were also constantly reported to churches for the monthly newspapers, the Catholic *Omukuni* and Lutheran *Omukwetu*.⁴⁸ As a rule, all adults, including chiefs and headmen, were obliged to report the presence of any person whom they suspected of being in Ovamboland unlawfully. Firearms and ammunitions were to be handed over to the authorities as a move in a campaign to contain increasing SWAPO guerrilla activities in Ovamboland.

Consequently, SWAPO retaliated by militarily targeting traditional authorities (chiefs and headmen) who collaborated with the South African government. The burning of homesteads and government structures such as cattle *mangas* (discussed in the previous chapter) was apparently a popular method of resistance against ‘tribal’ authorities in many areas in Ovamboland at the time. An earlier example of this in the 1960s is highlighted in Foibe Shoovaleka’s oral testimony where she states: “in the early stages of the war in Ovamboland in the mid 1960s, Nehemia’s wagon was burnt down by the young SWAPO

⁴³ SWAPO PLAN fighters (sometimes called guerrillas) were referred to as “terrorists” by South Africa.

⁴⁴ Grundy, K.W. *Soldiers without politics: Blacks in the South African armed forces*, (University of California Press, 1983), p 257-258.

⁴⁵ Totemeyer, G. *Namibia old and new*, p 127.

⁴⁶ Akawa, M. ‘Strictly Members only’: The Circulation of SWAPO Posters in Northern Namibia during the Liberation Struggle in Miescher, G., Rizzo, L. and Silvester, J. (eds) *Posters in Action: Visuality in the Making of an African Nation* (Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2009), pp 172-173.

⁴⁷ For a detailed account on this, see Karapo, H. ‘Living Memory in a Forgotten War Zone: The Ukwangali District of Kavango and the Namibian Liberation Struggle, 1966-1989’ (Unpublished MA Thesis, University of the Western Cape, 2008), pp 64-82.

⁴⁸ See Herbstein D and Evenson J *The Devils are Among Us*, p 55. The *Omukwetu* and *Omukuni* written in Oshindonga and Oshikwanyama respectively, reported facts of the war in the face of threats and harassment.

activists who were going around burning down houses and *mangas*.”⁴⁹ According to Foibe, this happened just a few months before Nehemia passed away on the 9th of June 1966, less than two months before the launch of the Namibian armed liberation struggle on the 26th August 1966.

Cooper has sketched how attacks on traditional authorities and their incumbents were widespread against the supporters of the colonial government in many parts of Ovamboland, by the late 1970s and most of 1980s. He claims that during 1984-1985, SWAPO attacked the dwelling of an Ongandjera headman, killing his guards and injuring him; bombed the Ovamboland Administrative offices in Oshakati; laid siege to the residence of a headman in Uukolonkadhi; killed Chieftain Petrus Mukengeli and one of his wives; faced a judicial inquiry related to an attack on the settlement of Chieftain Sakaria Shikongo; killed a radio announcer of the South West Africa Broadcasting Company in Ovambo area; killed Chief Nanyambo Nangombe; tortured and killed Chief Phillipus Emene of Okatope; fired mortar bombs at the residence of Gabriel Kautwima, chair of the Ovamboland Legislative Council; and attacked the dwelling of Headwoman Albertina near Oshikuku.⁵⁰ Sam Nujoma argued in his autobiography that the only factor that was capable of keeping the political morale of the people at that time was the impact of PLAN fighters, who attacked police and ‘puppet’ installations and personnel across northern Namibia.⁵¹ This implies that people’s allegiance to SWAPO was strengthened by repetitive attacks on collaborative leaders because they were seen as fighting for better prospects, but it is also important to consider that these attacks also alienated many people who initially might have been sympathetic to the SWAPO cause.

Seeing that SWAPO appeared to have been aiming its attacks mainly against members of the community who were collaborating with South Africa, the South African government became responsible for protecting the Ovambo traditional leaders. An unregistered secret document states that in such circumstances the government took steps to safeguard the lives of ‘tribal’ leaders as it was seen as good propaganda and good administration. The government suggested that each chief and headmen recruit a number of eight to ten of trustworthy ‘tribesmen’ to be trained and armed for their protection.⁵² This suggests that all efforts to protect the ruling traditional leaders were designed not only to protect them from ‘terrorist’

⁴⁹ Interview with Foibe Shoovaleka, Omhedi, 4.02.2009.

⁵⁰ Cooper, D. A. *Ovambo Politics in the Twentieth Century*, p 288.

⁵¹ Nujoma, S. *Where Others Wavered: The Autobiography of Sam Nujoma* (PANAF Books, 2001), p 216.

⁵² NAN, NAR 1/1/53, box 11, file 20, “Unregistered correspondence 1962-1967”.

attacks, but were also to allow the South African government to carry out socio-political measures which would win the population away from supporting SWAPO. It is also clear the involvement of chiefs and headmen into the local machinery of government with South African thoroughly discredited and marginalized them from their people by virtue of their collaboration.

However, based on their collaborative relationship and as paid government functionaries of the Ovambo Legislative Council, members were allegedly forced to comply with the colonial regime. Senior headman Kautwima and Chairman of the Ovambo Council claims:

I was given a group of policemen to guard me and my house. The reason was that I was a member of the government while some of my own sons had left the country to take part in the liberation struggle, some of them even died abroad. During the year 1980 all members of the assembly were given members of the police force to guard them. It was argued that if they were allowed to stay on their own, then SWAPO would spend the nights with them. They will then organise a big upheaval which would have threatened the peace of the country. So we were provided with those guards. One could not object to that idea otherwise you could lose your life. If you travel around without being accompanied by many of them, you will be questioned and the group members will also be asked if you do spend the nights at home. You will be highly suspected of dealing with unwanted elements. From there our houses were fenced. Freedom fighters used to shoot at us, but God protected us. The main reason for that was to persuade us to join them, but there was nothing we could do. If you jumped out of the house to go join the other side, these ones would kill you and say that they had been dealing with an animal.⁵³

Kautwima's account is ambivalent as he gives the impression that he stayed with the South African administration because either way he was going to be in trouble. He also highlights his proximity to SWAPO by mentioning that his sons took part in the liberation struggle and some even died in the process. However, a question arises as to why he said what he did in this interview, because he gives it a slant which requires some analysis. It is highly unlikely for someone who had been a representative of a structure of colonial rule and particularly took part in the public floggings of SWAPO members and arrested and detained anyone associated with SWAPO or opposed to colonial rule, to suddenly imply that he had actually yearned to join SWAPO. However, his account clearly shows that the situation in

⁵³ Interview by Patricia Hayes with Gabriel Kautwima, Omhedi, 25.06.1994.

Ovamboland became difficult for the traditional leaders. He might also have been judging what would be palatable to his interlocutors, and oral history often has this implicit problem.

It is also possible that not all members of traditional authorities related in the same way to the colonial system. Many members of the Ovambo Legislative Council such as Cornelius Ndjoba, Chief Elifas and others, openly collaborated with the South African regime, but it is known that there were others who were reluctant participants in the colonial system.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind, though, that their collaboration with South Africa had already undermined their legitimacy and independence, as they had to carry out orders given through the Bantu Affairs Commissioner or any other officer of the Government. Thus, there is a need to interrogate people's motives for saying what they do. Chief Elifas in his addresses to the Legislative Council consistently viewed SWAPO as a terrorist movement that promoted bloodshed, damage to property, intimidation, labour unrest and race hatred, and the undermining of government and tribal authority.⁵⁵ Equally, the Chief Minister Cornelius Ndjoba also repeatedly made clear that he and his government welcomed the presence of the South African Defence Force in Ovamboland. He further emphasised that his government had actually asked the Defence Force to be present in Ovamboland and to act strongly against any SWAPO activities in Ovamboland and on the border.⁵⁶ However, all three leaders (Elifas, Kautwima and Ndjoba) were prominent members of the Legislative Council and not just speaking as traditional authorities. This is central to this thesis because it marks the alienation of traditional leaders from their constituents.

Sandbags and headmen's homesteads

As a protective measure, many headmen's homesteads had dugouts around them and were protected with bags of sand provided by the South African administration, to protect them against live bullets when PLAN fighters started shooting at them.⁵⁷ According to John Liebenberg, sandbags formed part of a larger military infrastructure as they surrounded military and air force bases and were filled by South African conscripts.⁵⁸ These were

⁵⁴ Oral testimonies claim that many headmen were persuaded and convinced by the South African government to hate SWAPO, and even if one didn't really agree with their ideas, they just pretended to be on their side and continued to live in fear. Interview with Lucia Kamonde, Vatilifa Hangula, Okelemba, 4.02.2009.

⁵⁵ Totemeyer, G. *Namibia old and new*, p 107.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p 111.

⁵⁷ Interview with Lucas Shinedima, Onuno 23.06.2009.

⁵⁸ Liebenberg, J. and Hayes, P. *Bush of Ghosts*, p 9.

filled with sand and often used to provide the headmen with protection at both the front and rear of trenches that were dug around their homesteads and were generally stacked some two or three feet deep. Such sandbags afforded these homesteads with effective protection from PLAN rifle fire or bullets and shrapnel, as well as from the effects of artillery shellfire. Thus they were used to build and reinforce protective walls around collaborative headmen. Sandbags and trenches were dug around homesteads of headmen Vilho Weyulu at Ohaingu, Gabriel Katamba at Onamhinda and Gabriel Kautwima at Omhedi. There were however some Kwanyama headmen who refused to have their homesteads guarded or surrounded by sandbags. Those that retained their 'freedom' were headmen Johannes Kalomo (Kalimbo) of Onamutayi and Vatilifa of Okelemba, although the latter had bodyguards.

One can relate to the above account by Kautwima who claims they were guarded not only for their safety but also to control them, if one analyses this whole process of walling with sandbags. Was it put as a protective barrier in the wake of resistance or it was actually to keep control? I ask this because regardless of the walls and the number of guards employed to safeguard members of the Legislative Council as well as the chiefs and headmen, there was still widespread fear among them and in many parts of Ovamboland, as one member complained:

When a Minister returns home, he is only accompanied by 2 or 3 messengers or bodyguards. I have proof and can testify how the SWAPO people act, because I am very close to the border. What happens now to this Minister concerned who has 2 or 3 bodyguards, if fifty SWAPO terrorists arrive at his house, what can the three bodyguards do, will they not all be murdered? Is it not better to use the many policemen who are here, to give protection to the ministers. These honourable members are not taken into account. We have asked that we be given rifles for our own protection. Only here and there, persons have obtained rifles, but the others have been refused. Members of your Legislative Council are being threatened by SWAPO because they do not have rifles. If he had a rifle, he could try to defend himself. It is true that this government does not want to give rifles to the members of the Legislative Council, but we had said that we wish to purchase with our own money and still we have been refused rifles.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Stellenbosch Library holdings: JS Gericke – GA Publications SP, GAZ 1-17, 1973-1989: *Owambo Legislative Council: Proceedings of the 4th Session of the 3rd Owambo Legislative Council*, 17th April to 3 May 1978 – Ongwediva.

What is interesting here is the quest for their security to be stepped up in the form of more ‘home guards’ and rifles and bullets. Many further argued that to have a nation without weapons is just cowardly and that SWAPO was aware of the fact that there were no rifles, and that is why they attacked.⁶⁰ SWAPO’s attacks led the members of the Legislative Council to take flight from their homesteads, as they reported to the Chairman and the house that they did not sleep in their houses any more because they were afraid of getting killed. Ananias Kamanya claimed: “If a dog barks at night I immediately become frightened. My first thought is that it must be the SWAPO people. While my house was attacked the young men who were house guards just ran away and crept into the huts.”⁶¹ This suggests that it was really hard for those who worked for the government as they were the targets of guerrilla attacks. To add to their dismay, South Africa refused to give members of the Ovambo Legislative Council firearms, leading to frustration as many of them argued that most people have had rifles in Ovamboland for a long time and had not killed people with them.

Töttemeyer claims that the Legislative Council, being annoyed by the developments across the northern border in Angola and especially by various guerrilla outrages during the eight months from August 1975 to April 1976 in Ovamboland, adopted a motion that called for efficient steps to be taken to ensure that attacks from Angola would cease and that the border between Ovamboland and Angola be respected.⁶² As a result, the Council asked the Defence Force to be present in Ovamboland and to act strongly against any SWAPO activities in Ovamboland and on the border. Also as a safety measure, and also because many roads were reportedly mined frequently, the Council called for the roads to be “swept” before any trips are made.⁶³ However, not all mines were detected and lifted, leading to vehicles being blown up, ending in loss of both military and many local Ovambo lives.

⁶⁰ Stellenbosch Library holdings: JS Gericke – GA Publications SP, GAZ 1-17, 1973-1989: *Owambo Legislative Council: Proceedings of the 4th Session of the 3rd Owambo Legislative Council*, 17th April to 3 May 1978 – Ongwediva.

⁶¹ Stellenbosch Library holdings: JS Gericke – GA Publications SP, GAZ 1-17, 1973-1989: *Owambo Legislative Council: Proceedings of the 6th Session of the 3rd Owambo Legislative Council*, 20-26 May 1980, Ongwediva.

⁶² Töttemeyer, G. *Namibia old and new*, p 100.

⁶³ An example of this is found in John Liebenberg’s account about the ‘Oom Willie se Pad’ which was swept for landmines by the SADF (54 Battalion HQ Sweep teams from Eenhana and Elundu) on certain days. He explains that the two teams would sweep toward each other and meet in the middle. For more details see Liebenberg, J. and Hayes, P. *Bush of Ghosts*, p 247.

These incidents of attack on South African government's supporters still feature in memories of the war in Ovamboland as indicated by many oral narratives today. Lucas Shinedima describes traumatic moments of the war in the early 1980s, stating:

I was involved in two explosions. The landmines were planted by either the '*eendume domomufitu*' the SWAPO guerrillas, for the people who didn't want to believe in them, because they were considered their enemies, or by the South African troops. The second explosion happened *poluvanda laMhedi* right in front of the Omhedi homestead. The car that we were travelling in ran over a landmine and was blown up. The car belonged to Phillipus Kaluvi, he and the driver died at the scene. I survived, but was hospitalised for a long time.⁶⁴

As discussed in the preceding chapter, Headman Phillipus Kaluvi was considered to be a big supporter of government policies, and suffered many attacks. Lucas Shinedima further recount that landmines were mostly a danger to normal light vehicles, and posed a very dangerous risk to the local population, as many people lost their lives, limbs, in these explosions.⁶⁵

As Omhedi became a target for SWAPO attacks, many stories abound about the terror that people who lived in its proximity experienced. Foibe Shoovaleka narrates "During the war, when Gabriel lived at Omhedi, there were always shootings there, by the people fighting against the South African administration. But, what happened afterwards was terrible, as many people in the vicinity of Omhedi, us included, were beaten by the 'Boers,' who asked us if we had seen the 'terrorists' who were shooting at Omhedi the previous night."⁶⁶ Later events, however, suggest that the so-called 'witch-hunts' were a ploy on the part of the South African government to frighten and intimidate SWAPO supporters to stop assisting the 'terrorists'. Thus, it is likely that the South African troops' ploy was employed in turn to discourage people from any cooperation with SWAPO. Foibe Shoovaleka further narrate that they were beaten and their houses destroyed by the SADF and Koevoet when suspected of being in contact with the guerrillas.⁶⁷ This normally happened when they refused to disclose the whereabouts of the guerrillas in the area, or simply because they were never in contact

⁶⁴ Interview with Lucas Shinedima, Onuno, 23.06.2009.

⁶⁵ Interview with Lucas Shinedima, Onuno, 23.06.2009.

⁶⁶ Interview with Foibe Shoovaleka, Omhedi, 4.02.2009.

⁶⁷ Interview with Foibe Shoovaleka, Omhedi, 4.02.2009.

with them or did not know where they were. These incidents were not restricted to the Omhedi area or Oukwanyama but to the whole of Ovamboland at the time.

It is interesting how Omhedi features in all this. Therefore, it is pertinent to this thesis to question whether these activities changed the landscape of Omhedi, with regards to people's perceptions about it and the physical barriers that were set up there. Were these not, in a way, pushing people away? This is because, according to oral testimony, headmen's homesteads were kept isolated from local people walking too close to the homestead or even in the field around the homestead, and as already mentioned, were protected by armed guards and heavily fortified sand bags and trenches.⁶⁸ Also, due to the dusk-to-dawn curfew, no movement was allowed between sunset and sunrise. Vilho Tshilongo narrate that he was arrested by Kautwima once when he walked in his field at Omhedi during the curfew in the late 1970s, when he resided in Oukwanyama.⁶⁹ The implication here is that, it was not just guerrillas that were feared but also the civilian population which inevitably resulted in the breakdown of social and cultural structures, because of the mistrust among the population.

The Demise of Ovambo Legislative Council

Like other homelands in Namibia, the Ovambo Legislative Council was abolished in May 1989 at the start of the transition to independence. Gargallo citing Keulder posits that because Namibia became independent amidst the wave of decentralization policies being implemented – at least in principle - in a number of African states in the 1990s, it wished to break with the past of ethnic division encouraged by the South Africans.⁷⁰ He further states that in 1991 an official Delimitation Commission announced that, in order to abolish the apartheid legacy, Namibia should be divided into 13 regions, with borders demarcated according to geography and the economy, and not to ethnic criteria. For instance, the former Ovamboland was partitioned into four regions (Omusati, Oshana, Oshikoto and Ohangwena), and Hereoland was divided amongst Otjozondjupa and Omaheke.⁷¹ As we shall see in the next chapter, the end of the homelands meant that new legislations came in effect reducing powers of traditional chiefs and headmen. In 1992 the Local Authorities Act was passed,

⁶⁸ Interview with Vilho Tshilongo, Ongwediva, 18.06.2010.

⁶⁹ Interview with Vilho Tshilongo, Ongwediva, 18.06.2010.

⁷⁰ Gargallo, E. 'Land, Restitution and Traditional Authorities in Namibia's Agrarian Reform' *CIEA7 #15: State Power between Modernity and Tradition in Southern Africa: Decentralisation and Governance of Land and Natural Resources* (Lisboa: 7th Congress of African Studies, 2010), p 4.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, p 5.

establishing democratically elected Regional Councils and local authorities. Regional Councils were now responsible for the development of rural areas and traditional leaders fell under their jurisdiction. Furthermore, the passing of Traditional Authorities Act in 1995 meant chiefs must be elected following the customary laws of each community, and then the Ministry of Rural and Local Government has to confirm the appointment.⁷² Chiefs and their councillors receive a salary from the government. Traditional authorities retained powers over several subjects as they can judge minor cases according to customary law and they also have limited rights to grant land. The power vested on them by the Traditional Authorities Act is therefore, very limited as traditional laws are invalid if they conflict with the Constitution or statutory law and chiefs are legally bound to collaborate with the local authorities' and the State's policies.⁷³

Conclusion

This chapter looked at the Ovambo Legislative Council, which was opened and had its first session on the 17th of October 1968 following the 1964 report of the Odendaal Commission, which recommended establishing eleven self-governing Bantustans in Namibia to house each official ethnic group. It continued the preceding chapter's discussion on the intimidation and public floggings of SWAPO members and supporters, as it analysed the position of traditional leaders and the Ovambo Legislative Council and SWAPO, by examining the composition of the Legislative Council and the powers that 'traditional' leaders accrued or lost within this self-ruling structure. This is pertinent to this thesis because there was deep-seated resentment towards collaborating 'traditional' authorities and a series of attacks against them were blamed on SWAPO. Concern over political activities in Ovamboland featured mostly in the Legislative Council's proceedings. This chapter investigated the process which aimed at curtailing SWAPO and other political parties from expanding their movements on a national level. This was because SWAPO guerrillas were entering the territory from exile. South Africa employed precautionary measures in a bid to protect the 'traditional' leaders and headmen.

Consequently, the South African government unleashed severe repression on the local people who had been or were suspected of having been in contact with the guerrillas. What normally

⁷² Ibid, p 6.

⁷³ Ibid.

followed was a veritable witch-hunt for contacts, suspects and firearms and many people's crops and property were destroyed in the process. Killings, torture and other forms of brutal activities were also constantly reported. I argue that despite all these, SWAPO PLAN fighters received local hospitality which entailed shelter and sustenance. As a rule, all adults, including chiefs and headmen, were obliged to report the presence of any person whom they suspected of being in Ovamboland unlawfully. SWAPO retaliated by militarily targeting traditional authorities (chiefs and headmen) who collaborated with the South African government. The burning of homesteads and government structures such as cattle *mangas* was apparently a popular method of resistance against 'tribal' authorities in many areas in Ovamboland at the time especially in wake of 1972 protests.

Omhedi featured prominently at this time as it became a scene of fighting between the Ovambo Battalion troops and SWAPO PLAN fighters, where cases of shooting and explosions of land mines were reported. As Omhedi became a target for SWAPO attacks, many accounts abound about the terror that people who lived in its proximity experienced. Therefore, this thesis questioned whether these activities changed the landscape of Omhedi, with regards to people's perceptions about it and the physical barriers that were set up there. I argue that Omhedi was kept isolated from the local people and people seen walking too close to the homestead or even in the field around the homestead were intimidated by armed guards. Also, due to the dusk-to-dawn curfew, no movement was allowed between sunset and sunrise. The implication here is that, it was not just guerrillas that were feared but also the civilian population which inevitably resulted in the breakdown of social and cultural structures because of the mistrust among the population, indicating a long-term failure of indirect rule.

The Ovambo Legislative Council like other homelands in South West Africa now Namibia, was abolished in May 1989 at the start of the transition period to independence, opening way for the Council of Traditional Leaders established in 1991. The Namibian government encouraged traditional communities to identify their kings, chiefs or other traditional leaders who can promote the respective cultures of that community. The following chapter analyses the post-colonial politics of restoration of precolonial kingships of different traditional communities. This had its contradictions, because while the new government of independent Namibia wished to break with the past of ethnic division encouraged by the South Africans, in some ways the complex politics of restoration could not escape it.

Chapter 9

The Restored Oukwanyama Kingship

Introduction

This chapter aims to provide some understanding of the role of the restored Kwanyama kingship in contemporary Namibian politics, and more specifically how the Kwanyama question has influenced political debates in Namibia since its restoration in 1996. For decades after this kingship had been abolished upon the South African colonial occupation in Ovamboland, it was literally inconceivable to restore it during that period. However, the collapse of apartheid and the attainment of independence for the Namibian people in 1990 has triggered a seeming resuscitation of old identities and renewed emphasis on the reinstallation of past kingships. This chapter analyses this specific postcolonial question in relation to how the Namibian government made ethnic authority legitimate after independence, all of this subsequent to the ethnic segregation history discussed in the previous chapter.

Following Mamdani's and Chatterjee's discussion of the postcolonial question, this chapter attempts to argue that the regime of differentiation as fashioned in colonial Africa is again reformed after independence.¹ There are quite fundamental similarities between the colonial and the postcolonial states in the governing practices on which these regimes were based. The South African ethnic segregation policy in Namibia inherently focused on dividing people along ethnic lines and these divisions still characterize Namibian society today. Even though there was a significant break with the formal institutions of 'indirect rule', there was no such break with the form of its power. In an analysis concerned not just with the colonial legacy in Namibia, this chapter problematizes postcolonial attempts to reform the ethnic question in the context of broader politics of the centralized Namibian state committed to nation-building, as the bid for ethnic recognition is simultaneously unifying and fragmenting. This chapter thus explores how the SWAPO-led government has articulated a 'unified Namibia' discourse over time and whether this is necessarily seen as conflicting with ethnically-based traditional authority.

Since the restoration of the Oukwanyama kingship it has served as a platform for 'tribal' or ethnic political debates in contemporary Namibian politics, as there have been concerns about the

¹See Mamdani, M. *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the legacy of late colonialism* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996) and Chatterjee, P. *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton University Press, 1993).

government's recognition of the kingship. This was linked to alleged anxieties and common perceptions regarding Kwanyama dominance over other ethnic groups in the country, in terms of political influence and demographic weight.² The establishment of the Rally for Democracy and Progress (RDP)³ in 2007 crystallised further concern, as it is believed to have been conceived in tribal or ethnic solidarity and was claimed to be directed towards the Ovakwanyama in Ohangwena region and the restored Kwanyama kingship.

This chapter assesses the accuracy of these allegations and seeks to establish why the government agreed to the restoration of the Oukwanyama kingship, albeit limited to the Ovakwanyama on the Namibian side. Oukwanyama was fragmented at the time of colonial cartography and occupation by the Namibia/Angola border. Thus, the current kingship is restricted to a small place – Omhedi – as the Namibian Ovakwanyama can not reconstitute Oihole or Ondjiva where previous kingships had located their 'capital'. This chapter therefore deals with the question of the border and the fragmentation of the Kwanyama country from yet another angle: the postcolonial. Linked to this once again is the issue of Mandume's body – a particular history of the body politic – as there is a belief that his decapitated head is buried under a monument in Windhoek Namibia, while the rest of his body is buried at Oihole in southern Angola. Thus, his body has been fragmented, just as the unity of Oukwanyama which died with Mandume, but the question is now linked to postcolonial memorial politics in both Namibia and Angola.⁴

Linked to the recent retraditionalization of regional politics and power, this chapter looks at the Oukwanyama kingship restoration process inside postcolonial Namibia where Kwanyama interests have surfaced, and how this has influenced and still influences current political debate in Namibia. Consistent demands to restore and reinstate the *ouhamba* kingship were raised soon after independence in 1990, by prominent figures in Oukwanyama who were acting as advisors in Oukwanyama history and customs, such as Rev. Appolus Kaulinge, Abednego Nghifikwa, Rev. Shinana, Hinananye Kandy Nehova, George Nelulu, Gabriel Kautwima, Rev. Shihala Hamupembe to mention just a few. Their demands were met on the 6th of February 1996 when the government

² Forrest, J. B. 'Democracy and Development in Post-Independence Namibia' in York Bradshaw and Stephen N. Ndegwa (eds) *The Uncertain Promise of Southern Africa* (Indiana University Press, 2000), p101.

³ RDP is an opposition political party in Namibia, launched on 17 November 2007 under the leadership of Hidipo Hamutenya and Jesaya Nyamu, both former leading members of the ruling party SWAPO and cabinet ministers. Inner-organisational conflicts and rivalries, with personal differences dating back to the 'struggle days', were apparently factors to the formation of this political party.

⁴ See Shiweda, N. 'Mandume ya Ndemufayo's Memorials in Namibia and Angola' (Unpublished MA Thesis, University of the Western Cape, 2005).

decided to reinstate a new Oukwanyama king, *Ohamba* Cornelius Mwetupunga Shelungu, on the anniversary of king Mandume ya Ndemufayo's death in 1917, at Ohangwena. The restoration took place after approximately 79 years when the Kwanyama people had been without a king. However, *Ohamba* Shelungu only reigned for nine short years before he passed away in November 2005.

After his death, *Ohamba* Meekulu Martha Mwadinomho ya Christian ya Nelumbu made history as she was declared *Ohamba* (Queen) of Oukwanyama after her uncle, becoming the first female ruler of Oukwanyama. She now resides at Omhedi. It was not common practice to appoint a woman in the traditional leadership among the Ovambo, although historically there were a number of royal women who enjoyed autonomy and influence under matriliney. This chapter links the debates about gender, authority, and social change covered in preceding chapters that have tended to be shaped into an opposition between custom and modernity. Focusing on *Ohamba* Martha Nelumbu as a sign of Kwanyama female authority, this chapter explores her role from the perspective of the dynamics of the Kwanyama kinship system which is matrilineal. This chapter examines the question of women leaders emerging through the institution of chieftaincy in postcolonial Africa, following previous discussions on gender interactions in the thesis. Previous chapters have looked at how power is gendered, illustrating the ways in which Ovambo women were positioned as bearers of culture particularly through photographic activities at Omhedi. Other chapters have examined conflicts concerning women's perception of modernity and mobility in the face of those traditionally in a position of dominance over them. Thus, this chapter foregrounds how female power in postcolonial Namibia can be located in opportunistic ways, by questioning how the politics of this restored kingship are gendered.

The question of symbolism and significance also features centrally in this chapter as it analyses why Omhedi was chosen as a seat of the new kingship. Thus, this chapter studies why people felt that the newly restored Oukwanyama palace should be situated at Omhedi. Since Gabriel Kautwima's death in February 1995, Omhedi was not occupied, and the residence became *eputu*, it was abandoned. Thus, this chapter asks if this was a redefinition of Omhedi as a place in terms of it being a symbolic site for the previously displaced Kwanyama kingdom. This is because previously the royal palace was located at Ondjiva and later Oihole in southern Angola. Hence, debates associated with the re-enactment of past kingdoms and motivations will also be explored here, bringing the substance of Omhedi as a place into deeper historical context.

Revival of traditional authorities in independent Namibia

We start by exploring the current trend of traditional resurgence in Namibian politics and the re-establishment of what were pre-colonial kingships within the confines of a post-colonial state. The Namibian government appointed a Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Chiefs, Headmen and Other Traditional or Tribal Leaders in 1991, to review the role of traditional leaders during the previous 150 years of Namibian history, and assess whether there should be a function for traditional authorities in an independent Namibia. I use the report by the Commission of Inquiry to highlight the debates that have emerged from different research carried out during the fact-finding analysis of why traditional leaders were important for postcolonial Namibia and how these are relevant to my own research. The Commission was given the task to enquire into the existing statutory laws, rules of customary law and the practices pertaining to the appointment or recognition of chiefs, headmen and other traditional or tribal leaders and authorities; their powers, duties and functions; and the terms and conditions, including conditions in relation to remuneration and other benefits, attached to the various offices.

The Commission was expected to report its findings to then President Sam Nujoma and to make recommendations regarding the viability or otherwise of traditional or tribal authorities, regard being had to the provisions of the Namibian Constitution.⁵ Presumably this looked at the terms of indirect rule. It found that the retention of the traditional system at the stage of socio-economic development of the country was necessary because: although many people reside in the urban areas and have no direct link with the application of the traditional system, it is mostly in communal areas where it finds its practical application. The Commission accepted, as a point of departure, that the institutions of traditional leadership are an important element of rural life, and consequently affect most rural people, if not also large numbers of urban residents. Thus, it felt that traditional leaders must be enabled to play a role in the administration of the country as representatives of their group and protectors of their group rights; this role should be in the field of culture and not of government, in which capacity they will serve to preserve tradition in the form of customary laws and practice for their ethnic groups.⁶

⁵ NAN, AP 23/6/1, Report by the Commission of Inquiry into Matters relating to Chiefs, Headmen and Other Traditional or Tribal leaders, 1991, p 1.

⁶ Ibid, p 67.

Allan Cooper states that the draft legislation offered by the Commission to recognise traditional authorities was passed, in amended form, by the Namibian Parliament in 1995. He claims that the law permitted each traditional community in Namibia to have a traditional authority subject to the approval of the President of the country.⁷ Thus, the functions of a traditional authority were to supervise and ensure the observance of customary law by members of that community and to promote peace and welfare among community members.⁸ He further claims that the Namibian government has encouraged traditional communities to identify their kings, chiefs or other traditional leaders who can promote the respective cultures of that community.⁹ This was initiated at the drafting of the Namibian Constitution as according to Article 102 (5) of the Constitution, it states that, “there shall be a Council of Traditional Leaders to be established in terms of an Act of Parliament in order to advise the President on the control and utilisation of communal land and on all such other matters as may be referred to it by the President for advice.”¹⁰ Thus, the law that provides for traditional authorities was adopted by parliament in the early 1990s and amended in the year 2000. It stipulates the duties and functions of traditional authorities – to uphold, promote, protect and preserve the culture, language, tradition and traditional values of that traditional community. I believe this acceptance of such values comes from the fact that since colonial policies promoted the institution of traditional leadership and its legitimacy (politically and administratively) in the colonial period, it became hard for the democratically elected leaders to ignore these institutions in the postcolonial state.

Traditional Authorities under colonial rule

There is a need for a longer assessment of the history and role of traditional authorities prior to and under colonial rule, to establish if the decisions and recommendations by the Commission of Inquiry discussed earlier were substantiated. This is because in the period before colonial rule, social organisation in Ovamboland was characterised by a number of matrilineal kingships, that had a traditional leader who was the central and highest authority in the community. Many nuanced accounts of the social and political change under colonialism in Ovamboland shed light on the relationship between Ovambo political leaders such as chiefs and their people. The traditional leader had various functions, which he did not exercise as an autonomous individual but in

⁷ Cooper, D. A. *Ovambo Politics in the Twentieth Century* (New York: University Press of America Inc. Lanham, 2001), p 298.

⁸ *Ibid*, pp 298-299.

⁹ *Ibid*, p 308.

¹⁰ The Constitution of the Republic of Namibia (Namibia: Legal Assistance Centre, 1998), p 48.

collaboration with a tribal council that represented the people.¹¹ However, with the arrival of colonialism in Ovambo, as with the case of many other African countries, the colonialists used traditional leaders to their own advantage. Since colonialists used traditional leaders to implement their policies and enforce colonial laws, Christiaan Keulder argues that the institution of kingship was systematically weakened, and the bond between traditional leaders and their subjects was gradually eroded. He further claims that, traditional kingship systems got eroded because they were used as the organizing principle in South Africa's policy of segregation and the divide and rule strategy that reinforced ethnic homelands.¹² The South African regime used group divisions effectively in perpetuating their racial policies, dividing groups both in ethnic and geographic terms through the traditional chiefs and headmen. Therefore, chiefs remained dependent on colonial government patronage, increasingly strengthening 'tribal' divisions.

To take a typical example: powers of chiefs and headmen regarding land in Ovamboland suggests that with the advent of colonial rule these powers and duties were not only changed from their pre-colonial nature, but that traditional leaders were given increased powers with regard to the allocation and control of land. The findings of the Commission of Inquiry are obviously within the discourse of indirect rule as they suggest that colonial rule had deliberately promoted ethnicity and tribalism as a basis for the convenience of dividing and ruling the people politically. Consequently, the issue of tradition, culture and custom has become politicised to an extent where under certain circumstances individuals have tended to express loyalty and allegiance to traditional leaders on the basis of their political rather than cultural stances.¹³ This is because custom, tradition or culture are means through which traditional leaders or institutions are endorsed and some leaders are using them to legitimize their political agendas.

However, the question remains as to why has the Commission of Inquiry recommended the incorporation of traditional leaders into the Namibian state structures when their history and role during the colonial period was so negative? And although the government took the Commission's recommendations, the role of traditional leaders has diminished substantially. Their capacities with

¹¹ See, McKittrick, M. *To dwell secure: generation, Christianity, and colonialism in Ovamboland* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2002); Hayes, P, 'A History of the Owambo of Namibia, 1880-1930' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 1992); Moorsom, R. 'Contract Labour System 1900-1926' in *Underdevelopment and labour migration: the contract labour system in Namibia* (Bergen, Norway: Working Paper, Chr. Michelsen Institute, 1997) and Kreike, E. *Recreating Eden: Agro-ecological change, food security and environment diversity in southern Angola and northern Namibia, 1890-1960* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2004) .

¹² Keulder, C. 'Traditional leaders' *State, Society and Democracy: A reader in Namibian Politics* (Windhoek: Gamsberg Macmillan, 2000) p 161.

¹³ NAN, AP 23/6/1, Report by the Commission of Inquiry, 1991, p 65.

regard to policy implementation and law enforcement were weakened greatly as in effect, all administrative powers previously allocated to traditional authorities were transferred to the newly established Regional Councils. Keulder claims that the Traditional Authorities Act and the introduction of Regional Councils effectively saw the subordination of traditional authorities to the structures of the State. This is because in no instance does any of the legislation dealing with rural, local administration make formal provision for the inclusion of traditional leaders into local State structures, and the only official role reserved for traditional leaders in the administration of the rural areas is that of supporting State structures.¹⁴ For example, with the arrival of independence in 1990, traditional leaders lost their jurisdiction over criminal matters as their power was systematically limited to civil cases based on customary law. Additionally, traditional leaders also lost their powers of detention as their ‘tribal’ police that they had during the colonial era were disbanded, further reducing traditional authorities’ capacities with regard to policy implementation and law enforcement.¹⁵ Therefore, because of the absence of the referral to traditional courts, traditional leaders were stripped of most of their powers. This is hardly surprising as SWAPO’s nationalist discourse does not include the history and power of traditional leaders/authorities in the colonial period, except as resistance heroes and in fact chiefs were often forgotten. It is thus important to ask how the postcolonial discourses and practices relate to the notion of tradition, or traditional leaders more specifically?

Keulder argues that the introduction of Regional Councils as de jure rural local Government is perhaps the most significant aspect of postcolonial state-building to have affected the institution of traditional leadership: in effect, all administrative powers previously allocated to traditional authorities were transferred to the newly established Councils. Together with the Traditional Authorities Act, the introduction of Regional Councils effectively saw the subordination of traditional authorities to the structures of the State.¹⁶ What is more, the Namibian Traditional Authorities Act 25 of 2000 does not improve the role of traditional leaders. This is because the Act restricts traditional leaders to cultural or traditional matters and in assisting government in maintaining peace and order. So far, the Act does not give them any role in development and service delivery, as in terms of section 3(2) traditional leaders are required to assist the police and other law enforcement agencies in the prevention and investigation of crime and the apprehension of offenders.¹⁷ Ultimately, traditional leaders

¹⁴ Keulder, C. ‘Traditional leaders’, p 161.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Keulder, C. ‘Traditional leaders’, pp 161-162.

¹⁷ Ibid, p 162.

in Namibia are only allowed to assist government in the implementation of policies and governmental programmes. As a result, Keulder argues, this has created tension between traditional leaders and the elected councillors, as the elected members, for instance, do not approve of the charging for the use of communal land by traditional leaders.¹⁸ Arguably, one can say that the causes for the tension are the bigger postcolonial issues in rural areas such as poverty, crime, inadequate education, HIV-AIDS, unemployment and disillusionment with development and progress that have many people, especially the opposition, pressing for greater attention to social problems.

In some areas specifically within the former Police Zone, land shortages in combination with rising expectations of new jobs in the cities, have produced a strong influx of urban migrants who have added to concerns regarding overcrowded housing in Windhoek and other regional towns. Thus, failure of traditional leaders and the elected leaders of government to address these very serious issues in rural and urban areas is somehow the cause of tension between them. This relates to some earlier questions about centralised and decentralised ‘despotism’, the divide between the rural and the urban that has been established under the apartheid-era and its persistence in the postcolonial state. Also, because of the postcolonial centralised ‘despotism’, the divide between the rural and the urban has been exacerbated and this bifurcation reflects the apartheid-era consolidation of the state.

Traditional Authorities in the postcolonial era

An attempt will be made here to bring an awareness of the dynamics and insights into the study of traditional authorities, as they have been seriously affected by the postcolonial process of state-building in independent Namibia. I want to explore questions as indicated earlier where people feared that the ‘nation’ was disintegrating with the recognition of different traditional authorities based on ethnicities. According to Keulder, the Namibian state was subjected to structural reorganisation which saw the abolition of the ethnically-based second-tier administration implemented by the South African regime.¹⁹ The second-tier, ethnic or Bantustan authorities were some of South Africa’s strongholds of apartheid policies prior to Namibian independence in 1990. Consequently, with the abolition of this administration, traditional leaders who were part of those structures and, also part of the colonial state, were inevitably affected. To a great extent, the

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Keulder, C. ‘Traditional leaders’, pp 162-163.

resistance to apartheid rule called many Namibians to oppose the segregation of the various ethnic groups. Thus, the idea of a unitary state at independence was an attempt to move away from these ethnic and racial divisions of the past. According to Cooper, during the 1980s, SWAPO argued that it would get rid of all apartheid vestiges particularly the AG8 proclamation issued by the South African-appointed Administrator General that required that the governing structure of the country to be organized into two primary tiers: a national administration serving the nation as a whole, and ethnic-based leadership that possessed authority over traditional communities. These tiers were to remain separate, and individuals were prohibited from serving in both.²⁰ However, argues Cooper, once in power, SWAPO embraced the principles of AG8 and created a bicameral parliament which reflected the interests of the national elite in the National Assembly (the country's parliamentary body), and regional interests in the National Council.²¹ Cooper further suggests that with the enactment of Traditional Authorities in Namibia, the SWAPO-dominated government opened the Pandora box of ethnicity²² in a country so ethnically diverse. This is because the call for 'ethnic identity' had not only created division among many ethnic groups but had also contributed to conflicts and tension in certain regions of the country.

Initially, the Commission of Inquiry had also found that the present available framework for determining an area of jurisdiction of a traditional leader is essentially ethnic or 'tribal'. Therefore, in pursuance of his/her role under the Constitution, a traditional leader may be seen to be promoting ethnicity. An example of this can be derived from land claims by an ethnic group against a community or another group, as the land in question was accorded by the colonial authorities for purely political reasons. SWAPO which pursued a successful liberation struggle built around the motto 'One Namibia, One Nation' was then governing a body advocating the revival of separatist traditional identities.²³ Furthermore, the Commission reports that there was also conflict with the provision of the Constitution and the role of the traditional system. The Constitution's preamble states that "whereas the people of Namibia...desire to promote amongst all of us the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Namibian nation" – undoubtedly presupposing that the Namibian nation shall be one and in association with the other nations of the world. Thus, the concept of an 'ethnic group' may be in conflict with this provision.²⁴ The report further claims that Article 102(2): of the Constitution states that "The delineation of the boundaries of the regions and

²⁰ Cooper, D. A. *Ovambo Politics in the Twentieth Century*, p 312.

²¹ *Ibid*, p 312.

²² *Ibid*.

²³ Cooper, D. A. *Ovambo Politics in the Twentieth Century*, p 311.

²⁴ NAN, AP 23/6/1, Report by the Commission of Inquiry, p 10.

Local Authorities ...shall be geographical only, without any reference to the race, colour or ethnic origin of the inhabitants of such areas” – thus going against the fact that the areas of jurisdiction of most traditional leaders are ethnically determined, which is directly in conflict with this article. Again, article 102(5) of the Constitution states: “There shall be a Council of Traditional Leaders...in order to advise the President on the control and utilisation of communal land...”. In actual fact, all communal land is ethnically determined and the authority of the respective traditional leaders is thus bound to be effectively ethnically rather than geographically based with the result that land claims and advice to be given to the President are bound to be ethnically motivated.²⁵ On the whole, these provisions complicate the definition of the authority of a particular leader, because if her/his functions and duties include the promotion of the culture, language, tradition and religion of “his people” within her/his area of jurisdiction, the question arises as to how such a traditional leader will be able to assert his authority over people from a different group that may have settled in his original area of jurisdiction.²⁶ Conversely, how will a traditional leader bring his authority to bear on members of “his people” who have chosen to live elsewhere in Namibia? Keulder quoting section 2(2) of the Traditional Authorities Act maintains that the official view pertaining to all traditional leaders in Namibia stipulates that the jurisdiction of a traditional leader is confined to all his/her subjects, irrespective of where they live.²⁷ Thus, it is apparent that all members of a specific community regardless of where they are in Namibia are considered to be under the jurisdiction of their traditional leader wherever they are and not limited to an area of ‘ethnic’ origin.

According to Cooper, the recognition of ethnicity in the post-independent era brought with it unexpected contradictions and ironies.²⁸ This is further corroborated by the Commission when it stated that it was confronted by claims of groups who in the past had been recognised as part of one or another community that they should in future be regarded as and recognised as independent communities in their own right.²⁹ To establish a criteria for the recognition of such groups is on the one hand to be seen as promoting the disintegration of the Nation and the dismemberment of the country which would result in further ‘ethnicism’ and ‘tribalism’ and thus undermine the concept of ‘One Namibia, One Nation’. On the other hand, to deny such groups their claims could be seen as suppression of their rights of association. Evidently, in recent years, the number of Traditional Authorities in Namibia have multiplied considerably. Most interesting, however, has been the

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid, p 11.

²⁷ Keulder, C. ‘Traditional leaders’, p 161.

²⁸ Cooper, D. A. *Ovambo Politics in the Twentieth Century*, p 311.

²⁹ NAN, AP 23/6/1, Report by the Commission of Inquiry, p 72.

number of calls for traditional authorities from groups in Namibia without a strong tradition of centralized kingships, most probably in a bid for identity construction and legitimation of authority. It also seems that the struggles for many ethnic groups to have their leaders recognised could be to exert authority and to have access to land and other resources. I will discuss this matter in more detail in the course of this chapter.

Following the issue of many 'ethnic groups' calling to have their leaders recognised, I argue that the renewed significance of traditional authorities and the debates and disagreements that surround them, emerge from discourses of identities and power circulating in Namibia today. One of the many examples of this could be the recent push by Kosie Pretorius to have an Afrikaner traditional authority established.³⁰ The chairperson of the 'Self-Help Trust of Namibia', Kosie Pretorius, is reported to have once again lobbied Government for the establishment of an Afrikaner traditional authority. Pretorius, who is also the Monitor Action Group (MAG) political party leader, met President Hifikepunye Pohamba at State House on Friday the 17th of September 2010 to deliberate on the matter.³¹ However, about a year ago, he was reported as having stated:

It is important to differentiate between an Afrikaans society and an Afrikaner society. Brown and black people speak Afrikaans but they do not share our history. Afrikaners have a common ancestry, as diverse as it may be and therefore, our culture does not exist in song and dance, for example, but in our values and traditions, our upbringing, education and so on. We need to start by preserving our history, as the act says. Our monuments, our documents, publications and books. Currently, we are busy building the archive or historical centre for this very purpose in Bismarck Street just behind the Smuts monument. That is where the act suits our needs. Our children are not learning our people's history in schools anymore so it is important to instil a sense of pride in them.³²

This clearly indicates that there is a push for the preservation of the Afrikaner culture and identity, as apparently the Portuguese and Germans have organisations but the Afrikaner group does not have anything. Pretorius feels that something must be done, as the Afrikaner group has the right to protect its people's needs and history. He further states: "Even if the youth is not interested now, in 50 to 100 years, there will be interest in what has happened now. The fact remains, our people need high-level representation at Government, just like any other traditional authority has. The responsibility for this lies with us as we have mostly isolated ourselves from the political processes

³⁰ 'Pretorius pushes for Afrikaner traditional authority', *The Namibian*, 20/09/2010.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Erasmus, Y. 'A square peg in a round hole? Evaluating the Namibian Afrikaner', *The Namibian*, 18/12/2009.

of the country and we have become apathetic.”³³ Evidently, there is a push to have Afrikaners’ own history restored and conserved for the future generations, but there is a trend here (as can be seen with other applicants i.e. the Hai//om community, which wanted its rights to ancestral lands in Etosha reinstated) because having a state-recognised traditional authority legitimises Afrikaners’ authority and gives them access to resources and power.

However, President Hifikepunye Pohambahas expressed concern about the mushrooming of traditional authorities, calling for urgent reform of this sector. This is because the endless applications for recognition is posing an immense challenge for Government. Among other things the President at the opening of the 12th annual meeting of the Council of Traditional Leaders in December 7, 2009, called for the introduction of mechanisms that would control recognition of new traditional authorities, he stated:

...this has raised the question of the proliferation of fragment traditional authorities...at the moment there are 49 recognised traditional authorities in Namibia – up from 46 last year. Government’s position is that the establishment of traditional authorities must be done within the broader policy of maintaining national unity. In this light, it is a cause of concern that the increase in applications for recognition of new traditional communities may be fuelled by breakaways of smaller splinter groups from major groups. This may lead to an undesirable situation where applications are submitted to recognise clans or families. Such a trend would fragment society and undermine unity in the country. There is a need to review the basic requirements for recognition as traditional authorities and chiefs.³⁴

The President points to shortcomings in the existing proliferation of traditional authorities in the country, criticising the drive for disunity between communities of common descent and authority. However, one needs to ask, what does this say about the effects of apartheid and Bantustan policy and postcolonial national polities? This is very important because I believe the South African segregation policy has left lasting ramifications, such as the call for ‘ethnic separatism’ which produces artificial categories and dominance of certain groups over others.

In an attempt to address further fragmentation of the population, the President urged communities to fight towards building one national identity, instead of fighting over ‘tribal’ issues. At the recent 13th annual meeting of the Council of Traditional Leaders, Regional and Local Government, Housing and Rural Development Minister, Jerry Ekandjo, has also urged

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Shigwedha, A. ‘Too many chiefs: Pohamba’, *The Namibian*, 09/12/2009.

traditional communities to resort to the leadership of government-recognised traditional authorities instead of breakaway groups that would not have a claim to any communal land. Ekanjo stated that traditional authorities should not be seen as a “project or company that an individual should initiate to suit his or her need”. It seems that he said this in response to a clamour from traditional groups such as the Afrikaners and many others wanting formal recognition from government.³⁵ I argue that government probably had political agendas in bringing traditional groups within the orbit of government structures, but as a government that is committed to a unitary state and the one Namibia, one-nation policy, it is now faced with a predicament as to how to stop the mushrooming of traditional authorities or rather ‘ethnic identities’ they themselves called for. Therefore, the question remains as to why these old kingships were restored given that they encourage division and there are ambiguities regarding their role in the current or new democratic Namibian state.

Why go back to ‘Tradition’?

There is a need for an analysis as to why after the attainment of independence and decolonisation, with an inclination towards modernisation, ‘tradition’ seems to be useful to most postcolonial African states. As indicated in the example above, there are some areas in Namibia where the institution of chieftaincy was much less significant or did not exist in pre-colonial and colonial times. Thus, one has to be conscious that it does not necessarily refer to the pre-colonial past, but primarily represents an approach of gaining legitimacy for a rather modern trend. When the Commission first ventured out to inquire about issues relating to the traditional system, it considered it necessary to dispel certain myths prevalent in common usage of such concepts as tradition, culture and custom, and by implication traditional leadership.

The Commission argues that, in popular usage, these concepts lose their dynamic nature and assume an a-historical character. Such static and a-historical notions of culture and tradition were actively encouraged by colonial historiography and political interests which sought to strip indigenous African populations of their history.³⁶ Therefore, it is no surprise that public references to traditional leadership more often than not implicitly refer back to some – unspecified – history, which gives the assumption that tradition and culture cannot adapt in a positive and dynamic way to

³⁵ Sasman, C. ‘Stop the ‘mushrooming’ of traditional authorities’, *The Namibian*, 21/09/2010.

³⁶ NAN, AP 23/6/1, Report by the Commission of Inquiry, p 6.

new situations. Against this view, the Commission agreed that tradition, culture and custom are constantly changing in response to a rapidly changing world. And thus, similarly, the functions, duties and powers of chiefs and headmen were and are not static, but were constantly manipulated by colonial administrators to suit their policy of divide and rule. Now, the question arises as to what form of tradition or custom is inherent in the restored kingships that is recognised as truly 'traditional'? Should, for example, the customs and traditions of the oldest generation of a particular community be taken as authentic, or should one seek more current customs of a younger generation to determine the role of chiefs and headmen?³⁷ The Commission suggests that the most reactionary elements of tradition and custom are recognised as authentic. But this was particularly acute under colonial rule, when traditions and customs (which served to establish 'tribalism') were more likely to be popularised and recognised than the more modern elements.³⁸

But although there were concerns that the values of unity that characterise the Namibian unitary state could be at stake, ethnic groups were called to re-organise and re-establish their own traditional structures that were somehow marginalised during the colonial era. Allan Cooper argues that an alternative explanation for why the Namibia government advocated the revival of traditional authorities relates to the governing party's lack of organised political opposition. After SWAPO won the first elections in 1990, opposition continued to degenerate and the danger increased that a government that advertises its country as a multi-party democratic state would be perceived as just another authoritarian one-party African dictatorship. The reincarnation of traditional authorities allows some semblance of political opposition to form, although at a sub-national level that is inherently incapable of challenging a unified, trans-ethnic government.³⁹ Cooper further claims that the revival of traditional authorities was done to provide an administrative layer to the distributive network that linked the national government with the individual homestead throughout the country.⁴⁰ These motivations are however difficult to justify now, as Namibia has many different political parties contesting in spite of Cooper's arguments that SWAPO had no opposition in the 1990s and it is practically impossible for the national government to have support of all the traditional authorities.

Furthermore, the challenge facing both government and the traditional authorities is to set an agenda for community development and service delivery and establish mechanisms for

³⁷ Ibid, p 7.

³⁸ Ibid, p 8.

³⁹ Cooper, D. A. *Ovambo Politics in the Twentieth Century*, p 313.

⁴⁰ Ibid, pp 313-314.

collaboration in this regard. But, even if the revival of traditional authorities was to serve as an administrative layer to the distributive network, this seems to have failed and is obviously a source of contention between the state and traditional authorities. Cooper offers another explanation, noting that one of the consequences of utilizing traditional authorities as agents of development in Namibia is that failures of state, whether perceived or real, can more easily be blamed on traditional authorities rather than on government officials.⁴¹ This is debatable, as either way, both the state and traditional authorities need to be integrated and developed into social forces which can enhance social cohesion and community development. The issue of why government agreed to the restoration of precolonial kingships needs further research.

Omhedi and the restoration of the Oukwanyama kingship

In light of the previous discussion, I present a case of the restoration of Ovakwanyama kingship at Omhedi to analyse the meaning and significance as to why it was revived after so many years. Oral testimonies maintain that starting in 1993, a committee of Kwanyama senior headmen, village chiefs, pastors and teachers came together to organise the restoration of the kingship for their community.⁴² According to the Report by the Commission of Inquiry, various representations were made by the members of the Kwanyama community at their public meeting at Ohangwena. Oral testimonies claim that the general feeling was that since Namibia became independent and the Portuguese were no longer in Angola, the King of Ovakwanyama must be found and to take his rightful place as head of the Oukwanyama Community to succeed King Mandume.⁴³ It was proposed that the Senior Headmen should retain their positions provided they did not take part in active politics.⁴⁴ Cooper claims that a committee for the Restoration of the Kwanyama kingdom was established and was chaired by Abednego L. Nghifikwa, who - following meetings with the necessary stakeholders and senior headman Gabriel Kautwima - announced on 23 August 1993 that the Kwanyama kingship would be restored. However, some members of the cabinet expressed concern over the movement to restore traditional kingships in the country as it was allegedly against the integrity of the Namibian state.⁴⁵ This refers to earlier discussions about the recognition

⁴¹ Ibid, p 314.

⁴² Interview with Hinananye Nehova, Windhoek-West, 30.01.2009; Vilho Tschilongo, Ongwediva, 18.6.2010. Also see, Cooper, D. A. *Ovambo Politics in the Twentieth Century*, p 314.

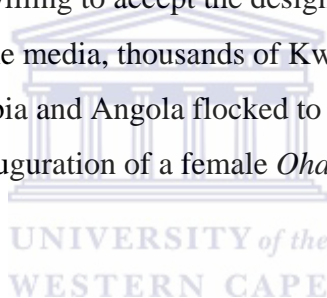
⁴³ Interview with Hinananye Nehova, Windhoek-West, 30.01.2009, Lucas Shinedima, Onuno, 23.6.2009 and Cooper, D. A. *Ovambo Politics in the Twentieth Century*, pp 308-309.

⁴⁴ NAN, AP 23/6/1, Report by the Commission of Inquiry, p 35.

⁴⁵ Cooper, D. A. *Ovambo Politics in the Twentieth Century*, p 314.

of traditional kingships and the state's fear that this practice promotes disintegration of the state by dividing people according to their ethnicities.

This came after the Commission recommended that the term 'Chief' be retained to describe the principal leader of a community because Namibia is a Republic and cannot have traditional leaders named as kings and queens that would signify a monarchy. In the Namibian context it would sound artificial if not ridiculous to have many Kings, e.g. five Kings or Queens in Kavango, seven in Ovambo, two in Caprivi. It should, however, be acceptable to describe the traditional leader-in-chief by the term he is known by in the community, for example Ga Aob, Hompa or Fuma etc.⁴⁶ Nonetheless, according to Cooper, former President Sam Nujoma was willing to meet with members of the Committee for the restoration of the Kwanyama kingdom and after much deliberation between the Committee and the Kwanyama council of headmen in October 1993, it was agreed to get rid of the title of 'king' and instead called for the restoration of the traditional '*ohamba*'. The cabinet members were willing to accept the designation and the restoration movement proceeded.⁴⁷ According to the media, thousands of Kwanyama people and other neighbouring ethnic groups from Namibia and Angola flocked to Omhedi homestead on the 12 of November 2005, to witness the first inauguration of a female *Ohamba* of the Ovakwanyama people.



Following the issues raised in the previous chapter about the role of the Ovambo Council – a self governing Bantustan that tried to legitimise its authority through indigenous chiefs and headmen, but failed to gain much support amongst many Ovambo people – it is important to analyse why the government agreed to the restoration of the Kwanyama kingship. As stated earlier, it seems that the postcolonial Namibian government is unable to rid itself of the imposed traditional institutions that existed during the colonial state. It seems there is a need to keep and maintain them, or even invent some for those that did not have traditional institutions in the first place. But the question remains, why is the government doing this? Mamdani's argument about fundamental similarity between the colonial and the postcolonial states can be related to the Namibian case here. The similarity is not so much in the actual bases of support for the two formations, because the sections of the Namibian population on which the colonial state relied for support were not necessarily the same as those that supported the new nation-state, but many of the systems of rule, the governing practices on which

⁴⁶ NAN, AP 23/6/1, Report by the Commission of Inquiry, p 75.

⁴⁷ Interview with Hinananye Nehova, Windhoek-West, 30.01.2009 and Cooper, D. A. *Ovambo Politics in the Twentieth Century*, p 315.

these regimes were and are based, are very similar.⁴⁸ In this case, Kwanyama headmen who ruled during colonial rule, continued to be part of the traditional institution even after Namibia became independent and the Bantustan was abolished.

Even though *Ohamba* Cornelius Mwetupunga Shelungu did not occupy Omhedi during his tenure, as the palace was still being built, his kingship was recognised by the Ovakwanyama people and the government. Shelungu had led the Ovakwanyama since February 1996 and was the first king of the Ovakwanyama after Mandume Ndemufayo. Oral testimonies narrate that, on his deathbed, Shelungu informed his senior leaders and councillors that he wanted his cousin, Martha Nelumbu, as his successor.⁴⁹ After his death Meekulu Martha Christian Nelumbu became *Ohamba* of the Ovakwanyama, making history as among the Ovambo - in contrast to other ethnic groups such as the Ovakavango - it was not common practice to appoint a woman in the traditional leadership.

I wish to focus on the symbols and rituals that took place at Meekulu Martha's inauguration in order to show how they compare with colonial performances. Symbolism in the aesthetics of ceremonies such as this one needs to be read within particular contexts as these illuminate many similarities with the opening of the Ovambo Council in 1968 discussed in the previous chapter. According to Oswald Shivute, the ceremony was opened with the national anthem, the EU anthem and a prayer by Anglican Bishop Shihala Hamupembe. Clearly, the performance of symbolism by the state is important in an event of ethnic recognition as it demonstrates that a kingship or chieftaincy is part of a nation. The South African government used symbolics such as the mace, flags, anthems and assemblies for the Bantustans in order to create ownership and legitimacy for the different councils.

I believe this is the same in postcolonial Namibia as the government's involvement suggests a symbolic connection between the traditional authorities and state. This is of course because the recognition of traditional authorities was gazetted by the government and the inauguration was attended by members of parliament and other government officials. These included the President Hifikepunye Pohamba and the former President and officially designated Father of the Nation, Sam Nujoma. Oswald further reports that in her address, the Queen said she would abide by the Namibian Constitution as well as to the Traditional Authority Act, to the rule of law, national

⁴⁸ See Mamdani, M. *Citizen and Subject*, pp 15-16 and 25-6. Some insights were garnered from Chatterjee, P. *The Nation and Its Fragments*. This book confines its illustrations to Bengal, but there are some very important references to African nationalism and the question of the postcolony too.

⁴⁹ Interview with Ohamba Meekulu Martha Mwadynomho Christian Nelumbu, Omhedi, 12.02.2010.

reconciliation and democracy. She reportedly said she would see to it that traditional laws and the laws of the country are respected and adhered to, and that all traditional leaders in Oukwanyama adhere to the traditional laws.⁵⁰ President Pohamba, in his welcoming address reportedly welcomed Queen Mwadinomho Nelumbu to the Namibian leadership, but emphasised that she ruled only over the Ovakwanyama in Namibia and not in Angola. He further stressed that, “Angola is now another country, and those Ovakwanyama in Angola are Ovakwanyama of Angola and not of Namibia. Thus, the Ouhamba of *Ohamba* Mwadinomho is only for the Ovakwanyama in Namibia and not of those in Angola too. This must be clearly understood by all,” he stated.⁵¹

This brings me to earlier arguments in the thesis, that reflect the anxieties about the Kwanyama as a group and the politics of the Namibia/Angola border which cuts Oukwanyama into two parts. I argue that common perceptions regarding Kwanyama’s dominance over other ‘ethnic groups’ in the country, in terms of political influence and populace, has influenced the need to keep them separated, as there is paranoia about the biggest fragmented group re-emerging in a forceful way. There is a particular history of the body politic, regarding a belief rooted in oral history that Mandume’s head was decapitated and is buried under the Ovambo Campaign Memorial in Windhoek, while the rest of his body is buried at Oihole in southern Angola.⁵² Thus, his body is fragmented between Namibia and Angola. This issue is very complex as a number of factors are at play here. Angolan politics and the civil war forced many Kwanyama people to support the Angolan government rather than UNITA which basically controlled southern Angola, leading to the MPLA government to make Kunene region a national priority area for reconstruction by erecting memorials in the name of Kwanyama king Mandume at Oihole and other parts of the country.

I argued elsewhere that this serves to endorse a particular MPLA government position based on legitimising vested political interest so that the ruling government will gain support rather than UNITA during the civil war.⁵³ With all that the Angolan government has done for the Kwanyama in southern Angola, it is evident that it is not willing to let go of that border. There was a Mandume Traditional Community Discussion Committee (MTCDC) in the 1990s which aimed to have the border shifted 60 kilometres up to Ondjiva in Angola so that Oshikwanyama-speakers in Angola and Namibia could be reunited, but the members disappeared without a trace and the idea has been considered sensitive ever since. Thus, President Pohamba’s emphasis that the restored kingship

⁵⁰ Shivute, O. ‘Thousands flock to Omhedi for crowning’, *The Namibian*, (14.11.2005).

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² See, Shiweda, N. ‘Mandume ya Ndemufayo’s Memorials’, pp 40-53 and 96-103.

⁵³ Ibid, pp 113-117.

only belongs to the Kwanyamas on the Namibian side indicates the government reluctance to jeopardise its relationship with Angola and to avoid conflict with Angola, which is considered one of the strongest military powers in Africa to date. This brings me to the core insight of this chapter, which is that central government is at ease with the fact that the Ovakwanyama are still fragmented and remain fragmented, because as long as they are disunited then their dominance is weakened.

Following allegations that the RDP was formed within the Oukwanyama kingship and is directed at the Ovakwanyama people in the Ohangwena region and finds 'tribal' solidarity in the kingship, senior headman and Chairperson of the Oukwanyama Traditional Authority, George Nelulu hit back stating:

To this end, we want to collectively make it categorically clear to all interested that Oukwanyama Kingdom is the Kingdom for all Ovakwanyama People. These People embrace and belong to different faiths, political parties, get treated at different hospitals, public and private and own and work for different businesses. As such, for all Ovakwanyama to feel free to visit their Kingdom, a strict standard of unfettered neutrality was, is and will be upheld. Having said that, let it be emphatically underscored here that this Kingdom has never been, is not and will never belong to any political party; and it welcomes People of all race, colour, culture, language, tradition and political affiliation as long as they adhere to the law of the Republic of Namibia and those of Oukwanyama Traditional Authority. Like armies, businesses, churches, hospitals and police that maintain stringent neutrality, Oukwanyama Kingdom does not exist to propagate or promote views of any political parties, but ours is to ensure that traditional norms, values, relics, and rules are developed, promoted, respected, maintained and, let us face it, sustained and that peace and justice for all, law and order are upheld.⁵⁴

Following the account above, it would seem that nation and party are conflated. The account is also corroborated by several oral testimonies, arguing that the restored kingship is there to maintain, and safeguard what is positive in Oukwanyama culture and identity. They further claim that the aim of the kingship is to protect and develop the rich Oshikwanyama language, poetry, proverbs, dance, festivals and rituals that signify the historical and social development of the Ovakwanyama people.⁵⁵

It is imperative to the analysis of the restoration of Oukwanyama kingship to give awareness that the question of the resuscitation of the Ovakwanyama kingdom existed during the colonial period,

⁵⁴ Nelulu, G. 'Setting The Record Straight', *The Republikien Online*, 01.02.2008.

⁵⁵ Interview with Hinananye Nehova, Windhoek, 30.01.2009; Hangula Vatilifa, Okelemba, 04.2.2009 and Ndahafa Kakonda, Omalyata, Onuno, 07.2.2009.

although it remained under the surface. This is evident from archival documents and oral histories that narrate how after Mandume's death, Shongola started asking the eight headmen if there were still members of the royal family in Oukwanyama who could be installed as king.⁵⁶ At the same time, Portuguese authority apparently also had an idea to appoint Mandume's nephew Shiyakela sha Shihepo⁵⁷ as the new Kwanyama chief.⁵⁸ He was supposed to take king Mandume ya Ndemufayo's place as king but people were afraid that he would be killed just like Mandume. The royal family then stayed quiet and went into hiding.⁵⁹ However according to the (colonial) state ethnologist K.R. Budack, the appointment of Shiyakela as king after Mandume's death could not materialise because the prominent ruling Kwanyama headmen argued that a king could not be appointed sectionally, as he needed to be on both sides of the border where Kwanyama people resided as parts of the (former) whole kingdom. Budack who drafted the secret report based on an ethnological study of the unrest in the Kwanyama area in 1972,⁶⁰ further implies that the issue of reinstating the Kwanyama kingship seems to have caused divisions within the 'tribe' especially amongst the senior headmen who were preventing it, obviously because such a step would have put their own positions at risk.⁶¹ Budack stated that many people idealised Mandume, because he fought against white colonial forces and they thought that a new king would interfere with the power of the senior headmen. Thus, using the 'traditional' argument was a tactic by the headmen to discourage the whole idea as it would threaten their power. Also, Budack argues that in such a situation they would not like to belong to the Portuguese as there were no developments and work opportunities in Angola at that time.⁶²

On the other hand however, Kreike claims that to prevent the restoration of the Kwanyama kingship, the Portuguese administration killed the husbands of princesses Kaleinasho Ndeiweda and Ndilokelwa and kept a close watch over the female members of the Kwanyama royal clan who could produce heirs. What is more, the Portuguese imposed their candidate as chief in Ombadja in 1928. By 1930, very few *omalenga* headmen who had ruled groups of villages that had been

⁵⁶ Interview with Hangula Vatilifa, Okelemba, 04.2.2009.

⁵⁷ Shiyakela ya Shihepo was the current Kwanyama Queen's uncle, her mother's brother. He was the *mwene womukunda* (headman) of Odibo but people warned him that it might be a set up to get him killed, thus he ran away with his family and servants to Oluheke in Okalongo. According to oral testimony, the new Queen is a descendant of this royal family that ran away to Ombadja, Okalongo. She lived with Kaleinasho ka Ndaiweda at Oongo, where Vilho Weyulu took her and brought her to Ohaingu where she grew up. After Mandume's death, Shongola divided Oukwanyama between omalengas.

⁵⁸ NAN, BAD, Box 18, File no. O.13, 1972; Owambo: Unrus in die Kuanyamagebied. Translated by Kletus Likuwa.

⁵⁹ Interview with Hinananye Nehova, Windhoek, 30.01.2009 and Hangula Vatilifa, Okelemba, 04.2.2009.

⁶⁰ Budack was the architect of Ovambo Bantustan and perhaps the rituals that came with it.

⁶¹ NAN, BAD, Box 18, File no. O.13, 1972; Owambo: Unrus in die Kuanyamagebied..

⁶² Ibid.

organised in districts remained in Portuguese Oukwanyama. Portuguese occupation forces also introduced taxation and forced labour in Oukwanyama, often in the form of violent raids and razzias.⁶³ Kreike further argues that for the South Africans, attracting headmen was an excellent business for them, as when the headmen fled the Portuguese territory, they typically brought not only their families but also their followers and cattle.⁶⁴ Thus South Africans actively (though clandestinely) encouraged and sponsored in-migration from Angola to increase their migrant labour pool.⁶⁵ In this way, both the Portuguese and South African administration were involved in a 'policy of attraction'⁶⁶ to draw and control the population along the border, especially in Oukwanyama. This included members of the royal family and headmen of importance who together with their adherents and stock moved south when the Zone was actually handed over to Portugal. According to Hayes, in 1927 however, Mandume's nieces, Kaleinasho and Ndilokelwa moved over the border as the former's husband Haimbili was offered a large headmanship to persuade his royal wife to return to Angola.⁶⁷ Essentially, the incentive was between more favourable ecological conditions as opposed to more favourable administrative conditions. This was apparent from the two trends of movement firstly in the mid-1920s, which favoured the south, and another series of shifts after 1928, which favoured the north.⁶⁸

Hayes further argues that a sense of physical, spatial and political compression emerges after Mandume's death, mainly from the implementation of the boundary agreement between South Africa and Portugal in the late 1920s.⁶⁹ For those Kwanyama in the Neutral Zone, which now fell in Portuguese territory, the decision as to whether to remain in Angola or move south over the border was dictated by specific conditions offered by either side. The South West African side of the boundary offered relative stability, no taxation until 1929, no military presence and a large labour market in its Police Zone. However, land for new or expanding settlement was relatively scarce. Grazing was also restricted except at some distance from central settlements.⁷⁰ On the Portuguese side by contrast, there were large tracts of comparatively under populated country, with better water and grazing conditions. Unlike in SWA considerable freedom of trade existed which included commodities such as liquor. However, the disadvantages of Portuguese colonial rule were

⁶³ Kreike, E. *Recreating Eden: Agro-ecological change, food security and environment diversity in southern Angola and northern Namibia, 1890-1960* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2004), p 62.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p 70.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p 71.

⁶⁶ Hayes, P. 'A History of the Owambo', p 267.

⁶⁷ Hayes, P. 'A History of the Owambo', pp 269-270.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p 267.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p 264.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p 266.

numerous. Hut tax was imposed after the occupation of Oukwanyama, military service and a forced labour regime implemented. Thus for any Kwanyama headman weighing up the relative advantages of remaining under Portuguese rule or shifting south, a crucial consideration would not only be whether he could safeguard his own interests, but also to offer his followers protection against Portuguese administration and the soldiery entrusted to round up forced labour for highland plantations.⁷¹ In this way, the colonial forces tried to control and influence the population especially the members of the royal family as they moved with a number of their following and this contributed to prospective human labour power. As a form of enticement, the Portuguese especially undertook appointing non-royals as chiefs for Ombadja⁷² and Oukwanyama as indicated above. In the absence of detailed archives, it appears that the Portuguese appointed non-royals that were cooperative with them to gain legitimacy and also because this enabled them to implement their colonial policies more easily.

A gender perspective: Matriliney in Oukwanyama

Linking the debates about gender, authority, and social change covered in preceding chapters which are shaped into an opposition between custom and modernity, I examine *Ohamba* Meekulu Martha Nelumbu as a sign of Kwanyama female authority. I start by exploring her role from the perspective of the dynamics of the Kwanyama kinship system which is matrilineal. Acknowledging that it is extraordinary to have a woman *Ohamba* at Omhedi, particularly in Oukwanyama, this chapter analyzes insights on how women leaders appointed through the institution of chieftaincy in postcolonial Africa tend to face greater hardships and vulnerabilities than men. In addition, I want to make a point that current laws fail to account for the strength and power of women.⁷³ My attention to gender relations draws from a number of discourses discussed throughout this study, looking at how power was and is gendered in the Ovambo society and Namibia more broadly. This discussion illustrates the ways in which Kwanyama women were positioned as bearers of culture in ethnographic and photographic activities at Omhedi.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid, p 269.

⁷³ See Manicom, L. 'Ruling Relations: Rethinking State and Gender in South African History' in *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (1992), pp 441-465 and LaFont, S. and Hubbard, D. 'Unravellings of Taboos: Gender and Sexuality in Namibia', *Gender Research and Advocacy Project: Legal Assistance Centre* (Windhoek: John Meinert Printing (Pty) Ltd, 2007).

Previous chapters examined conflicts concerning polygyny, women's workload in the rural economy and women's perception of modernity and mobility in the face of those 'traditionally' in a position of dominance over them. These debates looked at how polygyny was the domain of contestation between Kwanyama headmen and the local people as well as between missionaries and colonial officials. I argued that polygyny and dominance by men tended to increase, but by no means could it be said that men unambiguously dominate women.⁷⁴ Thus, this narrative foregrounds how female power - in postcolonial Namibia - can be located in opportunistic ways, by questioning how the politics of this restored kingship are gendered. I ask this question to suggest that although Namibia has a small number of elected women leaders such as *Ohamba* Meekulu Martha Nelumbu, their role - as important as it is - is not given enough attention.

Linzi Manicom on South Africa argues that historically and today state policy has discriminated against women, oppressively so against black women, and that, indeed, the historical development of apartheid was predicated on state-enforced gender subordination. She further claims that the role of the state in the oppression of African women was encapsulated in a significant intervention - the enactment of the 1927 Native Administration Act, which recognized, nationally, the institutions of African customary law (transformed and reinterpreted to be more restrictive in the process) as the central mechanism for confining women to the reserves and thereby ensuring the continuity of rural production.⁷⁵ Part of the problem was the colonial imagination which only worked with patriliney, entrenching and legitimating patriarchal forms of ruling and obscuring women's control. Having a women leader was however clearly significant as previously in Namibia, there have been occasions when women have either been influential princesses to the reigning male chiefs or have been regents in the absence of or during the minority of a male heir.

Historically, Oukwanyama had a number of women *eehamba* or princesses and queens who owned and ruled over districts, such as Nekoto la Mwaeshange (Oiheke), Hipondoka ya Nyanya (Olukango), Ndatiolye ya Hangula, Hanyangha ya Hamutenya (Oukwangali), Ndilokelwa ya Shihepo (Oongo) and Ndavavele (Elala).⁷⁶ *Ohamba* Nekoto was mentioned in the writings of the German Lutheran missionaries who worked in Oukwanyama from 1891 to 1915, as an aunt to kings Weyulu and Nande of Kwanyama and a great-aunt to the last Kwanyama king, Mandume, and exerted great influence over her nieces and nephews. As a member of the royal family, she ruled

⁷⁴ Poewe, K. *Matrilineal Ideology: Male Female Dynamics in Luapula, Zambia*, (London: Academic Press 1981), p 40.

⁷⁵ Manicom, L. 'Ruling Relations', pp 441-465.

⁷⁶ Interview with Hinananye Nehova, Windhoek-West, 8.12.2010.

over a large section of Oukwanyama where she took all relevant political decisions and passed judicial sentences in court. Although she had authority, she was not a sole ruler. Like any other female *Ohamba*, Nekoto enjoyed the privilege to choose a spouse to her liking. When Nekoto married Haishi after the death of her first husband, Mwoombola, he had to leave his former wives, who are said to have numbered five or six (as he was a wealthy man) in order to join her as her 'prince consort'. The role of the royal husband was to carry out and oversee all orders around the queen's area. However, he had no say in decision-making, although Haishi is said to have tried to act independently, too. It is not known when Nekoto was born but already in 1896 she was described as 'an old woman' (d. 1908). According to the custom of the time, after the death of a female *Ohamba* her husband was to be killed to provide her company in the other world, but he was apparently saved by the missionaries.⁷⁷

Heike Becker, with reference to a separate Ovambo polity, argues that Ongandjera stands out among the Ovambo societies as the polity that had a strong tradition of female rulers, who were known as *aakwaniilwa* (kings or queens; singular *omukwaniilwa*) in pre colonial times until the 1860s. Although local history has much to say about them, the ruling queens of the past are largely forgotten today, although some families still tell their children stories about the queens of the past. Oral history suggests that male and female *omalenga* (counsellors and senior headmen or headwomen; singular *elenga*) assisted past Ongandjera kings and queens.⁷⁸ In postcolonial Namibia, Becker claims that Ovambo chiefs are striving for more gender balance in decision making, widely recognised as a crucial element.⁷⁹ This is evident in the great strides that Uukwambi Traditional Authority (UTA) has made in putting women into leadership positions.⁸⁰

According to the findings of Dutch researcher Dr Janine Ubink who recently did a five-month study on the customary legal empowerment of women in Uukwambi Traditional Authority in the Oshana and Omusati regions, it appears that in many traditional setups, most traditional leaders are men, traditional dispute settlement processes are dominated by men, and the normative framework favours men. However, she claims that after Independence the Uukwambi Traditional Authority initiated changes on all these aspects. There is an active promotion of female traditional leadership, customary dispute settlement processes are no longer dominated by men and one well-known

⁷⁷http://www.guide2womenleaders.com/Namibia_Heads.htm, Accessed 19/10/2010, 20:44 PM.

⁷⁸Becker, H. 'New Things after Independence': Gender and Traditional Authorities in Postcolonial Namibia' in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Volume 32, Number 1, 2006, p 34.

⁷⁹ Becker, H. 'New Things after Independence', p 37.

⁸⁰ Shigwedha, A. 'Kwambis lead the way in gender equality', *The Namibian*, (05.02.2010).

example of a change in the normative framework is found in the protection of widows after the death of their husbands against eviction from house and land by the husbands' family.⁸¹ Female leaders are now at the level of the traditional authority as well as encouraging their appointment at district and village levels in their own right. This has led to a number of female traditional leaders, and in Uukwambi women now actively take part in court proceedings and are constantly encouraged to do so by traditional leaders and in many villages, they now form the majority during court meetings.⁸²

Women were able to play some important roles in society, but with colonization, these are defined out of existence. This was because, according to Becker, gendered identities were reconstructed in new cultural discourses through both the Christian missions and the South African colonial administration's efforts to masculinise the 'native' political authority concomitant with the large-scale, exclusively male labour migration from Owambo and the indirect form of colonial rule in the northern Namibian territories.⁸³ There was anxiety focused on the question of social disintegration. Couched as a colonial discourse, social disintegration was seen as the inevitable result of the impact of a modern economy on a traditional way of life. Becker argues that colonial rule and Christianity diminished the autonomy and discretion that elite women had historically enjoyed under matriliney, and modified gender discourses and gendered practices that masculinised the realm of traditional authority.⁸⁴ Even though a number of ethnic groups in Namibia have a few royal women who retained their positions throughout the colonial and postcolonial periods, the impact of pre and post-independence nationalist politics and its prominent gender equality discourse appears to be more limited. Thus, the notion of a highly patriarchal tradition, where domesticity became the defining characteristic of femininity, is prominent among the Christian cultural forms that many people today consider indigenous.⁸⁵

This brings me to the question: does the appointment of women in leadership positions today have any impact on norms of gender relations? On the inauguration of Kwanyama Queen Martha Mwadinomho, Brigitte Weidlich reported that the organising committee for the restoration of the Oukwanyama kingship were a bit surprised that a woman was chosen as their leader. But they conceded, because historically women from the royal Mandume family had special rights and the

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Becker, H. 'New Things after Independence', p 34.

⁸⁴ Ibid, p 40.

⁸⁵ Becker, H. 'New Things after Independence', p 34.

Ovakwanyama always chose their successors from the female hereditary bloodline.⁸⁶ Thus, under matrilineal influence, royal women had comparable powers with the most prominent male *omalenga*.⁸⁷ However, many scholars have made much of the apparent contradiction of matrilineal descent and male authority in African societies. For several decades, according to Heike Becker, the view that matriliney did not entail greater authority for women but merely meant that authority flowed through the mother's rather than the father, remained stock of the mainstream western anthropology. She further argues that contrary to contemporary suppositions, women in many communities had access to property and were highly valued as agricultural producers. But in the example of Ovambo culture, where the economy was based on a mixed agricultural-pastoral system, the value socially attached to men's products, that is cattle, was high because of its ritual significance.⁸⁸ Women, however, contributed the bulk of subsistence through agriculture.

Becker claims that women were only visible in the sphere of production, which was integrated with the relations of reproduction, but elements of the matrilineal system mitigated the control a husband could evoke over his wife, or wives and children.⁸⁹ However, in the matrilineal royal clans the women played a very important role, and were seen to have executed a considerable amount of influence behind the scenes. The king's mother was particularly powerful, but other female members of the royal clan were also revered.⁹⁰ This is can be related to the Ondonga king Martin ka Dikwa's accession in 1912, when his mother Mutaleni obtained his succession amidst strong competition from other candidates. Also, similarities exists with the Swazi case in terms of the special role played by the Queen Mother, especially in the politics of succession. Phillip Bonner quoting Kuper states that the Swazi kingdom can be characterised as a dual monarchy, because the Queen Mother wields powers almost equal to those of the king.⁹¹ Moreover, according to Dina Kraft, a queen ruled the constitutional monarchy of Lesotho for 20 years, and women chiefs are common in its rural villages.⁹² Thus, it is quite possible that in a given society women could have been relatively powerless in general and in the family organization, while on the other hand, the

⁸⁶ <http://www.news24.com/Africa/News/Namibia-gets-first-female-chief-20051111>, Accessed 19/10/2010, 22:20 PM.

⁸⁷ Hayes, P. 'A History of the Owambo', p 49.

⁸⁸ Becker, H. 'Women Politics and Peace in northern Namibia' in *Women and peace in Africa: Case Studies on traditional conflict resolution practices* (France: UNESCO, 2003), p 51.

⁸⁹ Becker, H. 'Women Politics and Peace', p 51.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Bonner, P. *Kings, Commoners and Concessionaires: The Evolution and Dissolution of the Nineteenth-Century Swazi State* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), p 25.

⁹² Kraft, D. (2003) "The Changing Roles of Africa's Women," <http://www.iol.co.za/news/africa/the-changing-role-of-africa-s-women-1.118801>, accessed 21/10/2010, 23:33PM.

royal women in this very same society were in possession of considerable political authority, social status, and substantial power.

It is important to note however that although elite women in matrilineal societies such as the Ovakwanyama played an equally central role in the economic and political affairs of the society, men still had control over key decisions. It is thus pertinent to ask if the Ovakwanyama Queen has any power? I argue that women have been negligible in leadership positions, historically and today, as state structures have a way of putting women in prominent positions without necessarily having any significant power.⁹³ I do not want to claim here that the Queen does not have any power, but I just want to point out that most structures of state, whether it is a traditional institution or a modern one, are predicated on state-enforced gender subordination, specifically on the subordination of women.

Narrating Omhedi as a place

Oral histories claim that some research was carried out to see which place would be best suited for the restored kingship, looking at places like Omhedi, Oihole and Ondjiva. Ondjiva and Oihole were the two places where Mandume's palaces were situated originally. Engela which is close to Omhedi was not considered suitable as it has *okaheke*, a little bush area where a bushman's afterbirth '*omashe*' *ovakwanghala* has been buried.⁹⁴ Ohaingu was also not considered as it is neighbouring a village called Oshatotwa where a marula tree resembling a pregnant woman with breasts is found, which also represents a 'taboo' for the Kwanyama royal family. There were also talk of taking the restored kingship to Oihole, but Omhedi was chosen as a suitable place. According to oral history, Omhedi and Ohaingu were the big homesteads in Oukwanyama, where king Mandume used to visit at that time. But Omhedi is more important because it belonged to Ndjukuma ya Shilengifa who made space for King Mandume.⁹⁵ This is the claim of legitimacy.

As indicated earlier, Ndjukuma ya Shilengifa resided at Oihole but because of king Mandume's conflict with the Portuguese this forced him out of his palace at Ondjiva. It was decided that Ndjukuma should leave Oihole and move to Omhedi, to make way for the King. Oral testimonies

⁹³ For a full discussion on state and gender relations, see Manicom, L. 'Ruling Relations', pp 441-465.

⁹⁴ Interview with Julia ya Mbida, Odibo, 20.08.2008.

⁹⁵ Interviews with Haimbodi Haiduwa, Eembo, 2008, Sipora ya Weyulu, Ohaingu, 2008, Lucas Shinedima, Onuno, 2.08.2008 and 23.6.2009, Elia la Haikali, Eengwena, 16.8.2008, Julia ya Mbida, Odibo, 20.08.2008, Ndationawa Nehemia, Odibo, 25.06.2009.

narrate that Hamunyelagona who lived at Omhedi at the time had to move to Engela so that Ndjukuma could take his place at Omhedi. At the same time, Weyulu la Nakambuda who lived at Engela also moved to Oipapakane and Ndeunyema who was at Oipapakane had to move to Onekwaya.⁹⁶ This whole process raises questions of place and displacement, in thinking about connections to place and movements from it, interactions across place and complex negotiations in place. It also means that questions associated with processes of negotiation between Royalty or prominent men and commoners who did not really have a choice about displacement, need to be explored fully here. Oral histories claim that people who made space or were displaced in this way did not have a problem. They claim that the relocations were all discussed with people concerned and they did not have a problem at all. It was apparently considered an honour to give up your land for the king as you became a noble and were rewarded generously. Thus, in this way, people gave each other space, deciding on who should go there and so on.⁹⁷ Oral histories' general impression is that Omhedi is looked upon as very important in Kwanyama history because King Mandume was initially supposed to move there.⁹⁸ Thus meanings are mobile but at times do get fixed to place.

It is therefore key to ask here in what ways do people attach meaning to and organize a sense of space and place, somewhere like Omhedi? Linking Mandume and the displacement from Ondjiva to Omhedi, one notes that the current royal Kwanyama palace has become a way for interpreting Kwanyama people's experience in enacting their precolonial kingship. This points to the loss of their palace at Ondjiva in Angola, and problematizes a sense of place in many ways, relating to their bifurcated older space, the loss of capitals at Ondjiva and Oihole and the graves of their former kings. I argue that Omhedi is considered to have a sense of place for the Kwanyama population and as it provides a link to the abolished kingship. But it also means that they have reconciled with the history of problematic big headmen who lived at Omhedi. Yi-Fu Tuan has pointed out that a sense of place is often used in relation to those characteristics that make a place special or unique, as well as to those that foster a sense of authentic human attachment and belonging.⁹⁹ Such characteristics are corroborated by oral testimonies that maintain that there are still a number of items at Omhedi that people identify with Mandume's memory and the

⁹⁶ Interviews with Ndahafa ya Kakonda, Omalyata, Onuno, 07.02.2009, and Vilho ya Tschilongo, Ongwediva, 18.06.2010.

⁹⁷ Interviews with Ndahafa ya Kakonda, Omalyata, Onuno, 07.02.2009, Lucas Shinedima, Onuno, 02.08.2008 and Vatilifa Hangula, Okelemba, 04.2.2009.

⁹⁸ Interviews with Ndahafa ya Kakonda, Omalyata, Onuno, 07.2.2009, Lucas Shinedima, Onuno, 02.08.2008 and Vatilifa Hangula, Okelemba, 04.2.2009; Vilho ya Tschilongo, Ongwediva, 18.6.2010; Hinananye Nehova, Windhoek-West 30.01.2009 .

⁹⁹ Tuan, Y-F. *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (University of Minnesota Press, 1979), pp 3-7.

Kwanyama precolonial kingship. One of these items is *omwoongo wa Mandume* (Mandume's marula tree) at Omhedi, named after the king because he used to tie his horse to this tree when he visited Omhedi.

When I asked why Omhedi is significant enough to become the seat of Oukwanyama restored kingship, many people responded that Omhedi represents *omundilo woshilongo shaUkwanyama* - the sacred ('tribal') fire for the Kwanyama - as the person who made space for King Mandume lived there, it was his seat. Other respondents also claim that Omhedi as a place was chosen as the seat of Oukwanyama kingship because *eumbo lohamba kwali* - it was a royal homestead, as it belonged to members of King Mandume's family, coming from the same clans – *ovakwanangobe* and *ovakwanaidi*. Moreover, Mandume used to visit Ndjukuma at Omhedi, so the place still has his presence. It is through such appropriations that Omhedi represents the connections with Kwanyama royalty and thus *Ohamba* Martha Nelumbu now resides there. Marcel Hunziker et al argue that an important use of landscape is a physical "space" for living, but also as a "place" with its meanings and contributions to societal identity. They emphasise that place identity is a particular element contributing to sense of place. Furthermore, landscape plays a role in psychological restoration, a notion which bridges the approaches that treat landscape as space and those which treat it as place.¹⁰⁰ This refers to a sense of nostalgia that many Kwanyama people have for a precolonial past, and the Omhedi landscape serves that purpose. In analyzing these sentiments against the construction of Omhedi as a space and place, this highlights a sense of identity and belonging that many Kwanyama people have towards Omhedi in default of any site with deeper legitimation or authenticity.

On a more abstract level, Andrew Merrifield's study of 'Place and Space: A Lefebvrian Reconciliation'¹⁰¹ invites us into a dialectical interpretation of place, arguing that much of the confusion in the literature on place stems from its failure to engage with the ontological nature of place. This alludes to the fact that narratives about how histories of a place such as Omhedi are projected onto a landscape, fail to connect with how people in their sense of existence look at and make meaning of a place. Merrifield proposes that a reassertion of an explicit dialectical mode of argumentation can make a major contribution to the goal that has hitherto effectively eluded geographers: that of reconciling the way in which experience is lived and acted out in place, and how this relates to, and is embedded in, political and economic practices that are operative over

¹⁰⁰ Hunziker, M. Bachecker, M. and Hartig, T. 'Space and Place – Two Aspects of the Human Landscape Relationship' in Keinast, F. et.al (eds) *A Changing World, Challenges for Landscape Research* (Springer, 2007), pp 47-62.

¹⁰¹ Merrifield, A. 'Place and Space: A Lefebvrian Reconciliation', in *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, New Series*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (1993), pp 516-531.

broader spatial scales.¹⁰² He further argues that Lefebvre is adamant that this overall process of space and place production is a deeply political event, as space internalizes conflictual and contradictory social forces and social conflict is thereby ‘inscribed in place’. This conflict arises from the inextricable tension between the usage and appropriation of place for social purposes and the domination of place (and space).¹⁰³

I concur with Lefebvre’s argument that the process of space and place production internalises conflictual and contradictory social forces and that social conflict is thereby ‘inscribed in place’, but I do not agree that this is a deeply political event. This is because the production of a place or space such as Omhedi was and is a political process, and not an event. A place is marked by dynamism, it is not static as a short-term event would imply. Omhedi’s different social as well as political histories and meanings are inscribed on its landscape over a period of years as it takes on a new resident and thus a different meaning. There are many layers to the making of Omhedi as a place because although oral testimonies stress its importance based on the fact that it became prominent because of Ndjukuma who made space for King Mandume, the place later became a site of many activities as discussed throughout the thesis. Even before Mandume’s death, Omhedi was associated with white colonial authority as it is understood that Hahn visited Ndjukuma at Omhedi, at the time when he was set on dividing Mandume’s support and destroying remaining loyalties of the headmen to the kingship.¹⁰⁴ This marked the political tension between king and headmen as the latter were offered increased authority in Oukwanyama in exchange for loyalty to the colonial administration.¹⁰⁵ After Mandume’s death, Omhedi became a lived space as Ndjukuma built it to be one of the greatest homesteads and conducted tours in its intricate passages. And although he was already a prominent and wealthy man, he became more so under the new dispensation – as he became senior headman under South African indirect rule.

During Nehemia’s and Gabriel Kautwima’s residence at Omhedi, it again represented another segment, for staged ethnographic tours and photography, and later a contested site of conflict during the war of liberation. They all left their imprints on the place. Thus, as a space, Omhedi internalizes conflictual and contradictory social forces and conflict which are thereby ‘inscribed in place’. I further argue that a place is not merely an abstract space: it is the terrain where basic social practices - consumption, enjoyment, tradition, self-identification, solidarity, social support and

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Hayes, P. ‘The Abyss of Transition’,?? p 15.

¹⁰⁵ Hayes, P. ‘The Abyss of Transition’,?? pp 18-19.

social reproduction, etc. - are lived out.¹⁰⁶ It is however evident that the decision to choose Omhedi was pointedly based on the history of Ndjukuma who had made space for King Mandume at Oihole and moved to Omhedi, thus the idea is to follow that line of legitimacy and the old history. As I argued earlier in this thesis, Ndjukuma had more legitimacy than the other two headmen. It is however important to examine how the Kwnayama Traditional Authority edited out the bad days with Kautwima especially his involvement in the public floggings that received domestic and international attention. Although Omhedi was regarded as illegitimate because of its 'colonial' association during colonial rule and liberation struggle respectively, Omhedi was a big house of law for Oukwanyama, it was the centre for many activities, and all headmen had their seats and gathered there for meetings, especially during Ndjukuma and Nehemia's tenure. It is more representative of the history of the Kwanyama kingship than any other place within the Namibian border, thus I believe it was chosen for all these reasons.

Conclusion

The collapse of apartheid and the attainment of independence for the Namibian people in 1990 has triggered a seeming resuscitation of old identities and renewed emphasis on the reinstallation of past kingships. In an analysis concerned not just with the colonial legacy in Namibia, this chapter problematized postcolonial attempts to reform the ethnic question in the context of broader politics and a centralized Namibian state committed to nation-building, as the bid for ethnic recognition involves some contradiction: it is simultaneously unifying and fragmenting. The restoration of the Oukwanyama kingship served as a platform for debates in contemporary Namibian politics about the government's recognition of the kingship. This was linked to alleged anxieties and common perceptions regarding Kwanyama dominance over other ethnic groups in the country, in terms of political influence and populace. I argue that the anxieties about the Kwanyama as a group are attached to the politics of the Namibia/Angola border which cuts Oukwanyama into two parts. Common perceptions regarding Kwanyama dominance over other ethnic groups in the country, in terms of political influence and demographic density, has influenced the need to keep them separated, as there is fear about the biggest group that was fragmented by colonialism actually re-emerging. The conclusion of this chapter is that central government prefers the Ovakwanyama to remain fragmented because as long as they are split then their potential dominance is undermined.

¹⁰⁶ Merrifield, A. 'Place and Space', pp. 516-531.

Most interesting, however, are the number of calls for traditional authorities from other groups in Namibia without a strong tradition of centralized kingships, most probably in a bid for identity construction and legitimation of authority. It seems that the struggle for many ethnic groups to have their leaders recognised could be to exert authority and to have access to land and other resources. President Pohamba points to shortcomings in the existing proliferation of traditional authorities in the country, criticising the drive for disunity between communities of common descent and authority. I argue that this proliferation can be attributed to the effects of apartheid and Bantustan policy as well as postcolonial national policies. This is because I believe the South African segregation policy has left lasting ramifications, such as the call for ethnic separatism which produces artificial categories and dominance of certain groups over others.



Conclusion

This dissertation has explored the critical role played by African intermediary headmen from the former precolonial Oukwanyama kingdom in northern Namibia in the construction of indirect rule, by examining the history of one place of important local power, Omhedi. This narrative of history is focussed around successive Kwanyama *omalenga* or headmen, who played a significant role in shaping colonial rule. Such a layer of intermediate power has been substantially overlooked by many scholars when exploring indirect rule and its incorporation of decentralized and centralized Ovambo powers into the colonial state. Thus, the analysis permits these important Kwanyama figures to become more salient in the history of Ovambo more broadly. The spotlight is put on Omhedi over the period of a century, in order to get a sense of the genesis of this intermediate stratum.

Omhedi was chosen as a site of research over other headmen's places because it served as a central point for most of the colonial administration's activities in alliance with the headmen that resided there, though it was not the only site of headmen's influence. In reconstructing political authority in Ovamboland the South African colonial administration set up a Council of Headmen consisting of eight senior-headmen in Oukwanyama. These headmen assumed jurisdictions which were smaller than Mandume's had been, but larger and more legitimized than any previous *omalenga*. The intermediaries were supposed to exert authority over ordinary people to maintain law and order, mobilize migrant labour, collect taxes and preserve selected rituals, for instance *efundula*, the female initiation ceremony.

It emerged that Omhedi gained prominence firstly because a senior headman Ndjukuma ya Shilengifa, who normally resided at Oihole on the southern side of the border, was uprooted from Oihole to make space for King Mandume ya Ndemufayo. Omhedi is thus marked by the displacement of the Oukwanyama kingship. But Omhedi then became central in the second half of the 20th century when Ndjukuma was succeeded by Nehemia Shoovaleka. During Nehemia Shoovaleka's term, Omhedi stood forth as a representational space for photography, tours by South African officials, and showcasing of cultural events such as *efundula* (female initiation). This indicated an element of collaboration between the headmen and colonial administration as the latter influenced the Council of Headmen to manipulate tradition and legitimized Omhedi through the practices that took place there.

Omhedi as a space was created rather sensationally to emphasize the power, authority and wealth of the headmen. At a time when indirect rule was being articulated as official policy, the colonial state staged itself through public spectacle such as the *omaludi eengobe* cattle festival, *efundula* female initiation, and other festivals. ‘Cocky’ Hahn, the Native Commissioner for Ovamboland from 1920-1946, set up Omhedi as the crucial site for visitors to Ovambo to photograph ‘the native’, especially during this residence period of Nehemia Shoovaleka. Polygamy was repeatedly offered up to the camera because Nehemia had numerous wives, and photographers continued to visit this site even after Hahn’s retirement in 1946.

The photographic construction of Omhedi is highlighted because the images from there came to stand for the whole of colonial Ovamboland, and had generic effects. This was because of the unique accessibility that Omhedi offered to photographers, and the way its history as a place was entangled with the question of projecting an overall picture of indirect rule. This way, Omhedi was visualised for the purposes of indirect rule and generalized as symbolizing a generic Ovambo ‘culture’ through its headmen and Hahn’s representations. Omhedi also catered for *omaludi eengobe* cattle festival which was an annual event when cattle were brought back from the main areas of residence after grazing at outposts through the long dry season. A deeper exploration of women’s productive roles and the cattle economy in Ovambo allows us to deconstruct the colonial image made so powerfully by Hahn at Omhedi.

Analyses of the productive and symbolic aspects of photography, polygamy and pastoralism in Oukwanyama and Omhedi show the role of women in the construction of tradition at Omhedi and how they were represented by the colonial administration. Photographs highlight certain things such as the empirical contrast between the invisibility of Ovambo women in most colonial documentation and their consistent visibility in colonial photographs of the period. This was possible because Omhedi was an ideal place through which indirect rule was effected and as such, the preservation of certain customs and aspects of culture (such as polygyny) was highly desirable if not required.

Omhedi was also central with regards to the contract labour system because Ovambo chiefs and headmen were expected to support the recruitment of young Ovambo men in the contract labour system and this specifically served the colonial administration. The headmen and chiefs teamed up with the colonial officials for their own interests rather than their own people. Ovambo chiefs or headmen’s authority was requested when a migrant worker

‘misbehaved’ and needed to be disciplined. Normally when the workers’ contracts ended or were no longer considered economically productive, they were sent back to Ovamboland. Consequently, the conditions of travel, housing and living conditions, medical inspections, unnatural classifications of the fittest, and the systematic control endured by Ovambo migrant workers encouraged resistance against the colonial labour system.

This relationship between headmen and colonial administration, which initially made the recruitment of Ovambo young men into migrant labour easier while maintaining customary law and customary land tenure, was again expected to resolve ‘detrribalisation’ by repatriating migrant workers after their contracts. In this way, the colonial system used traditional leaders to control the Ovambo migrant workers which increasingly led to the latter’s disillusionment with their leaders. There was fear that detrribalisation would upset the delicate balance of Ovambo societies and the ongoing relations between colonial officials and Ovambo traditional authorities, which was attained through the institution of indirect rule and allowed colonial administrators to operate within the structures of kinship and councils of headmen. However, the Ovambo men and women adopted and appropriated aspects of modernity in their own economic and social routines and in their political consciousness. The way in which Ovambo men set about making sense of the whole modern process was mediated by an existing set of motivations, which profoundly suggested a disillusionment with their traditional leaders and headmen. The discourses of ‘detrribalisation,’ migrant labour, money and western commodities, were deeply linked to the colonial process, which divided the urban from the rural, and the industrial centre and the ‘native’ reserve.

Omheddi furthermore featured greatly in the 1970s – 1980s when the liberation struggle waged by guerrillas of SWAPO intensified, because the war in the north heightened Omheddi’s central importance as a centre where hearings and beatings took place. The colonial administration together with the Council of Headmen exercised a ritualized public violence – public flogging - whose main purpose was the ostentatious display of power. The majority of Ovambo men and women were arrested by the South African police in the middle of August for being members or sympathisers of SWAPO and DEMKOP, and held in detention without charges. However, in October-November they were ‘released’ but immediately handed over to the ‘tribal’ authorities. The floggings were carried out with the broad rib of the *makalani* palm, where in some cases men were ordered to strip for the beatings, while the women were told to lift their dresses and to crouch over stools. The

jurisdiction of the 'traditional' authorities was derived from the South African government and as a result gave them the authority to hand out these sentences of public floggings. Considerable public condemnation was propagated by domestic as well as international media. The use of public space for public floggings served to enforce fear and power for both the South African authorities and 'traditional' authorities. The colonial and 'traditional' authorities were set on legitimating their power and authority, but the floggings reflected the narrowing or shrinking down of culture as their punishments became standardised and bureaucratized. The last precolonial King Mandume in fact exercised a variety of punishments for different offences, but the headmen's punishment was being narrowed down to the single mode of public flogging, which was a particular interpretation of prior disciplinary practices and something of a 'reinvention'.

Headmen at this time also used women's 'bodies' to legitimate their rule by treating them as labour units. This is because by sentencing the four nurses who were flogged to additional hard labour and all kinds of domestic work at Omhedi, Kautwima engaged in a re-enactment of polygyny and in a sense treated them like traditionalised wives. It suggests that Kautwima wanted to re-traditionalise educated women, because as nurses, they were becoming modernised. They were obviously punished for being educated, modern, independent and mobile.

Sandbags and trenches were dug around homesteads of headmen Vilho Weyulu at Ohaingu, Gabriel Katamba at Onamhinda and Gabriel Kautwima at Omhedi. Sandbags formed part of a larger military infrastructure as they surrounded military bases, air bases and were filled by South African conscripts.¹ These were filled with sand and often used to provide the headmen with protection at both the front and rear of the trenches that were dug around their homesteads, and were generally stacked some two or three feet deep. Such sandbags afforded these homesteads with effective protection from PLAN rifle-fire, bullets and shrapnel as well as from the effects of artillery shellfire. Thus they were used to build and reinforce protective walls around collaborative headmen. Omhedi became a target for SWAPO attacks, and many stories abound about the terror of those people who lived in its proximity.

¹ Liebenberg, J. and Hayes, P. *Bush of Ghosts*, p 9.

This thesis has posed key questions about political legitimacy at Omhedi, a site of frozen tradition but riddled with contradictions. This is because a place that was considered illegitimate during the colonial period and nationalist struggle is now made legitimate as the current Kwanyama Queen resides there. Evidence shows that the Kwanyama queen is placed at Omhedi because it is considered to have a sense of place for the Kwanyama population, due to its links with the abolished kingship. It also suggests that they have ‘reconciled’ with the history of problematic big headmen who lived at Omhedi. There are still a number of items at Omhedi that people identify with Mandume’s memory and the Kwanyama precolonial kingship. One of these items is *omwoongo wa Mandume* (Mandume’s marula tree) at Omhedi, named after the king because he used to tie his horse to this tree when he visited Omhedi. Omhedi represents *omundilo woshilongo shaUkwanyama*, the sacred (‘tribal’) fire for the Kwanyama, as the person who made space for king Mandume lived there, it was his residential seat.

Other respondents also claim that Omhedi as a place was chosen as the seat of the Oukwanyama kingship because it was *eumbo lohamba kwali* (a royal homestead). It belonged to members of king Mandume’s family through the same related clans, the *ovakwanangobe* and *ovakwanaidi*. Moreover, Mandume used to visit Ndjukuma at Omhedi, so the place still carries his presence. It is through such appropriations that the *Ohamba* Martha Nelumbu resides at Omhedi and it represents the seat of Kwanyama royalty at the present time. This highlights a sense of identity and belonging that many Kwanyama people have towards Omhedi, in default of any deeper legitimation or authenticity. As a space, Omhedi internalizes conflictual and contradictory social forces, which are thereby ‘inscribed in place’. It is evident that the decision to choose Omhedi was pointedly based on the history of Ndjukuma – who had made space for King Mandume at Oihole and moved to Omhedi – thus, the idea is to follow that line of legitimacy and the older strand of history. As I argued earlier in this thesis, Ndjukuma had more legitimacy than the other two headmen. Although Omhedi was regarded as illegitimate because of its ‘colonial’ association during colonial rule and the liberation struggle respectively, Omhedi was a big house of law for Oukwanyama, and was the centre for many activities where all headmen had their seats and gathered there for meetings, especially during Ndjukuma and Nehemia’s tenure. It is more representative of the history of the Kwanyama kingship than any other place within the Namibian border, thus I believe it was chosen for all these reasons.

The restoration of the OuKwanyama kingship has served as a platform for debates in contemporary Namibian politics about the government's recognition of kingship. But in this case it was linked to alleged anxieties and common perceptions regarding Kwanyama dominance over other ethnic groups in the country, in terms of political influence and demography. I argue that the anxieties about the Kwanyama as a group are attached to the politics of the Namibia/Angola border which cuts Oukwanyama into two parts. Common perceptions regarding Kwanyama's dominance over other ethnic groups in the country, in terms of political influence and size of populace has influenced the need to keep them separated, as there is fear about the biggest fragmented group re-emerging. An implication of the last chapter of the thesis is that central government is at ease that the Ovakwanyama are still fragmented and remain fragmented because as long as they are split then their dominance is undermined.

Ohamba Martha Nelumbu is a sign of Kwanyama female authority within the dynamics of the Kwanyama kinship system that is matrilineal. This question of women leaders as negotiated through the institution of chieftaincy in postcolonial Africa follows previous discussions on gender interactions in the thesis. This last chapter foregrounded how female power in postcolonial Namibia can be located in opportunistic ways, by questioning how the politics of this restored kingship are gendered. I conclude however that Omhedi is considered to have a particular sense of place for the Kwanyama population as it does provide a link to the abolished kingship. It has hosted three prominent Kwanyama men. Now Omhedi is feminized in ways that it never was before. But some questions remain. Is a woman leader for Oukwanyama in some sense 'convenient' for central government, given that women are considered relatively harmless and less influential? Is *Ohamba* Martha Nelumbu actually able to exercise her own authority and communicate about her own position? Perhaps the future of Omhedi will provide some answers.

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