

The Khwe and West Caprivi before Namibian independence: Matters of land, labour, power and alliance

Gertrud Boden

Abstract

This article outlines the pre-independence past of the Khwe in West Caprivi, one of Namibia's San populations whose history is yet to be written. Besides consolidating material from previous publications, it also presents fresh insights based on archival and oral sources. While the trans-regional networks and power relations, in which the Khwe participated before the onset of colonialism, remain blurred due to scarce source material, the article will show that the German colonial power, while not profoundly affecting the daily lives of West Caprivi residents, nevertheless had significant and long-lasting effects through the definition of the boundaries, which, although permeable for local residents, became crucial in rendering activities illegal, delineating territories of refuge and marking out areas affected by conflicts in the neighbouring countries. During the first decades of South African administration, the situation on the ground was not much different from that under German 'control'. From 1940 onwards, however, the state intervened in local interethnic relations as well as in the economic lives of the Khwe in a number of ways: by making West Caprivi first a livestock free territory, then a nature conservation area and finally a military no-access zone. In addition the state had an impact by promoting the recruitment of Khwe men for mine labour, installing native guards and Khwe leaders, courting the Khwe as useful people and hiring Khwe as soldiers for the South African Defense Force. While meant to make available historic detail in the first place, the article will also demonstrate how, over the decades, the categorization of the Khwe as a hybrid or mixed population was used in multiple and contradictory ways in order to serve different political agendas.

Introduction

In independent Namibia, the Khwe are usually defined as part of Namibia's San population.¹ They speak a language of the Khoe (formerly: 'Central Khoisan') language

¹ The Khwe (also: Kxoé; the spelling used in this article is according to "The Penduka Declaration on the Standardisation of Ju and Khoe Languages" decided upon by San representatives in April 2001) are referred to by a number of different ethnonyms, not all of them denoting the language community as a whole but only particular regional subgroups. In the sources used for this article Khwe people were called Hukwe (Franz Seiner, "Ergebnisse einer Bereisung des Gebietes zwischen Okavango und Sambesi (Caprivi- zipfel) in den Jahren 1905 und 1906", *Mitteilungen aus den Deutschen Schutzgebieten*, 1909, 22: 1-111), Barrakwenge, Barakwengu, Mbarakwengo, Barakwengas (archival files of the South West Africa Administration) or Zama (António de Almeida, "The Black Bushmen (Zama or Kwengo)", in: Phillip. V. Tobias & John Blacking, (eds.), *Bushmen and other Non-Bantu Peoples of Angola. Three lectures by António de Almeida*,

family and belong to the so-called Northern Khwe Bushmen.² In the past, the larger Khwe settlement area extended into south-east Angola and south-west Zambia and it still extends into East Caprivi and northern Botswana.³ West Caprivi lies at the heart of this wider Khwe settlement area. It is the narrow strip of Namibian territory between the Okavango River in the west and the Kwando River in the east, the international borders with Angola in the north and Botswana in the south.⁴

This article focuses on West Caprivi as a stretch of land and the Khwe in West Caprivi as a group of people. This is due to the scope of research underlying this article.⁵ Therefore, the histories, opinions and attitudes of non-Khwe residents of West Caprivi as

Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press, 1965: 13-22) respectively. The SADF called the Khwe from West Caprivi Baraquena and those from Angola Kazamba (Ian Uys, *Bushman Soldiers. Their Alpha and Omega*, Germiston, Fortress, 1993: 59). In the contemporary local context of West Caprivi, Khwe originating from Angola were either referred to as Buma-Khwe (Buma being both the name for an area in southeastern Angola and the term for 'north') or Phutu-Khwe (Phutu being the Khwe name for the Portuguese). The Khwe on the Okavango were called ||Xom-Khwe (||xom means 'river') and those living in the dryer eastern parts of West Caprivi were either called ||Xo-Khwe (||xo means 'dry'), Ts'ao-Khwe (*tc'áó* is the Khwe term for 'bush') or Buga-Khwe (*búgá* is the ||Ani-Khwe term for 'bush'). Buga-Khwe is also the ethnonym most often used by the Khwe in Botswana (Michael Taylor, *Life, Land and Power. Contesting Development in Northern Botswana*, unpubl. Ph.D. thesis, University of Edinburgh, School of Social and Political Science, Department of Social Anthropology, 2000: 309). For more details on the different ethnonyms used for the Khwe or for Khwe subgroups see Oswin Köhler, "Die Khoe-sprachigen Buschmänner der Kalahari. Ihre Verbreitung und Gliederung (mit einer Karte)", in: *Forschungen zur allgemeinen und regionalen Geographie. Kölner Geographische Arbeiten (Festschrift K. Kayser)*, Wiesbaden, Steiner, 1971: 371-411, Matthias Brenzinger, "Moving to Survive: Kxoe Communities in Arid Lands", in: Mathias Schladt, (ed.), *Language, Identity, and Conceptualization among the Khoisan*, Köln, Köppe, 1998: 321-358 and Gertrud Boden, *Prozesse sozialen Wandels vor dem Hintergrund staatlicher Eingriffe. Eine Fallstudie zu den Khwe in West Caprivi/Namibia*, Ph. D. thesis, Universität zu Köln, 2005: 229 ff., 400 f. (<http://kups.ub.uni-koeln.de/volltexte/2005/1595/>). For more details on identity discourses and politics between and among the subgroups see Boden, *Prozesse*; 262 ff., 342 ff.

² Alan Barnard, *Hunters and Herders of Southern Africa: A Comparative Ethnography of the Khoisan People*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992: 116.

³ Brenzinger, "Moving": map on page 329, 342 f.

⁴ This piece of land is also often called 'western Caprivi'. Such a geographical denomination is, however, misleading since the stretch of land between the Okavango and Kwando Rivers is neither identical with the western part of the 'Caprivi Zipfel' (Caprivi Strip) added to the then German South West African territory in 1890, nor with the western part of the current Caprivi Region of Namibia. Unlike the Caprivi Strip it does not include the area between 21° East and the Okavango River. It does, however, cover the area between the Okavango River and 22°30' East, which no longer belongs to the Caprivi Region since 1998, when the borders between the Kavango and Caprivi Regions were redefined. The area between the two rivers was called "(West) Caprivi Game Park" between 1963 and 2000, when it was upgraded to form part of the newly declared Bwabwata National Park.

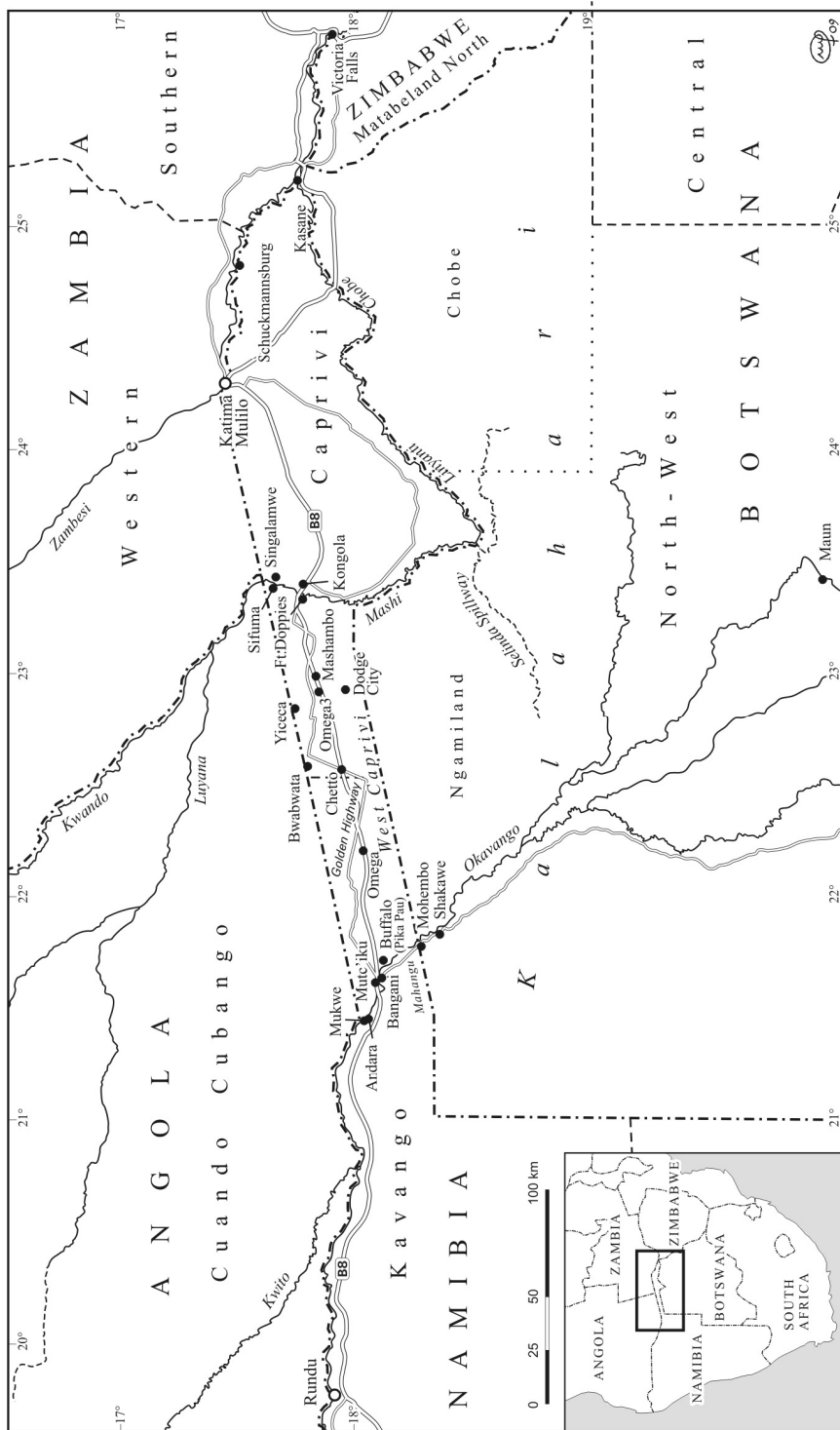
⁵ This article is based on the introductory chapter to a thesis on social change among the Khwe in West Caprivi (Boden, *Prozesse*). Research was carried out between 1998 and 2003 and was funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG) within the scope of the special research unit SFB 389 ACACIA (Arid Climate Adaptation and Cultural Innovation in Africa) at the University of Cologne. I would like to thank the DFG for funding, Monika Feinen for drawing the map as well as Martina Gockel-Frank, Robert J. Gordon and especially the anonymous reviewers for comments on previous versions of this paper.

well as those of other Khwe subgroups in Angola, Zambia and Botswana have to remain excluded.⁶ Archival sources examined are those in the National Archives of Namibia on the San and on West Caprivi respectively. The oral sources are biographical interviews recorded with Khwe individuals in West Caprivi with a focus on former settlement patterns, relations between kin, group and subgroup identities as well as political institutions in order to track social change as a product of Khwe coping with and locally managing state interventions.⁷ The time period covered has been limited to the pre-independence period. The multifaceted political dynamics and developments in West Caprivi after Namibian independence have been dealt with in more detail by a number of authors. All of them stress the extent to which colonial portrayals of peoples feature in current political discourses.⁸

⁶ The author is fully aware that for a more complete history writing on the Khwe, oral and archival research in these countries is still pending. She is also fully aware that for an impartial historiography the accounts of present-day and former non-Khwe residents of the wider area would also have to be included.

⁷ See also Gertrud Boden, "How History Crosses the Threshold of the Domestic Sphere – Persistence and Change in Khwe Residential Units", in: Olaf Bubenzer, Andreas Bolten & Frank Darius, (eds.), *Atlas of Cultural and Environmental Change in Arid Africa*, Köln, Heinrich-Barth-Institut, 2007: 190-193, id., "'The young people know that they can do what they want. They learn it at school.' Making use of law and tradition in negotiating inter-generational relationships by Khwe people in West Caprivi/Namibia", in Erdmute Alber, Sjaak van der Geest & Susan Whyte, (eds.), *Generations in Africa. Connections and Conflicts*, Münster, LIT, 2008: 113-136. I have referred to excerpts from interview-logs anonymously, because I was not able to gain permission to publish individual statements in every case. Therefore only the initials of the interview partners and the dates of the interviews are provided.

⁸ Cf. Ina Orth, *Landrechte und Identität bei südafrikanischen Wildbeutern: Eine Fallstudie zu den Kxoe in West Caprivi (Namibia)*, unpubl. M.A. thesis, University of Cologne, Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, 1999; Silke Felton, "We Want our own Chief. San Communities Battle against their Image", in: Debie LeBeau, & Robert J. Gordon, (eds.), *Challenges for Anthropology in the 'African Renaissance'. A Southern African Contribution*, Windhoek, University of Namibia Press, 2000: 55-67; Gertrud Boden, "'Caught in the Middle'. Impacts of State Decisions and Armed Conflicts on Khwe Economy and Ethnicity between 1998 and 2002", in: Thekla Hohmann, (ed.), *San and the State. Contesting Land, Development, Identity and Representation*, Köln, Köppe, 2003: 161-204; Ina Orth, "Identity as Dissociation: Khwe Struggle for Land in West Caprivi", in: Thekla Hohmann, (ed.), *San and the State. Contesting Land, Development, Identity and Representation*, Köln, Köppe, 2003: 121-159; Karine Rousset, *To be Khwe Means to Suffer: Local Dynamics, Imbalances and Contestations in the Caprivi Game Park*, unpubl. M.A. Thesis in Practical Anthropology. University of Cape Town, Department of Social Anthropology, 2003; Julie J. Taylor, *Land, Resources and Visibility: The Origins and Implications of Land Mapping in Namibia's West Caprivi*, unpubl. MA thesis, Oxford University, St. Anthony's College, 2005; Julie J. Taylor, Carol Murphy, et al., "Land and Natural Resource Mapping by San Communities and NGOs: Experiences from Namibia", *Participatory Learning and Action*, 2006, 54: 79-84; Julie J. Taylor. & Joe Tagg, "PGIS and Mapping for Conservation in Namibia", *Participatory Learning and Action*, 2006, 55: 79-86; Julie J. Taylor, *Naming the Land: Identity, Authority and Environment in Namibia's West Caprivi*, unpubl. Ph.D. thesis, University of Oxford, St. Anthony's College, 2007; id., "Rendering the Land Visible", *Cultural Survival Quarterly*, 2007, 31 (4): 10-15; id., "Naming the Land: San Counter-mapping in West Caprivi, Namibia". *Geoforum*, 2008, 39 (5): 1766-1775; id., "Post-Apartheid 'Tribalism'? Ethnicity and Discourses of San Subversion in West Caprivi, Namibia", *African Studies*, 2008, 67 (3): 315-338.



Historiography focusing on San populations has only recently become a matter of academic concern.⁹ This was an effect of the historical critique of earlier academic representations of San societies and cultures as timeless, a-historic and primordial, a critique voiced in the Kalahari debate of the 1980s and 1990s.¹⁰ The life of the Khwe in West Caprivi before independence, is even less known compared to those of other San for mainly two reasons: first, they did not fit the image of 'pure' San or Bushmen in the views of either physical or cultural anthropologists and secondly, they lived in the geographical isolation of West Caprivi, which at first was difficult to access because of its remoteness and later because of its deliberate isolation in order to hide military activities of the South African Defense Force (SADF). While cultural anthropologists have done a lot of research on other San groups, the Khwe share the fate of most San of being excluded from historiography.

The lack of information on the Khwe's role in the past not only applies to Namibian history writing in general but also to those publications which explicitly deal with the histories of either Caprivi or the San. Fisch gives an overview of the history of the Caprivi Strip during the German colonial period based on sources in the National Archives of Namibia.¹¹ Her work focussed on the eastern part of the Strip because the sole German administration post at Schuckmannsburg was located there and also because West Caprivi was only of minor interest to the Germans (see below). Reports published during the German period itself are those of the geographer and race biologist Franz Seiner, who travelled through Caprivi in 1905 and 1906 and those of the administrators at Schuckmannsburg, Streitwolf and von Frankenberg respectively.¹² Kangumu deals with the period between 1939 and 1980 and concentrates on eastern Caprivi as well.¹³

⁹ Cf. Robert J. Gordon, *The Bushman Myth: The Making of a Namibian Underclass*, Colorado & Oxford, Westview Press, 1992; Robert J. Gordon & Stuart S. Douglas, *The Bushman Myth: The Making of a Namibian Underclass*, Oxford, Westview Press, 2nd edition, 2000; James Suzman, *Things from the Bush: A Contemporary History of the Omaheke Bushmen*, Basel, Schlettwein, 2000; Dieckmann, Ute, *Haillom in the Etosha Region: A History of Colonial Settlement, Ethnicity and Nature Conservation*, Basel, Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2007.

¹⁰ Cf. Edwin N. Wilmsen, *Land Filled with Flies: A Political Economy of the Kalahari*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1989; Gordon, *Bushman*; Suzman, *Things*.

¹¹ Maria Fisch, *Der Caprivizipfel während der deutschen Zeit 1890-1914*, Köln, Köppe, 1996.

¹² Cf. Franz Seiner, "Der Caprivizipfel. Erlebnisse mit den Eingeborenen", *Kolonie und Heimat*, 1909, 24: 4-5; id., "Die wirtschaftsgeographischen und politischen Verhältnisse des Caprivizipfels", *Zeitschrift für Kolonialpolitik, Kolonialrecht und Kolonialwirtschaft*, 1909, 11: 417-465; id., "Die Buschmänner des Okavango- und Sambesigebietes der Nord-Kalahari", *Globus*, 1910, 22: 341-345; 23: 357-360; id., "Beobachtungen an den Bastard-Buschleuten der Nord-Kalahari", *Mitteilungen der anthropologischen Gesellschaft Wien*, 1913, 43: 311-324; Kurt Streitwolf, "Reise von Sesheke nach Andara im Jahre 1909", *Deutsches Kolonialblatt*, 20: 554-556; id., *Der Caprivizipfel*, Berlin, Süsserott, 1911; Viktor von Frankenberg, "Vom Sambesi zum Okavango durch das deutsche Hukwefeld, Juni bis August 1911", *Mitteilungen aus den deutschen Schutzgebieten*, 1919, 32: 33-35.

¹³ Kangumu Bennett Kangumu, *A Forgotten Corner of Namibia: Aspects of the History of the Caprivi Strip, 1939-1980*, unpubl. M.A. thesis, Department of Historical Studies, Cape Town, University of Cape Town, 2000.

Historical sketches of West Caprivi are available from the sociolinguist Brenzinger and the social anthropologists Orth and most recently, Taylor.¹⁴ Uys, who is a former member of the South African Army offers a chronological account for the 1970s and 1980s in West Caprivi, put together in a collage format, ideologically biased and representing the SADF as a kind of development agency for the San.¹⁵ Background information on the histories of the wider area are also to be found in the historiographies of neighbouring regions, the oral traditions of other groups¹⁶ or in works assigning only a marginal role to the Khwe among other San.¹⁷ Writing about the Khwe from the late 1950s onwards was for more than three decades the work of a sole researcher, i.e. linguist and ethnographer Oswin Köhler. As an ethnologist in the service of the government from 1954 to 1957, Köhler recorded ethnographic and demographic data in several districts of the territory¹⁸ and probably obtained the “impeccable conservative credentials” researchers needed for research clearances under the Apartheid regime and, certainly even more so, for research in the immediate neighborhood of a military no-access zone.¹⁹ In his main publication, *Die Welt der Kxoé-Buschleute*, which claims an encyclopedic scope, he focuses on the documentation of those aspects of Khwe life and culture which he considered to be on the verge of extinction. Published so far are four parts in three volumes, the last of them posthumous.²⁰ The topics covered in the published volumes are a description of the

¹⁴ Brenzinger, “Moving”; id., “The Khwe History – A Struggle for Recognition. Report to the Legal Assistance Centre Windhoek”, University of Cologne, Institute for African Studies, 2003; Orth, *Landrechte*, Taylor, *Naming*: 98 ff.; id., “Differentiating ‘Bushmen’ from ‘Bantus’: Identity Building in West Caprivi, Namibia, 1930-1989”, *Journal of African History*, forthcoming.

¹⁵ Uys, *Bushman Soldiers*.

¹⁶ E.g. Louis L. van Tonder, *The Hambukushu of Okavangoland. An Anthropological Study of a South-Western Bantu People in Africa*, unpubl. Ph.D. thesis, University Port Elisabeth, 1966; Thomas Tlou, *A History of Ngamiland 1750 – 1906*, Gaborone, Macmillan, 1985; Gabriele Sommer, *Ethnographie des Sprachwechsels. Sozialer Wandel und Sprachverhalten bei den Yeyi (Botswana)*, Köln, Köppe, 1995; Leif J. Fosse, *Negotiating the Nation in Local Terms: Ethnicity and Nationalism in Eastern Caprivi*, unpubl. M.A. thesis, University of Oslo, Department and Museum of Anthropology, 1996; Axel Fleisch & Wilhelm J. G. Möhlig, (eds.), *The Kavango Peoples in the Past. Local Historiographies from Northern Namibia*, Köln, Köppe, 2002.

¹⁷ Gordon, *Bushman*, Gordon & Douglas, *Bushman*.

¹⁸ Cf. Oswin Köhler, *A Study of the Karibib District (South West Africa)*, Pretoria, Government Printer, 1958; id., *A Study of the Gobabis District (South West Africa)*, Partly Based on Material of Günter Wagner, Pretoria, Government Printer, 1959; id., *A Study of the Grootfontein District (South West Africa)*, Pretoria, Government Printer, 1959; id., *A Study of the Okanhandja District (South West Africa)*, Pretoria, Government Printer, 1959; id., *A Study of the Omaruru District (South West Africa)*, Partly Based on Material of Günter Wagner, Pretoria, Department of Bantu Administration and Development, 1959; id., *A Study of the Otjiwarongo District (South West Africa)*, Pretoria, Government Printer, 1959.

¹⁹ Gordon, *Bushman*: 158.

²⁰ Oswin Köhler, *Die Welt der Kxoé-Buschleute im südlichen Afrika. Eine Selbstdarstellung in ihrer eigenen Sprache*. Mit Übersetzung, Anmerkungen und Kommentaren von Oswin Köhler. *Band I: Die Kxoé-Buschleute und ihre ethnische Umgebung*, Berlin, Reimer, 1989; id., *Band II: Grundlagen des Lebens. Wasser, Sammeln*

language together with texts on the Khwe and neighbouring populations (vol. 1), subsistence practices (vol. 2), material culture and descriptions of the homestead (vol. 3). All volumes present Khwe texts with German translations and a great number of annotations but very little analysis.²¹ In Köhler's publications, one can find a great amount of historical information, which is, however, often hidden in the numerous footnotes.²²

Like the histories of other population groups in Namibia and especially those of the different San groups, the history of the Khwe still has to be examined from different perspectives.²³ Future research will have to include the archival sources in Angola, Zambia and Botswana and as far as possible oral accounts from representatives of all parties involved. By presenting some material on actors and interests before independence, this article hopes to stimulate further research, which I consider a necessity for understanding contemporary relations between the Khwe and their fellow citizens as well as representations of past relationships.

My historical account follows a chronological line starting with short paragraphs on the pre-colonial and German colonial periods. They focus on land occupation and the relations between the different population groups since these issues are at the core of current contests for land use and leadership. The South African period is dealt with in sub-sections focusing on particular assets: land, labour, power and alliance. Under the headings (a) 'land matters' I analyze issues of veterinary intervention and nature conservation, (b) 'labour matters' I deal with Khwe mine labour, (c) 'power matters' I discuss the interference of the state in local leadership hierarchies, and (d) 'alliance

und Jagd. Bodenbau und Tierhaltung, Berlin, Reimer, 1991; id., *Band III: Materielle Ausrüstung: Werden und Wandel. Wohnplatz und Buschlager*, Berlin, Reimer, 1997.

²¹ For a more detailed account of Köhler's Khwe ethnography see Boden, *Prozesse*: 15 ff., for reviews of the volumes of his Khwe encyclopedia see Bernd Heine, "Rezension: Köhler, Oswin. 1989. Die Welt der Kxoé-Buschleute. Band 1: Die Kxoé-Buschleute und ihre ethnische Umgebung", *Afrikanistische Arbeitspapiere*, 1990, 22: 123; id., "Rezension: Köhler, Oswin. 1991. Die Welt der Kxoé-Buschleute. Band 2: Grundlagen des Lebens", *Afrikanistische Arbeitspapiere*, 1992, 29: 187-189; Mathias G. Guenther, "The World of the Kxoé Bushmen: A Review Article", *Anthropos*, 1991, 86 (1-3): 213-219; Rüdiger Schott, "Buchrezension: Köhler, Oswin: Die Welt der Kxoé-Buschleute. Band 1: Die Kxoé-Buschleute und ihre ethnische Umgebung", *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, 1991, 116: 292-295; Edwin N. Wilmsen, "Review of: Die Welt der Kxoé-Buschleute. Vol. 1 (1989) & 2 (1991)", *American Ethnologist*, 1993, 20 (3): 882-883; Thomas Widlok, "Buchrezension: Köhler, Oswin: Die Welt der Kxoé-Buschleute. Band 2: Grundlagen des Lebens (1991) und Band 3: Materielle Kultur. Werden und Wandel. Wohnplatz und Buschlager", *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, 1998, 123: 299-300. For a more detailed account of Köhler's life and work see Klaus Keuthmann, "Professor Oswin R. A. Köhler: A Retrospect on Thirty Years of Studying Language, Culture and History of Southern African Khoisan-Speaking Peoples", in: Rainer Voßen & Klaus Keuthmann, (eds.), *Contemporary Studies in Khoisan*, 2, Hamburg, Buske, 1986: 79-94.

²² Especially Oswin Köhler, "Tradition und Wandel bei den Kxoe-Buschmännern von Mutsiku", *Sociologus*, 1966, 16 (2): 122-140; id., *Kxoé-Buschleute*; id., *Ausrüstung*.

²³ Patricia Hayes, et al., (eds.), *Namibia under South African Rule. Mobility and Containment 1915-1946*, Oxford, Currey, 1998.

matters' I describe how the Khwe became regarded as a useful people for the South African Administration and involved in its military actions.²⁴

Each of these sections also reveals different ways of how ethnic categorizations of the Khwe as a hybrid or mixed population were used for different political and economic agendas by emphasizing or accentuating either their Bushman or Bantu qualities or both simultaneously.²⁵ Although nowadays usually classed with the (former) hunter-gatherers and indigenous minorities who are called 'San' or 'Bushmen' in southern Africa, the Khwe were in the past regarded as mongrels and less distinct from the surrounding Bantu-speaking populations, physically because of their dark skin colour and tall body height and culturally because they cultivated small gardens and owned small numbers of livestock or both.²⁶ They were therefore disqualified as a genuine Bushman race worthy of protection and of being described by ethnographers in terms of a traditional lifestyle.²⁷ Instead, they were acceptable as contract workers in the gold mines on the Witwatersrand in South Africa between the 1940s and 1960s based on the argument that they were Bantu-like enough for the purpose while during the same period they were allowed to stay in West Caprivi based on the argument that they were not like Bantu. Whereas the two aspects of their ethnic categorization as mixed were kept apart during this phase in order to comply with the different agendas they had to serve, the integrated Bushman and Bantu qualities became considered to be a perfect combination during the 1970s and 1980s when many Khwe men became soldiers in the SADF featuring as "crack soldiers" "combining the strength of the Black with the cunning of the Bushman".²⁸ The history of the Khwe in West Caprivi can thus serve as a prime example for the fluid, situational, volitional and dynamic character of ethnic identification or categorization.²⁹ For the Khwe, these different and partly inconsistent or

²⁴ "Land matters" is the title of a recent documentary film on Namibian farmers and farm workers by Thorsten Schütte from which I have borrowed the willfully ambiguous headings to these paragraphs.

²⁵ By using the term 'mixed' synonymously with 'hybrid' I try to escape the connotations attached to the latter term, the denigrating ones of racial theory as well as the celebrating ones of postcolonial theory. This article does not deal with Khwe ethnic identity but wants to point to some of the ambiguities and ramifications of their ethnic categorization by others in the course of history.

²⁶ Franz Seiner, "Beobachtungen und Messungen an Buschleuten. Eingeleitet durch Erläuterungen des Herrn P. Staudinger", *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, 1912, 44: 275-288; id., "Bastard-Buschleuten", Martin Gusinde, *Von gelben und schwarzen Buschmännern. Eine untergehende Altkultur im Süden Afrikas*, Graz, Akademische Verlagsanstalt, 1966; Siegfried Passarge, "Die Grundlinien im ethnographischen Bilde der Kalahari-Region", *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für Erdkunde zu Berlin*, 1905: 20-36; 68-88 (85); Joachim H. Wilhelm, "Die Hukwe (Mit einer Einführung, besonderen Anmerkungen, Schlußbetrachtung und 1 Karte von F.R. Lehmann)", *Jahrbuch des Museums für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig*, 1955, 13: 8-44 (23); Almeida, "Black Bushmen": 13.

²⁷ Gordon, *Bushman Myth*: 62; Barnard, *Hunters*: 121.

²⁸ John Sharp & Stuart S. Douglas, "Prisoners of their Reputation? The Veterans of the 'Bushman' Battalions in South Africa", in: Pippa Skotnes, (ed.), *Miscast: Negotiating the Presence of the Bushmen*, Cape Town, University of Cape Town Press, 1996: 323-329 (325); Uys, *Bushman Soldiers*: 4.

²⁹ E.g. Joane Nagel, "Constructing Ethnicity: Creating and Recreating Ethnic Identity and Culture", *Social Problems*, 1993, 41 (1): 152-176.

conflicting state agendas obviously provided specific opportunities for making their own choices. Khwe agency does, however, only rarely surface from the material presented here and is suggested as a topic for future investigation.

The precolonial setting

The settlement area of the Khwe before the onset of colonialism was bound by the Kwito, Zambezi, Linyanti and Okavango Rivers in what is nowadays southeastern Angola, southwestern Zambia, the Caprivi Strip in Namibia and northwestern Botswana.³⁰ West Caprivi was in the centre of this area and simultaneously lay on the periphery of the realms of several Bantu-speaking groups. Especially the Kwando-Mashi-Linyanti area was a home or travel-through area for several population groups.³¹

Following the oral tradition of Khwe in Botswana, the Yei were the first Bantu-speakers whom they met.³² According to Sommer, the Yei left the Mashi area around 1750 in order to settle in Ngamiland.³³ Also the Khwe in West Caprivi claimed a particularly close relationship with the Yei to whom they often collectively referred as their *ciróó*, the Khwe kin term for cross-cousins, describing the relationship as characterized by joking and support. Myths of origin hold that the Yei and the Khwe were created simultaneously at the beginning of time while other black people only arrived later.³⁴ Historical linguistics has some evidence for early contacts between Khwe and Bantu-speakers who nowadays live in northern Angola.³⁵

During the 18th century the Kwando-Mashi-Linyanti-area was inhabited by Kwangali, Mbunza, Gciriku and Sambyo, often subsumed under the label Kavango, who identify this area as their land of origin in oral traditions. They left it in the late 18th century, obviously reacting to the expansion of the Lozi.³⁶ The Mbukushu originally moved to the Kwando-Luyana area from southwest Zambia and later to the Okavango and further

³⁰ Seiner, "Verhältnisse"; Köhler, *Kxoe-Buschleute*; Brenzinger, "Moving".

³¹ Kwando, Mashi, Linyanti and Chobe are names for different sections of one and the same river which rises in the Angolan highlands and flows into the Zambezi at the point where the borders of Zambia, Zimbabwe, Botswana and Namibia meet (see map).

³² Taylor, *Life*: 204.

³³ Sommer, *Ethnographie*: 167.

³⁴ Boden, *Prozesse*: 285.

³⁵ Oswin Köhler, "Mythus, Glaube und Magie bei den Kxoe-Buschmännern. Bericht aus den Studienergebnissen 1959-1974", *Journal of the South West Africa Scientific Society*, 1979, 33: 9-50 (12); Köhler, *Grundlagen*: 541.

³⁶ Fleisch & Möhlig, *Kavango*; Köhler, *Kxoe-Buschleute*: 331,376.

south into Ngamiland.³⁷ They reached the Okavango in the late 18th century or around 1800.³⁸

In the late 19th century the Fwe, Yei, Mbukushu, Totela, Subiya and Khwe living on land today called Caprivi became subjects of the Lozi King Lewanika.³⁹ At the end of the 19th century, the Tswana had also reached southeast Angola from the south.⁴⁰ For the early 20th century, Seiner reported that the western part of the Caprivi strip was a border province of the Tswana empire while the eastern part was a border province of the Lozi, with both the Mbukushu and the Khwe being caught between them.⁴¹

Texts recorded by Köhler reveal that the Khwe fell prey to slave raids which in the 1830s had extended from the Angolan coast to the northern fringes of the Kalahari.⁴² The slave trade was dominated by the Mbundu people with the Mbari acting as their trading partners in southeast Angola. Mbwela people also engaged in the slave raiding and trading business while Mbukushu, !Xu and Khwe abducted each others or their own kin in order to exchange them for weapons, cloth, blankets or other goods.⁴³ The violence

³⁷ Van Tonder, *Hambukushu*: 37; A. G. Stigand, "Ngamiland", *The Geographical Journal*, 1923, LXII (6): 401-419.

³⁸ Van Tonder, *Hambukushu*: 42; Thomas J. Larson, "The Hambukushu Migrations to Ngamiland", *African Social Research*, 1971, 11: 27-49. Larson refers to Nettleton ("History"), who writes that the Mbukushu moved to the Okavango about 120 years ago and to Gibbons (1904), who stated that the Mbukushu were driven away from the Zambezi by the Lozi around 1750 and lived for about 60 years along the Mashi [Kwando] river (G. E. Nettleton, "History of Ngamiland Tribes up to 1926", *Bantu Studies*, December 1934: 343-360; Alfred St. H. Gibbons, *Africa from South to North through Marotseland*, 2 vols., London & New York, The Norwood Press, 1904). At the core of Van Tonder's calculations are the Mbukushu traditions on the succession of their chiefs with an assumed generational span of about 20 years. Van Tonder (*Hambukushu*: 44 ff.) reproduces a story describing how the Mbukushu discovered the Okavango when still living on the banks of the Luyana. According to this story a "slave who hunts" and might have been a Khwe person (see below) reached the river while following a wounded elephant up to a place close to a village of the Hazanikue (||Ani-Khwe). Upon his report, the Mbukushu decided to move to the Okavango. Köhler (*Kxoe-Buschleute*: 333) assumes that the elephant hunter must have reached the Okavango close to the point where the Kwito joins it since the ||Ani-Khwe were living there at about 1800. The Khwe in Mutc'iku had their own story of how a Khwe hunter in pursuit of a tsessebe (*Damaliscus lunatus*) discovered the Okavango River near the Popa Falls (PM, 5.12.1998). Although attracted by the water, his people didn't want to stay there because of the noise and decided to settle on the next dune top instead, which they called Mutc'iku, i.e. "see each others buttocks" (when going uphill).

³⁹ Klaus Dierks, *Chronology of Namibian History. From Pre-Historical Times to Independent Namibia*, Windhoek, Namibia Scientific Society, 1999: 33.

⁴⁰ Nettleton, "History".

⁴¹ Franz Seiner, *Die wirtschaftsgeographischen und politischen Verhältnisse des Caprivizipfels*, Berlin, Süsserott, 1913: 18; Fisch, *Caprivizipfel*: 69 ff.; Dierks, *Chronology*: 34.

⁴² Köhler, *Kxoe-Buschleute*, Joseph C. Miller, *Way of Death. Merchant Capitalism and the Angolan Slave Trade 1730-1830*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1988: 282.

⁴³ Seiner, "Ergebnisse": 106; Köhler, *Kxoe-Buschleute*: 327, 333, 342, 344 f., 408, 425, 434, 443 ff.

of the slave raids committed by both outsiders and within families is well-remembered and also resonates in Khwe kin talk today.⁴⁴

There are no extant sources describing what relationships between Khwe and others looked like at that time. In analogy to other settings, where Bantu-speaking agro-pastoralists migrated into the settlement areas of San people one can assume that some Khwe moved away in order to escape domination while others became clients, servants or slaves or whatever the correct term for their relatively inferior position in the agro-pastoralist societies might be.⁴⁵ The texts recorded by Köhler reveal that also the Khwe entered into client relationships with their Bantu-speaking neighbours. Furthermore, they contain lots of evidence for diverse trading relationships.⁴⁶ Memories of relationships between Khwe and the different Bantu-speaking populations in the area, which I have documented were far from uniform at least from the 1930s onwards and there is no reason to assume that they had been so in previous times.⁴⁷

The German colonial period

According to a number of different sources, the German colonial period, which started in 1884 and ended with World War I, left no considerable marks in the Caprivi Strip.⁴⁸ This is, of course, not true for the one most important legacy of that period – the determination of the boundaries. From west to east, the extension of the Caprivi Strip is almost 450 kilometers long while the north-south extension of the piece of land between the Okavango and Kwando Rivers is for most parts only 32 kilometers. In the long run,

⁴⁴ Boden, *Prozesse*: 186; see also Köhler, *Kxoé-Buschleute*: 444; id., *Ausrüstung*: 345 and Wilmsen, “Review”: 883. This is particularly true for the relationship between a man and his sister’s children. The latter are described as if they were the property of their mother’s brother who could do with them as he pleased. According to oral history accounts, at least some Khwe men sold their sister’s children to the Mbukushu (CK, 9.11.2000).

⁴⁵ Brenzinger, “Moving”. Cf. London Missionary Society, *The Masarwa (Bushmen): Report of an Inquiry by the South African District Committee of the London Missionary Society*, Alice, Lovedale, 1935; John W. Joyce, “Report on the Masarwa in the Bamangwato Reserve, Bechuanaland Protectorate, *League of Nations Publications C 112, M98, VI.B., ‘Slavery’, Annex 6*: 57-76, New York, League of Nations, 1938; Isaac Schapera, “A Survey of the Bushman Question”, *Race Relations*, 1939, 6 (2): 68-83; George B. Silberbauer & Adam J. Kuper, “Kgalagari Masters and Bushman Serfs: Some Observations”, *African Studies*, 1966, 25: 171-179; Wilmsen, *Land*; Barry Morton, “Servitude, Slave Trading, and Slavery in the Kalahari”, in: Elizabeth A. Eldredge & Fred Morton, (eds.), *Slavery in South Africa. Captive Labor on the Dutch Frontier*, Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1994: 215-250; Renée Sylvain, “Bushmen, Boers and Baasskap: Patriarchy and Paternalism on Afrikaner Farms in the Omaheke Region, Namibia”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 2001, 27 (4): 717-737.

⁴⁶ Köhler, *Kxoé-Buschleute*: 385 f., 394 f., 416 f., 455, 464; Köhler, *Ausrüstung*: 5 ff., 257 ff., 267 ff., 334 ff.

⁴⁷ Köhler: *Kxoé-Buschleute*: 130.

⁴⁸ Leslie French W. Trollope, *Report on the Administration of the Eastern Caprivi Zipfel*, unpubl. Manuscript, Windhoek, National Archives of Namibia, 1940; Fisch, *Caprivizipfel*; Kangumu, *Corner*:13. Major Leslie French Trollope was the first Native Commissioner of East Caprivi, which was declared a Native Reserve by Union Government Notice 1210 in 1940.

the corridor situation of West Caprivi between two international borders made it an economically marginal area, but at the same time a strategically important piece of land.⁴⁹

In order to investigate the economic potential of the Caprivi Strip, the German government commissioned the Austrian geographer and race biologist Franz Seiner to undertake a research expedition, which he completed in 1905 and 1906.⁵⁰ Seiner considered East Caprivi to be suitable at least for agricultural development while he called West Caprivi, apart from its eastern and western fringes, an arid and unproductive wood savanna almost worthless from the viewpoint of economic production except for the periodical richness in wildlife. Any agricultural exploitation by German settlers in the Caprivi Strip was deemed unrealistic because of the unfavourable climate.⁵¹ At the same time, Seiner stressed the political value of the “spike-shaped area”.⁵²

West Caprivi not only seemed to be economically worthless, but also presented an enormous obstacle to travelers and administration personnel on their way from the capital Windhoek to East Caprivi. The establishment of a trade route running solely through German territory was considered feasible but out of the question because of the costs.⁵³ Only in 1909, i.e. almost 20 years after the acquisition of the Strip, did the German colonial administration build the post Schuckmannsburg on the banks of the Zambezi. It remained the sole German administration post in Caprivi. It was accessible only via the British territories of Bechuanaland (today Botswana) or Northern Rhodesia (today Zambia). The imperial residents in Caprivi, Hauptmann Streitwolf and later Oberleutnant von Frankenberg, tried to find a direct route from the Namibian core

⁴⁹ Kangumu, *Corner*: 6.

⁵⁰ Seiner, “Caprivizipfel”; id., “Verhältnisse”; id., “Ergebnisse”; id., “Buschmänner”; id., *Caprivizipfels*. Seiner was not the first explorer in the area. In 1843 and again in 1860, David Livingstone failed in setting up a mission there (David Livingstone, *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa. Reprint 1858*. New York & London, Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1971). Between 1872 and 1879, the Austrian researcher Emil Holub travelled in the area between Chobe and Zambezi (cf. Emil Holub, *Sieben Jahre in Süd-Afrika. Erlebnisse, Forschungen und Jagden 1872-1879*, 2 Bde., Wien, Hölder, 1881; id., *Von der Capstadt ins Land der Maschukulumbe. Reisen im südlichen Afrika in den Jahren 1883-1887*, 2 Bde., Wien, Hölder, 1890). In 1884, Aurel Schulz and August Hammar followed the course of the Chobe-Linyanti-Mashi-Kwando and its tributary Luyana. From there they turned south to the Okavango and along its western shore downriver to Ngamiland (cf. Aurel Schulz & August Hammar, *The New Africa: A Journey up the Chobe and down the Okavango Rivers*, London, William Heinemann, 1897). They claimed to have been the first Whites who entered this area: “In fact we were the first white people that ever trod this particularly neglected corner of South Africa” (ibid.: 171). Passarge came up to Andara while travelling along the Okavango from Ngamiland between 1896 to 1898 (cf. Edwin N. Wilmsen, *The Kalahari Ethnographies of Siegfried Passarge (1896-1898)*, Köln, Köppe, 1997) and in 1899, the British Major Gibbons reached the Okavango at Andara coming from the north (cf. Gibbons, *Africa*). Dierks (*Chronology*: 56, 61) and Fisch (*Caprivizipfel*: 41 ff.) both mention the journeys of traders, namely those of the brothers Geik in 1902 and of Richard Rothe in 1904.

⁵¹ Seiner, *Caprivizipfels*: 10f., 13.

⁵² Ibid.: 51 (“dornartiger Landstrich”).

⁵³ Ibid.: 15.

land.⁵⁴ In the end, von Frankenberg succeeded in crossing West Caprivi without setting foot on British or Portuguese territory, but he did not consider this to be a reliable route.⁵⁵

The German sources can be read as supporting the Khwe claim to have been the sole residents of West Caprivi in the past. In 1903, Volkmann, a lieutenant stationed at Grootfontein made a reconnaissance trip to the Kavango and Caprivi areas. He thought the realization of a military post would be very easy between the Okavango and the Tschobe [Kwando-Mashi-Linyanti-Chobe] because “only Bushmen” were living there.⁵⁶ Seiner called the area between the Kwito, Okavango, Mashi and Luyana “Hukwefeld” after the inhabitants, the Hukwe or Khwe.⁵⁷ The population numbers given by Seiner were 8.000 for the whole Strip and 150 for the so-called Hukwefeld.⁵⁸ According to him, about 600 Bushmen lived in Caprivi. This would mean that at that time the majority of Khwe on Namibian (then German) territory lived in East Caprivi and not like nowadays in West Caprivi.⁵⁹ It is, however, also probable that Seiner failed to discover the actual number of Khwe living in West Caprivi, because the area was hardly accessible to him and because their way of subsistence did not present the kind of economic productiveness he was looking for.⁶⁰ Seiner explicitly excluded the Bushmen from his evaluation of the local labour force.⁶¹ He also wrote that the natives knew only one water place in the central Hukwefeld, i.e. in West Caprivi, namely the Mbukushu village Gauschiku. They told him that it was impossible to keep cattle in West Caprivi and claimed it was completely inaccessible for Whites and Bantu due to lack of water.⁶² Schönfelder who, between 1923 and 1933, traveled several times to southeastern Angola and West Caprivi, partly in the service of the Northern Labour Organization, commented on the different land use strategies of Bantu and San populations. According to him, the area offered relatively lush living conditions to “the Bushman” while it was only a migratory area for the Bantu populations whose natural living places

⁵⁴ Cf. Streitwolf, “Reise”; id., *Caprivizipfel*; Frankenberg, “Sambesi”.

⁵⁵ Fisch, *Caprivizipfel*: 130.

⁵⁶ National Archives of Namibia: ZBU 1009 J XIIIb 4, Vol. 1: page 10: Letter of the District Head Grootfontein to Imperial Government Windhoek, 23.5.1903 (“nur Buschmänner”).

⁵⁷ Seiner, “Ergebnisse”: 85. Original German text: “Die Hukwe bewohnen die zwischen Kuito, Okavango, Bifurkationsgebiet, Mashi und Lujana gelegene Steppe, weshalb dieses Gebiet als Hukwefeld bezeichnet sei.”

⁵⁸ Seiner, *Caprivizipfels*: 14.

⁵⁹ Cf. Brenzinger, “Moving”: 336.

⁶⁰ Like in West Caprivi (see below), the Khwe were also ignored by the administration in Angola until well into the 1940s although they had been mentioned as early as the 19th century by traveler Serpa Pinto (cf. Almeida, “Black Bushmen”: 13).

⁶¹ Seiner, *Caprivizipfels*: 15.

⁶² Ibid.: 10.

were the riverbanks and valleys.⁶³ While the water supply in the areas at a distance from the rivers may have been insufficient for agro-pastoralists and even more so for potential white settlers, West Caprivi was able to sustain the Khwe subsistence lifestyle.⁶⁴ A great number of biographical records and a detailed knowledge of the area support the claim that large parts of West Caprivi – not just the river zones – were settled and used by the Khwe.⁶⁵ In contrast to the notion of just one water place in the whole area, I was able to document more than 200 place names for rain water pans and hand-dug wells in the eastern part of West Caprivi alone.⁶⁶

Nowadays, the Khwe represent the Mbukushu as their former prime enslavers and oppressors from among all their Bantu-speaking neighbours.⁶⁷ For the period between the 1880s and 1920s, Mbukushu dominance and disparagement of the Khwe are

⁶³ Ernst Schönfelder, "Südost-Angola und der westliche Caprivi-Zipfel", *Petermanns Geographische Mitteilungen*, 1935, 81: 49-52, 87-89 (49) ["dem Buschmann"].

⁶⁴ Cf. Brenzinger, "Khwe-History": 5. It has, however, to be considered that the water supply and subsequently also the population numbers may have fluctuated over the years. Some old Khwe told me that water was much more abundant in West Caprivi in the past and that not only water but even fish and hippos could be found in some of the currently dry riverbeds. Schönfelder reports that 1926 was a year of exceptional rainfall when the riverbeds in West Caprivi were filled to a level that the mules had difficulties to cross (Schönfelder, "Südost-Angola": 51). Precipitation records for Andara and Katima Mulilo exist only from the 1940s onwards (John Mendelsohn & Carole Roberts, *An Environmental Profile and Atlas of Caprivi*, Windhoek, Ministry of Environment and Tourism, Directorate of Environmental Affairs, 1997: 6-7; John Mendelsohn et al., *Atlas of Namibia. A Portrait of the Land and its People*, Cape Town, Philip, 2002: 87.

⁶⁵ Boden, *Prozesse*.

⁶⁶ Some of these Khwe place names were already documented by Streitwolf (map attached to Streitwolf, *Caprivizipfel*) although in a mutilated form such as, e.g., Gaudinga for Kx'eu-dinga (*kx'éú* = bitter, *dínga* = *Tylosema esculentum*) or Gautscha for †Geu-càá (†*géú* = *Bucorvus leadbeateri*, *càá* = water). Diemer's consultants knew at least 50 water places between Bwabwata and the Kwando River including adjacent areas in Angola and Botswana (Jeroen Diemer, *The Barakwena of the Chetto Area. Living in a Game Reserve*, unpubl. M.A. thesis, University of Utrecht, 1996: 17). Köhler, who mainly worked with the Khwe on the Okavango River, localizes only three of the more than 120 place names he was able to document in the eastern part of West Caprivi but more than 60 places on the banks of the Okavango River (Köhler, *Kxoé-Buschleute*: 222 ff.). He mainly worked with the ||Xom-Khwe living on the Okavango River and the Khwe who fled from Angola and came to live there. Research results thus clearly depend on the geographic focus even when aiming for an encyclopedic scope.

⁶⁷ Orth (*Landrechte*: 20) points to the almost identical wording of reports documented in publications according to which the Mbukushu lured the Khwe into a boat in order to drown them. Such stories were also reported to herself, to me and Taylor (*Naming*). Since people, locations and times fail to be specified, it is hard to tell whether such stories go back to particular events which have been handed down for decades by Khwe story tellers and researchers alike, were a common practice or rather a metaphor for illustrating the relationship between Khwe and Mbukushu. Köhler interprets other traditions of Mbukushu stealing Khwe cattle as symbolically marking the deprivation of the Khwe by the Mbukushu (Köhler, *Grundlagen*: XIX). Both Köhler (*Kxoé-Buschleute*: 388 ff.) and I (with PM, 5.12.1998) have also recorded traditions, which state that the Mbukushu stole the Khwe's rainmaking abilities for which the Mbukushu have become famous (see e.g. Thomas J. Larson, "The Significance of Rainmaking for the Mbukushu", *African Studies*, 1966, 25 (1): 23-36; Maria Fisch, *The Mbukushu in Angola (1730-2002). A History of Migration, Flight and Royal Rainmaking*, Köln, Köppe, 2005).

confirmed by the travelers of that time.⁶⁸ The German colonial administration did not interfere in the relationships between the different ethnic groups in the area. Resident Streitwolf explicitly devoted himself to the principle of indirect rule practiced by the British, which had impressed him on his journey through Bechuanaland.⁶⁹

In sum, the Khwe in West Caprivi were probably less affected by the German administrators than by the slave raiding and trading relations. Neither the limited number of reconnaissance trips nor, at least according to Köhler, the establishment of a Catholic mission station at Andara on the Okavango in 1913, influenced the Khwe's daily lives in any decisive way.⁷⁰ In West Caprivi no permanent administrative posts were established, no settlements or roads built and no taxes levied during the German period, while the Khwe in Angola obviously had to pay hut taxes to the Portuguese, a factor, which might have been among the reasons why Khwe preferred to live in adjacent areas of West Caprivi.⁷¹ During the German period both the West Caprivi as a stretch of land and the Khwe as a group of people were regarded as unsuitable: the first as an area for White settlement and the latter as a labour force, the latter evaluation was to change in the following decades.

South West African administration

After World War I, the territory of the former German South West Africa became a mandated territory and was administered as an integral part of the South African Union, who retained control over the area until 1989, though this was considered illegal under international law after 1966. The Caprivi Strip presented "an administrative nightmare" to the South West African Administration.⁷² Much like under German 'control', West

⁶⁸ Cf. Holub, *Süd-Afrika*, Bd. 2: 51; Schulz & Hammar, *Africa*: 178; Seiner, "Buschmänner": 360; Wilhelm, "Hukwe": 20; oral histories as documented in Köhler, *Kxoé-Buschleute*: 392 f., 412 ff. Wilhelm travelled in the area in 1917.

⁶⁹ Streitwolf, *Caprivizipfel*: 22, 26 f., 69.

⁷⁰ Köhler ("Tradition": 133) argues that the Khwe did not want to send their children to the mission school because it was built on the land of the Mbukushu.

⁷¹ M#, 14.11.2000, Köhler, *Kxoé-Buschleute*, 471, 509 f.

⁷² Kangumu, *Corner*:8. This can also be concluded from the fact that jurisdiction over parts of the Caprivi Strip was adjusted several times. After World War I up to the Peace Treaty of Versailles and the South West Africa Mandate Act of 1919 and again between 1922 and 1929 (Government Gazette Proclamation No. 23/1922), the Strip was formally administered by the Bechuanaland Protectorate. During the latter period it was divided into an eastern part administered by the District Commissioner in Kasane and a western part administered by the District Commissioner in Maun. With Government Gazette Proclamation No. 196/1929, the area was returned to the Administration of South West Africa in Windhoek. In 1936, the Okavango area, to which West Caprivi belonged at that time, was declared a Native Territory and the Native Commissioner in Rundu became the regional representative of the General Commissioner in Windhoek and of the Minister for Bantu Affairs in South Africa (Government Gazette No.36/1936). The terms of office for the Native Commissioners in Rundu were: H.L. Eedes from 1937 to 1946, R.F. Morris from 1946 to 1954, C.E. Kruger from 1954 to 1958 and Dave J.F. Marée from 1958 to 1970; the latter was followed by the Director of Government D.E.S. Jacobs from 1971 to 1980 (Köhler, *Kxoé-Buschleute*: 511 ff.). From 1939 onwards East Caprivi was directly administered by the Department of Bantu Affairs in Pretoria.

Caprivi remained largely un-administered during the first two decades under the South African administration:

The strip of country between the Okavango and the Kwando (Mashi) Rivers is desert country and is unoccupied (except on the actual banks of the two rivers) and untravellable. It is not patrolled and there is no necessity for administration in that area.⁷³

Land matters: Veterinary intervention and ‘nature conservation’

In the late 1930s, however, things started to change. One of the first measures was the construction of a road along the Angolan border which was completed in May 1942.⁷⁴ One of the reasons was to facilitate control over the movement of cattle. The aim was to prevent the southward spread of animal epidemics and to ensure the protection of white-owned cattle in the commercial farming area.⁷⁵ In 1938, an inoculation campaign was carried out in the Kavango area. The inhabitants of West Caprivi had to bring their cattle to the river in order to have them inoculated and branded. Such a campaign had already been recommended for the whole Strip in 1937.⁷⁶ The natives were not allowed to return the cattle to West Caprivi, which was to become a livestock and native free zone with only Bushmen being allowed to live east of the Okavango River.⁷⁷

Probably also in 1938, the Lozi man, Muyatwa who is either called “native guard”, “native intelligence agent” or “border guard” in the archival record, took office in Bwabwata, a place located on the Angolan border about halfway between the Okavango and Kwando Rivers.⁷⁸ In the beginning two guards were appointed by the Department of Agriculture: Mukoya Kanjimi on the Okavango and Muyatwa Karianga in Bwabwata. Kanjimi was later suspended since he had hunted rhinos, elephants and giraffes in and out of Caprivi and had used Bushmen to dispose of the trophies.

The main responsibility of the native guards was to ensure the enforcement of the cattle decree according to which all natives and cattle had to be removed from West Caprivi. Their duties were:

⁷³ National Archives of Namibia: SWAA 2267 A 503/1. Letter of Administrator in Windhoek to the Secretary of Native Affairs in Pretoria, 5th of July 1938.

⁷⁴ National Archives of Namibia: SWAA 2268 A 503/25.

⁷⁵ Michael Bollig, “The Colonial Encapsulation of the North-Western Namibian Pastoral Economy”, *Africa*, 1998, 68 (4): 506-536; Taylor, *Naming*.

⁷⁶ National Archives of Namibia: SWAA 2267 A 503/1. The burdens associated with the cost of the inoculation campaign and the need for systematic control was one of the reasons why the Administration of South West Africa wanted to get rid of East Caprivi (Kangumu, *Cornet*: 16).

⁷⁷ National Archives of Namibia: SWAA 2267 A503/1. Letter of Native Commissioner in Rundu, 24th September 1952. Original Afrikaans text: “geen Naturelle behalwe die Boesmans wat alreeds daar is, of vee”.

⁷⁸ The exact date is not discernible from the files consulted. In SWAA 2268 A 503/25, which covers the period from 1941 to 1955 an undated letter mentions the Native Guard and refers to the cattle decree of 1938.

[...] to prevent the occupation of the strip [sic!] by natives, to keep the strip a stock free zone, to collect and hand over any ivory found in the strip. In practice these men guard the strip to prevent the spread of animal disease and all other duties are, in comparison, almost negligible.⁷⁹

The duties of the border guards also included border patrols and during World War II, Muyatwa was used for military intelligence purposes.⁸⁰ In June 1947, the Native Commissioner of East Caprivi complained to the District Commissioner in Maun that Tswana people had crossed the border into West Caprivi with Chief Moremi allegedly planning to change the border markings between South West Africa and the Bechuanaland Protectorate.⁸¹ Thereafter, the Native Commissioner in Rundu ordered his guard Muyatwa to do more border patrols.⁸² In his report for 1948, the Native Commissioner in Rundu wrote that the native guards' duties now included encouraging "bush people" to do light labour in return for tobacco and salt.⁸³ One of Muyatwa's sons whose mother was a Khwe told me that his father's duties also included teaching the Khwe how to plow with oxen and to thresh, which clearly is at odds with his prime duty of keeping the Strip a livestock free zone.⁸⁴ During the first decade after the cattle decree was enacted the reservation of West Caprivi for the Khwe can be said to have been indirect or an effect of their definition as people without cattle. After 1950, however, the reservation of West Caprivi for the Khwe became more explicit.

In 1949, the Commission for the Preservation of Bushmen in South West Africa was appointed in order to present solutions for the problems created by Bushmen who continuously raided migrant farm workers on their way back to Kavango (and Ovamboland). The commission advised against resettling the Khwe in a Bushman reserve and in doing so, also stated that it considered the Khwe to be the first inhabitants of West Caprivi.

The Barrakwenge [Khwe] or black Bushmen appear to be a mixture between the Kung and the Bantu and reside as a separate entity in the Western Caprivi Zipfel. There would appear to be no object in shifting them. They are at home in the area they now occupy and get on well with the surrounding Native tribes. Your Honour's Commissioners recommend, therefore, that they be allowed to remain where they are and that water be opened up for them.⁸⁵

⁷⁹ National Archives of Namibia: SWAA 2267 A503/1: Letter of Native Commissioner Rundu to the Chief Native Commissioner Windhoek, February, 8th 1950.

⁸⁰ National Archives of Namibia SWAA 2268 A 503/25, Letter of Assistant Native Commissioner Rundu to Chief Native Commissioner Windhoek, July 5th 1941, quoted in Taylor (2007a:104).

⁸¹ SM, 5.8.1999.

⁸² National Archives of Namibia: SWAA 2268 A 503/25, Letter of July, 12th 1947.

⁸³ National Archives of Namibia, Annual Report on Native Affairs, Okavango Native Territory, SWAA 477 A50/188/12.

⁸⁴ JM, 3.8.1999.

⁸⁵ National Archives of Namibia: SWAA A 267/11/1 1956: Report of the Commission for the Preservation of Bushmen in South West Africa, 1950:14. This quote not only reveals the ambiguousness in the classification of the Khwe by the administration which calls the Khwe 'a mixture' and 'a separate entity' in one and the same sentence but also the intricacy of its legacy for the Khwe who may want to use it as confirming that the

In the Commission's report West Caprivi is thus constructed as Khwe 'homeland' while the Khwe themselves are disqualified as Bushmen worthy of protection, an identification they shared with the Haillom in the Etosha area. Another quote from the report:

Nowhere did your [the Administrator's] commissioners receive the impression that it would be worthwhile to preserve either the Heikum [Hai||om] or the Barrakwenge [Khwe] as Bushmen. In both cases the process of assimilation has proceeded too far and these Bushmen are already abandoning their nomadic habits and are settling down amongst the neighbouring tribes to agriculture and stock breeding [...].⁸⁶

In 1964, the Odendaal Commission, which was to design the implementation of separate homelands for each of the non-White population groups in the country indeed recommended creating a homeland for the Khwe in West Caprivi.⁸⁷ The Administration, however, took a different decision. In 1963, the area was declared a nature conservation area called the "West Caprivi Nature Park".⁸⁸ Up until 1965, at least the killing of dangerous carnivores seems to have still been favoured by the officers in Rundu, who paid rewards for the fur.⁸⁹ In 1968, the conservation status was enhanced and the area renamed "Caprivi Game Park".⁹⁰ The Khwe were allowed to continue living in the area and hunting with traditional weapons, i.e. without horses and guns.⁹¹

West Caprivi was certainly not the only case where rivalries between the Departments of Bantu Administration and Nature Conservation over strips of land unwanted by white farmers were prevalent.⁹² In this particular case, however, it seems reasonable to suspect that the foremost aim of declaring West Caprivi a nature conservation area was not the protection of natural resources but the control of population movements along the Angolan border.⁹³ In 1963, the neighbouring countries, Zambia and Botswana were both on the verge of independence. In Angola, a war of liberation had started in 1962

Khwe were 'at home' in West Caprivi while simultaneously refuting that they 'got on well with the surrounding Native tribes' whom they prefer to represent as oppressors.

⁸⁶ National Archives of Namibia: SWAA A 267/11/1 1956: Report of the Commission for the Preservation of Bushmen in South West Africa, 1950: 6.

⁸⁷ Republic of South Africa, (ed.), *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into South West African Affairs*, Pretoria, Government Printer, 1964: 99.

⁸⁸ Government Gazette proclamation 67/1963.

⁸⁹ Oswin Köhler, "Zum Begriff der 'Freiheit' bei den Khoe-Buschmännern", in: Balthasar Staehelin et al., (eds.), *'Freiheit'. Vorträge und Diskussionsbeiträge der 6. Arbeitswoche des Engadiner Kollegiums St. Moritz*, Zürich, Editio Academica, 1975: 63-79 (77).

⁹⁰ Republic of South Africa, Government Notice 19 of 1968.

⁹¹ BD/SD, 9.11.1999; KC, 18.11.2000. Köhler (*Grundlagen*: XIV) writes that hunting with bow and arrow was prohibited south of the Okavango to the Botswana border at the end of the 1970s and that the prohibition was controlled by the army units composed of Cape Coloureds who were infamous for taking drastic action.

⁹² Gordon, *Bushman Myth*: 165; Taylor, *Naming*.

⁹³ Cf. Kipi George, "Affidavit", Chief Kippi George & The Kxoe Traditional Authority et al. / Government of the Republic of Namibia & Erwin Mbambo Munika in the High Court of Namibia, 1997; Orth, "Identity": 133.

and the Namibian liberation movement had close ties to comrades in both Zambia and Angola. In any case, the area became a military zone before further native conservation intervention could be realized and even the personnel of the Ministry of Wildlife, Conservation and Tourism were no longer allowed to enter the area.⁹⁴ Instead, nature conservation duties were taken over by the police and the army who also employed Khwe for the purpose:⁹⁵

When we worked for the police we searched for people who came from far and captured them when they killed animals. We were almost like game guards. We had guns. We patrolled the borders. At that time the area was closed.⁹⁶

In fact, poaching increased considerably during the time when West Caprivi was a military no-access zone. According to Köhler the Khwe soldiers in Omega used to hunt in their free time on horseback.⁹⁷ They bought the horses from Tswanas or Botswanan Khwe who smuggled them across the Okavango into West Caprivi. However, not only the Khwe but also other members of the army and of UNITA (União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola) were suspected to have had their share in the poaching. This was claimed at least by Colonel Breytenbach who was appointed a Nature Conservator by the South West Africa Nature Conservation Department while still in the services of the SADF.⁹⁸

During the 1940s through the 1960s, the Administration increasingly recognized West Caprivi not so much as a “Bushman area” as Taylor argues, but rather as a Native and livestock free Khwe area with the Khwe considered not Bushman-like enough to be resettled in a Bushman reserve and not Bantu-like enough to expel them from West Caprivi as a livestock free zone.⁹⁹ Before 1950 the ‘reservation’ of West Caprivi for the

⁹⁴ Christopher J. Brown & Brian T. B. Jones, (eds.), *Results of a Socio-Ecological Survey of the West Caprivi Strip, Namibia: A Strategic Community-Based Environment and Development Plan*, Windhoek, Directorate of Environmental Affairs, Ministry of Wildlife, Conservation and Tourism, 1994; Diemer, *Barakwena*.

⁹⁵ Uys, *Bushman Soldiers*: 61.

⁹⁶ TG, 27.1.2003.

⁹⁷ Köhler, *Grundlagen*: XX, Fn 66.

⁹⁸ Ros Reeve & Stephen Ellis, “An Insider’s Account of the South African Security Forces’ Role in the Ivory Trade”, *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 1995, 13 (2): 227-243; see also Jan Breytenbach, *Eden’s Exiles. One Soldier’s Fight for Paradise*, Cape Town, Queillerie, 1997; id., *The Plunderers*, Johannesburg, Covos Day, 2001. Breytenbach also claimed that his reports about contacts between UNITA poachers and the higher echelons of the SADF together with the latter’s involvement in the poaching business and smuggling were not followed up and that efforts were made to prevent his appointment as a Nature Conservator (Reeve & Ellis, “Insider’s Account”; 235 f., 241). According to oral history accounts Colonel Breytenbach took his nature conservation mission as seriously as to bring to an end the first attempt by Khwe to resettle at the village of Mashambo towards the end of the South African rule over Namibia by burning their huts (KN, 30.12.2000). When the end was in sight, the Khwe who were, themselves, not employed by the army but lived with their relatives at the military base in Doppies had to leave and tried to resettle at their pre-military period place of settlement in Mashambo. They were brought there by an army lorry (KN, 30.12.2000). Those who ordered or enabled the transport of the Khwe were obviously less concerned with nature conservation than Colonel Breytenbach and more concerned with making the move easier for these people for whatever reasons.

⁹⁹ Taylor, *Naming*: 90.

Khwe was rather an indirect consequence of veterinary interventions. From 1950 onwards, however, West Caprivi was more explicitly reserved for the Khwe as their 'homeland'. Much like the installation of the native guards (see paragraph on power matters below) this is represented by the Khwe nowadays as a state intervention on behalf of them as Bushmen. Furthermore, they also represent it as a reconstitution or recognition of their ancestral land by the (then) state authorities.¹⁰⁰

From the 1960s onwards the Administration increasingly set aside West Caprivi for its own purposes, at first as a nature conservation area and later for military activities. Before dealing with the military period, I want to point out some more inconsistencies in the ethnic categorization which the Administration held ready for the Khwe. It has already been expressed in the above quoted paragraphs from the report of the Commission for the Preservation of the Bushmen. The report calls the Khwe a "mixture" and a "separate entity" in one and the same sentence. The worthlessness of the Khwe for preservation as Bushmen was substantiated by pointing to their practices of agriculture and stock breeding, at the same time that the report recommended that they should stay in a livestock free zone.¹⁰¹ In the next paragraph I will demonstrate that ambiguities within ethnic identifications of the Khwe during the 1940s and 1960s went even further. While being disqualified as Bushmen for preservation within Bushmen politics and at the same time constructed as non-Bantu, non-Native or non-agropastoralists within veterinary and land politics, they became simultaneously regarded as Bantu-like natives within the field of labour politics, which accepted Khwe as migrant workers to the mines in South Africa.

For land matters, the Administration obviously had to attribute the presence of fields and livestock in West Caprivi to that of Bantu-speaking populations alone. However, Khwe also practiced horticulture.¹⁰² Livestock including oxen for plowing was a capital asset into which Khwe used to invest cash income at all times.¹⁰³ Khwe cash income must have increased considerably during the mine-work period and the prohibition to

¹⁰⁰ E.g. TC, 20.1.1999. I will show below that state interventions indeed were shaped more and more in favour of the Khwe.

¹⁰¹ There are also inconsistencies with respect to population numbers. The Commission's report gives the number of 'Barrakwenge' in West Caprivi as 600 while two years before, the Native Commissioner had stated that the area was largely empty apart from "border guards, their families and a few nomadic Bushmen, belonging to the Barakwengu [Khwe] tribe or clan" (National Archives of Namibia: SWAA 2268 A 503/25: Report III/1948) and the Administrator that it was "unoccupied (except on the actual banks of the two rivers)" (National Archives of Namibia: SWAA 2267 A 503/1. Letter to the Secretary of Native Affairs in Pretoria, 5th of July 1938). Given that a recently discovered file in the National Archives of Botswana gives the population "in the Strip, off the river" as consisting of "a good many Makwengo [Khwe] Bushmen and a few families of Mampukushu [Mbukushu]" and amounting to a number of probably one thousand (National Archives of Botswana. S.54/3. Report upon Portion of the Caprivi Strip under the Jurisdiction of the Resident Magistrate, N'gamiland for the Period 1st January 1929 to 31st August 1929: page 3), the increase in numbers of Khwe within the South West Africa Administration files rather read as a growing awareness of the Khwe population in West Caprivi.

¹⁰² For the years before 1965 e.g. Köhler, *Grundlagen*: 492.

¹⁰³ Köhler, *Kxoe-Buschleute*: 558; id.: *Grundlagen*: XII, 541; Orth, "Identity": 139; Boden, *Prozesse*: 106.

keep livestock in West Caprivi seems to increasingly have caused their discontent. In 1965, at least the Khwe in Mutc'iku were allowed to keep cattle again even though the cattle decree was formally still effective.¹⁰⁴ The Administration clearly gave in to pestering appeals of the Khwe or their advocates and wanted to attract the Khwe's support for potential future actions (see below).

Labour matters: Khwe as mine workers

In the middle of the 20th century the Caprivi Strip also gained importance because of its favourable position to tap the workforce in southeastern Angola as the demand for workers on the gold mines in South Africa now added to the demand for farm workers in South West-Africa. In general, San men were considered unsuitable for the physically demanding mine work at places far away from their families. On the 10th of August 1948, the Native Commissioner in Rundu enquired at the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WENELA) whether the company was ready to accept "male, adult, medically fit, robust Bushmen for labour on (1) The Mines and (2) other employment".¹⁰⁵ The answer read:

For mine work, the language problem would be insuperable in so far as pukkah [anglo-indian for 'genuine'] Bushmen is [sic!] concerned. Any hybrids, however, who understand the Okavango dialects would be accepted.¹⁰⁶

Also the Commission for the Preservation of Bushmen in South West Africa recommended that the Khwe be allowed to do mine work.¹⁰⁷ 'Hybridity' here refers to multilingualism – in addition to physical strength – and offered the Khwe new economic opportunities unavailable for 'pure' San. The Khwe preferred the work on the mines to that on the farms where they were not only paid less¹⁰⁸ but also badly treated, shouted at, beaten and treated as inferior Bushmen.¹⁰⁹ The Khwe's decision to look for work was

¹⁰⁴ Köhler, *Grundlagen*: 543.

¹⁰⁵ National Archives of Namibia: SWAA 434 A 50/67 Vol. 2.

¹⁰⁶ National Archives of Namibia: SWAA 434 A 50/67 Vol. 2. Letter 24.8.1948.

¹⁰⁷ Letter of the Commission to the Chief Native Commissioner, 19.12.1953, SWAA A 50/67 (quoted in Orth, *Landrechte*: 27 f.).

¹⁰⁸ San were particularly sought after as farm labourers since they were paid less than other workers (Gordon, *Bushman Myth*: 142). The reasons brought forward were their alleged physical weakness and unreliability.

¹⁰⁹ AM, 27.12.2000, see also Köhler, *Kxoé-Buschleute*: 557. The recruitment of farm workers from the Okavango had already picked up speed from 1921 onwards (Andreas E. Eckl, *Herrschaft, Macht und Einfluß. Koloniale Interaktionen am Kavango (Nord-Namibia) von 1891 bis 1921*, Köln, Köppe, 2004: 321 ff.). According to a text recorded by Köhler (*Kxoé-Buschleute*: 352, 555), the Khwe "formerly" ["früher"] didn't want to work on the farms because returning workers were often raided by San on their way back to Kavangoland. Since some Khwe were also in the gangs of workers travelling to the farm area, it might have happened that Bushmen, in this case Khwe, also fell victim to the so-called "Bushman-problem" (Oswin Köhler, "Dokumente zur Entstehung des Buschmannproblems in Südwestafrika", *Afrikanischer Heimatkalender*, 1957, 28: 52-64). An oral account documented by Köhler proves that Khwe also raided

motivated by the need for money and new kinds of goods which they could buy from wages.¹¹⁰ Numerous Khwe men took the opportunity to embark on migrant labour. Many closed several working contracts which lasted up to 16 months. In a report for the Department of Nature Conservation, Tinley wrote that in the middle of the 1960s most Khwe men were contract workers on the mines.¹¹¹

The WENELA established two recruitment posts on the borders of the Caprivi, one in Shakawe in Botswana on the Okavango River and one in Katima Mulilo on the Zambezi across the Zambian border.¹¹² In 1944, 6.000 mine workers passed through the Katima Mulilo recruitment office and even more, i.e. 1.000 per month, passed through the border post at Mohembo on their way to Shakawe.¹¹³ According to former Khwe mine workers, the western route started from an assembly point at Mukwe or Andara, from where workers were driven on a WENELA lorry across the border at Mohembo to Shakawe and then taken to Francistown by plane where they were put on a train via Mafeking to Johannesburg and then distributed to the individual mines. The eastern route started from a post at Singalamwe on the Kwando.¹¹⁴ The workers were then brought to Katima Mulilo by lorry and flown to Francistown.¹¹⁵ In order to reach one of the posts, the men had to hike for days or even for weeks if coming from southeastern Angola. A former mine worker remembers the recruiting procedures as follows:

They checked your size and your age. Then they sent the young ones to Rhodesia [Zimbabwe] for clearing the tobacco plantations or they fed them in Katima until they were fat enough for mine work. When they saw that you were strong enough for mine work, they sent you there.¹¹⁶

migrant workers on their way back home, in that case a gang of Lozi workers (Köhler, *Kxoé-Buschleute*: 448 ff.).

¹¹⁰ AS, 13.8.1999, see also Köhler, *Kxoé-Buschleute*: 483; id., *Ausrüstung*: 365-387.

¹¹¹ K. L. Tinley, *Western Caprivi Conservation Area, South West Africa: A Proposal of Natural Resource Land Use*, unpubl. report, Windhoek, Department of Nature Conservation, 1966, quoted in Brown & Jones, *Results*: 40). Not long afterwards, this option came to an end since Botswana closed the border to Namibia because of the military activities described below. These activities, however, opened up new working opportunities for the Khwe. According to Brenzinger, the SWA Administration erected a border fence between West Caprivi and Botswana in 1968 and asked the Khwe on the eastern banks of the Okavango to move to the Botswana side (Matthias Brenzinger, *Report on the Situation of San Communities in Angola and Zambia*, Windhoek, Legal Assistance Centre, 2000: 30) When exactly the border was closed, is not clear. In one of his publications, Köhler wrote that the border to Botswana was closed in 1978 (Köhler, *Ausrüstung*: 10).

¹¹² Köhler, *Kxoé-Buschleute*: 564.

¹¹³ Kangumu, *Corner*: 73 f.

¹¹⁴ One of Köhler's informants mentioned that a place called Sháng'ombò was the assembly point in the east, a place which neither Köhler nor I were able to locate (Köhler, *Kxoé-Buschleute*: 435).

¹¹⁵ AS, 13.8.1999; TG, 27.1.2003.

¹¹⁶ TG, 27.1.2003. Some Khwe also went to work on tobacco plantations in Zimbabwe (Köhler, *Kxoé-Buschleute*: 325; TG, 27.1.2003), to the Namibian farm area (ibid.: 484, 557) or to towns (ibid.: 484, 561; AM, 27.12.2000). Almeida ("Black Bushmen": 21) mentions that Khwe from Angola worked in the large fisheries on the southwestern Angolan coast and on the coffee plantations in northern Angola (see also Köhler, ibid.: 560).

According to Köhler, at least the Khwe who took the western route needed the written agreement of the then Mbukushu Chief Makushe who was in office from 1947 to 1969.¹¹⁷ Khwe men who went to the mines also reported to me that they had themselves registered at Chief Makushe in Mukwe.¹¹⁸ The fact that Chief Makushe somehow controlled the departure and return of Khwe workers did not please the Native Administration:

The Barakwengu, while making no specific charge, feared that those of them who wished to go to the Reef Mines to work, would be stopped by Chief Makushe to whom they have occasionally gone for passes. (Apparently these Bushmen [...] have been going to the mines for many years and *are treated as Natives*.) The Bushmen are told that it is the wish of the Administration that all people in S.W. Africa live in peace and under the protection of the Law. No Native Chief has any jurisdiction over them and they owe allegiance to the Administration and its Officials only. No tribute should be paid, no taxes can be levied on them and no one may interfere with them except on the instructions of the Administration. Under these circumstances they may consider themselves free to offer themselves for work in the Police Zone, and to continue working on the mines until such time as the Administration may otherwise order. They may obtain passes to the Police Zone from Runtu [Rundu] and may present themselves to WNLA [WENELA] without consulting the Mbukushu Chief.¹¹⁹

The Native Commissioner in Rundu recommended that the border guard Mukoya Litembero, stationed at Mahango, be authorized to issue passes for willing Khwe mine workers.¹²⁰ At least in the Okavango area, the Mbukushu chief continued to exercise power over the Khwe. The next paragraph discusses in more detail how the SWA Administration intervened in local power relations.

Power matters: Native guards and Khwe leaders

The statements of Khwe individuals concerning their former relationships with their Bantu-speaking neighbours are far from uniform, partly controversial and obviously depended on the personalities of individual chiefs, political situations and personal experiences. Relationships and loyalties in the past did not necessarily run along ethnic lines while current memories are shaped by recent contests.¹²¹

¹¹⁷ Köhler, "Tradition": 135; id., *Kxoé-Buschleute*: 564, 566 f.

¹¹⁸ E.g. NB, 19.1.1999.

¹¹⁹ National Archives of Namibia: SWAA 434 A 50/67 Vol. 4: Letter of the Native Commissioner Rundu to Chief Native Commissioner Windhoek, 26.10.1953 (emphasis G.B.).

¹²⁰ I could not yet verify whether Mukoya Kanjimi and Mukoya Litembero were one and the same person. Mukoya Kanjimi was suspended for poaching (see above). The border guard at Mahango does not seem to have had the same relevance for the Khwe on the Okavango as Muyatwa had for the Khwe in Bwabwata, the latter featuring prominently in their memories as a protector from Mbukushu infringements (see below). One reason for this might be the power and neighborhood of the Mbukushu chief, a second one the inauguration of the Khwe leader Martin Ndumba at Mutc'iku who dominates the traditions of the ||Xom-Khwe and was put in office during the late 1950s (see below).

¹²¹ Cf. Boden, "Impacts"; Orth, "Identity"; Rousset, *Local Dynamics*; Taylor, *Naming*.

The relationships between the Khwe and the Mbukushu were certainly most intense. At least they are the most prominent in today's historical and moral discourse. Especially on the banks of the Okavango, Khwe and Mbukushu seem to have lived as close neighbours though spatially separated from each other during the whole 20th century.¹²² The Khwe and Mbukushu also partly share family or clan names which cut across ethnic borders.¹²³

The dry core area of West Caprivi, appears to have been a favourite destination for slave raids until the 1930s or even 1940s, which was obviously supported by the lack of governmental control. Khwe reported violations and abductions of women and children, corporal punishment and even murder in case of resistance against orders.¹²⁴ They also described forced labour, such as carrying burdens, stamping mahango, building houses or taking care of sick people. Raids and oppression urged many Khwe in the eastern part of West Caprivi to try and escape the Mbukushu oppressors by crossing the border into Zambia where relationships between Bantu and Bushmen were described as more satisfactory by Clark.¹²⁵ In the memories of the Khwe the violent treatment by the Mbukushu was of central importance and was passed down to the younger generations. Reports about similar treatment by other people were comparatively rare although also Mbari, Mbwela and Tswana have enslaved Khwe.¹²⁶ Given the post-independence contest between Khwe and Mbukushu for political representation and land use rights, it is not surprising that the Khwe in Namibia stressed their experiences of enslavement and oppression by the Mbukushu while the Khwe in Botswana focused on their "history of enforced servitude" by the Tswana.¹²⁷

The Native Commissioner in Rundu saw the relationship between Khwe and Mbukushu in a different light:

The Bushmen [Khwe] complain that the Mbukushu Natives of Angola steal their wives and children and make slaves of them. My investigations revealed that quite a few women and children have probably left the Caprivi and are now in Angola. No evidence of forceful restraint was, however, forthcoming and the conclusion I came to is that the Barakwengu [Khwe] do not till the soil or keep cattle and that their own women folk prefer to attach themselves to Mbukushu kraals where the food position is better. The Barakwengu are believed to be dagga smokers and it is quite conceivable that in exchange for dagga they allow themselves to be exploited by their stronger neighbours. [...] The Barakwengu

¹²² DK, 31.8.1999; JM, 31.8.1999.

¹²³ Boden, *Prozesse*: 228 f.; see also António de Almeida, "Les Vazama, Boschimans noirs de l'Angola", Reprint 1960, in: António de Almeida, (ed.), *Os Bosquimanos de Angola*, Lisboa, 1994: 131-136 (136).

¹²⁴ N |, 12.7.1999; 26.1.2003; NB, 25.11.2000.

¹²⁵ JN, 8.11.2000; J. Desmond Clark, "Bushman Hunters of the Barotse Forests", *Northern Rhodesian Journal*, 1951, 1: 56-65 (57).

¹²⁶ Köhler, *Kxoé-Buschleute*: 441, 327; CK, 9.11.2000.

¹²⁷ Taylor, *Life*: 52.

women have been the recognized concubines of the Mbukushu for generations.¹²⁸

This view of Khwe-Mbukushu relations, did not, however, prevent the Administration to exploit the complaints of the Khwe against the Mbukushu for their own aims (see below) and the reasoning that Khwe women attached themselves to Mbukushu homesteads in Angola because Khwe did not till the soil or keep cattle must be called cynical given the fact that the Administration had prohibited stock-keeping in West Caprivi.

For the Khwe living in the eastern half of West Caprivi the arrival of the border guard Muyatwa in Bwabwata, whom they used to call Ndóroyi,¹²⁹ changed their life profoundly.¹³⁰ My interview partners represented Muyatwa as a liberator and explained his installation as a government intervention aimed at protecting the Khwe: “At that time, the Mbukushu used to capture the Khwe and sell their children. Therefore the Whites sent us Muyatwa. He chased the Mbukushu away.”¹³¹

Also many Khwe who suffered from infringements in Angola came to Bwabwata, which developed into a Khwe “capital” with population numbers said to have been the size of today’s Omega and thus to have exceeded the number of 600 individuals.¹³² In order to keep the Mbukushu out of West Caprivi, Muyatwa obviously built his own police force from Khwe men who helped him to chase the Mbukushu away.¹³³ My interview partners identified 14 Khwe men who belonged to Muyatwa’s police force. They also described Muyatwa’s treatment of the Mbukushu as brutal and merciless. Some claimed to have felt pity and warned the Mbukushu about Muyatwa’s being on the way.¹³⁴ Köhler as a contemporary witness wrote about Muyatwa:

Still in 1959 I experienced that the group of Khoe [Khwe] living at Buabuata [Bwabwata] (West-Caprivi) were actually subjugates of the Rotse [Lozi] man called Muyatwa. They had to work (djao) for him every day, they had to cut firewood for him, to bring it to his kraal, fetch water for him or herd his cattle.¹³⁵

Although it was apparently a much better choice to go and fetch water for a liberator than to have one’s children stolen or to be beaten by an oppressor, inconsistencies in representations of Muyatwa’s behaviour were not simply due to disparities between the

¹²⁸ National Archives of Namibia: SWAA 434 A 50/67 Vol. 4: Letter of the Native Commissioner in Rundu to the Chief Native Commissioner in Windhoek, 26. October 1953.

¹²⁹ Ndóroyi is composed of *ndó* = foreigner or enemy and *royi* = Lozi (Köhler, *Kxoe-Buschleute*: 373 f).

¹³⁰ Cf. Diemer, *Barakwena*: 20.

¹³¹ JD, 9.8.1999.

¹³² DT, 10.11.2000; KU, 12.11.1999; KC 18.11.2000; AM, 24.1.2003.

¹³³ KU, 12.11.1999, WM, 23.1.2003.

¹³⁴ AM, 24.1.2003.

¹³⁵ Köhler, “Begriff”: 71 f. Original German text: “Ich erlebte jedoch noch im Jahre 1959, dass die Gruppe der Khoe [Khwe] von Buabuata [Bwabwata] (West-Caprivi) dem Rotse [Lozi]-Mann namens Muyatwa praktisch untertan waren. Tag für Tag mußten sie für ihn arbeiten (djao), u.a. Brennholz schlagen und zu Muyatwas Kral tragen, Wasser holen oder die Rinder Muyatwas im Busch hüten.” Abuse of power by native guards with regard to Bushmen was also a problem in other areas (cf. Gordon, *Bushman Myth*: 163).

different perspectives of insiders and outsiders or contemporary and retrospective points of view. Köhler also quotes Khwe representing Muyatwa as a protector sent to them by the government.¹³⁶ The loyalties at that time obviously did not always follow the fault lines of ethnic affiliation and were therefore hard to penetrate for administration personnel as the following quote from a 1948 report may reveal:

I had heard that cattle were being run from Angola to Bechuanaland across this strip and that Muyatwa [...] was having trouble with the Bushpeople and Mambukushu of the Eastern Caprivi Zipfel. [...] I investigated the allegation that the Mambukushu had incited the Bushpeople to kill Muyatwa. While unable to say that there is no truth in the matter the Bushmen witnesses were too unreliable to be trusted [...] Muyatwa lives an isolated life, is by nature a Dictator and inclined to conscript Bushman labour. I explained to the Bushmen that they were free to work or not for Muyatwa in return for the protection he afforded to them from Angola raiders who apparently still enslave Bushmen children but that the Administration did not welcome enforced labour.¹³⁷

Indeed, the installation of border guards was only considered a preliminary solution. Also the Commission for the Preservation of Bushmen was opposed to the employment of members of other tribes in posts of authority over Bushmen and recommended that the Native Commissioner should do his best to encourage the Khwe to assume responsibility themselves.¹³⁸

They [the Khwe] are further told that it would be wise if they could consult each other and appoint their own 'Kaptein' so that they could have a Tribal Head to bring their troubles to my notice. (This suggestion may bear fruit but as Bushmen are reluctant to hold themselves out as superior to their neighbours there is some doubt in the matter.) [...] In order to fill the gap caused by the Barakwengu [Khwe] having no 'Kaptein' or other leaders I have instructed Muyatwa to take a fatherly interest in the Bushmen of his area and have issued similar instructions to Mukoya Litembero, the Border Guard at Mahango Omuramba on the Bechuanaland Route. Until Head Office decrees otherwise the Bushmen will regard these two persons as people to whom they can appeal when in trouble.¹³⁹

The Khwe formerly had no paramount chief but only local leaders who exercised authority within Khwe communities and sometimes had influence beyond their local communities but were unable to stop Mbukushu violations in most instances.¹⁴⁰ Thus, the installation of a paramount leader approved by the government meant direct interference in interethnic as well as internal political hierarchies. The archival sources suggest that the Khwe were hesitant to the idea of having their own paramount leader at least in the beginning. The following report of a Khwe informant about how Martin

¹³⁶ Köhler, *Kxoé-Buschleute*: 250, 452.

¹³⁷ National Archives of Namibia: SWAA 2268 A 503/25: Report III/1948.

¹³⁸ National Archives of Namibia: SWAA A 50/67 Vol. 4: Letter of the member of the Commission for the Preservation of Bushmen McIntyre to Major J.N. Naude, November 26th 1953.

¹³⁹ National Archives of Namibia: SWAA 434 A 50/67 Vol. 4: Letter of Native Commissioner Rundu to Chief Commissioner Windhoek, 26th of October 1953.

¹⁴⁰ Boden, "Impacts": 186.

Ndumba (†1989) became a headman of all Khwe must not necessarily be interpreted in the same way. Although the Khwe obviously had some difficulties to find the right person, they seem nevertheless to have accepted the idea in principle:

Leadership in Mutc'iku began with my mother's father ||Okodom.¹⁴¹ They [the administration officials] brought him a rifle. But he said: 'I am old. I don't know how to use this thing. Let me give the leadership to my grandchild Mahindi.' Then they brought the rifle to Mahindi. But he said: 'No, I am too young to be a leader.' Then they brought it back to ||Okodom. And he thought: 'Whom can we appoint for leadership? Let's appoint Ndumba!' Then he sent Pové to Angola in order to bring Ndumba. Then they handed both, the leadership and the rifle over to him.¹⁴²

It was probably during the second part of the 1950s that Martin Ndumba took office.¹⁴³ The anniversary of his death in 1989 and the Khwe chieftaincy is celebrated every year on the so-called 'big day', the 4th of December.¹⁴⁴

In Bwabwata the Lozi Muyatwa obviously stayed in office for some time after Ndumba became the Khwe headman.¹⁴⁵ Before his death, he had made the Khwe of the Bwabwata area elect their own leader. The vote favoured a man called Kandunda Kaseta, an elder of the Otceko family group resident at Bwabwata.¹⁴⁶ According to Kaseta's successor and sister's son, the border between the areas over which Ndumba and Kaseta respectively ruled was fixed jointly by Ndumba, Muyatwa and Kaseta and marked by a piece of wood immediately west of today's Omega. Both Ndumba and

¹⁴¹ †1967 (Köhler, *Kxoé-Buschleute*: 27).

¹⁴² MU, 27.11.2000

¹⁴³ According to Kipi George ("Affidavit": 23), who succeeded Martin Ndumba and was the Khwe Chief from 1989 until he died in December 2000, Ndumba became the head of the Khwe in 1953. This date seems to be untenable given the contents of the above quoted letter by the Native Commissioner from October 1953. Köhler (*Kxoé-Buschleute*: 277) writes that Ndumba was installed in office in 1965 by the then Mbukushu Chief Max Makushe, a version which is at odds with another source of information: In an earlier publication, in which he describes a case of lynch law by Ndumba, Köhler ("Begriff": 68) wrote that Ndumba had been appointed by the administration in Rundu. Ndumba might, of course, have been installed in office by the government while his factual power in the local context still depended on the Mbukushu Chief who later had to give in to the administration. In 1961, the Native Commissioner in Rundu calls Ndumba "die voorman van die Mbarakwengo Boesmans [Khwe] langs die Okavangorivier in die Westelike Caprivi" so that Ndumba most probably became the Khwe paramount chief sometime during the late 1950s (National Archives of Namibia: BAC 65 HN 1/25/8 Vol. 5, Letter of Native Commissioner Rundu to the Chief Native Commissioner in Windhoek, 24th of March 1961).

¹⁴⁴ Due to the vacancy of the Khwe chieftaincy after Kipi George's escape to Botswana during the secessionist upheaval in Caprivi in 1998 and his death in 2000, the annual commemoration did not take place after 1998 (Boden, *Prozesse*: 356). It is not known whether it has been revived in the meantime. The new Khwe Chief Ben Ngobara was elected only in 2006 (The Namibian, 15.5.2006: "Khwe in West Caprivi elect new Chief").

¹⁴⁵ According to Köhler (*Kxoé-Buschleute*: 452 f.), Muyatwa died in about 1960 and one of his sons, a man called Shākāvārà, acted as policeman in Bwabwata until he returned to the Lozi area in the rainy season of 1961/62. Diemer's consultants gave 1964 as Muyatwa's year of death (Diemer, *Barakwena*: 21).

¹⁴⁶ JD, 9.8.1999.

Kaseta were helped by an assistant and a policeman. Later, Kaseta apparently shared power with two other headmen in the eastern part of West Caprivi: Kyaku Ngoro, also known as Mberemtatu, at Yiceca and Kapaco, also known as Qam, in the Kwando area while Ndumba as the paramount chief also came to Doppies in a car and accepted offerings including money.¹⁴⁷

The installation of Khwe leaders also had important effects on the relationship between the different ethnic groups in West Caprivi. For the Khwe this meant a direct link to the government. Before, they could only escape from Mbukushu oppression by moving away. Now the recognition and support for Khwe leaders by the white rulers gave the Khwe an opportunity to challenge the Mbukushu politically:

The bad treatment stopped because the Whites recognized Khwe leaders. The Goava [Mbukushu] were afraid of the Whites. The Khwe leaders told the Goava that they should stay out. The Whites brought us tobacco, clothes and food. They told us that we should report bad treatment by the Goava. We told the Goava: 'Now we do have the Whites'.¹⁴⁸

Alliance matters: From separation to exploitation

On the local level, the installation of Khwe leaders and the support provided by the government meant emancipation from domination by the Mbukushu. However, the Administration had far wider reaching plans with the Khwe at least from the early 1960s onwards. These plans were not openly stated, but can be inferred from Government action in other matters which also contain hints regarding the role played by Oswin Köhler who obviously wished to promote the interests of the Khwe by interceding on their behalf with the Department of Bantu Administration.

Already from the early 1950s onwards, the Native Commissioner in Rundu was trying to convince the Khwe to engage in farming. This had also been a recommendation of the Commission for the Preservation of the Bushmen together with the advice to distribute food and tobacco as part of the new policy of befriending the Bushmen.¹⁴⁹ The Native Commissioner asked the Department of Agriculture several times to allow the Khwe on the eastern banks of the Okavango to keep cows and also oxen for plowing. In the early 1960s his requests became more insistent. He was, however, not simply concerned with ameliorating the living conditions of the Khwe. Obviously the Administration also feared for its international reputation:

The department is obviously really concerned to make the Bushmen stay and the situation is thus very delicate. It could evoke negative comments in foreign

¹⁴⁷ GM, 4.8.1999; CD, 30.12.2000.

¹⁴⁸ CD, 30.12.2000.

¹⁴⁹ National Archives of Namibia: SWAA A 50/67 Vol. 4: Memorandum of the Chief Native Commissioner MacIntyre, 17.12.1953; cf. Dieckmann, *Hailom*: 181 ff.

countries should the Mbarakwengo [Khwe] leave Southwest-Africa because they are discontent.¹⁵⁰

The Administration further discerned the advantages of potential Khwe vassals to the South African rulers in the future. Such arguments explicitly referred to Köhler's deeper insight into the Khwe society:

According to the ethnologist Dr. Köhler, who lately returned from a stay of several months among the Barakwengas [Khwe] where he did research and compiled a language book and dictionary of their language, these people are not exactly well-disposed towards the Natives and they – the Bushmen – can be encouraged and used in many senses to keep eyes open in West Caprivi.¹⁵¹

The same letter, written after a Chief Native Commissioner's visit to the Okavango, reveals that the Khwe had their own tactics of assuring him their loyalty which actually contradicts the administration's allegation that the Khwe were about to leave.

The Barakwengas [Khwe] said that many of their relatives and race fellows live in Angola and also in Botswana but that they don't have anything in common with them. Their land is Caprivi and they want to stay there because the Governor (Administrator) told them that they are his children and that he will look after them.¹⁵²

After the cattle inspector had ordered the killing of 11 head of cattle belonging to the Mbukushu Chief Cutende in Angola who maintained they were taken across the border into West Caprivi by Khwe people, Cutende captured nine head of cattle belonging to two Khwe individuals. They were keeping them on Angolan territory because of the cattle decree, a fact which in turn is clearly at odds with their above quoted allegations. The incident is of special interest since it distressed the Chief Native Commissioner to an amazing degree. In a letter to the Department of Agriculture requesting an explanation of their position he even conjured the specter of international conflict with the Portuguese in Angola.¹⁵³ The Department of Agriculture, however, did not give in easily and especially rejected the argument that relations with the Portuguese would be

¹⁵⁰ Original Afrikaans text: "Die Departement is klaarblyklik egter angstig dat ons die Boesmans moet probeer behou en die posisie is dus baie netelig. Dit kan ongunstige kommentaar in die Buiteland uitlok indien die Mbarakwengo [Khwe] weens ontevredenheid nou Suidwes-Afrika verlaat" (National Archives of Namibia: BAC 65 HN 1/25/8 Vol. 6: Letter of Native Commissioner Rundu to the Chief Native Commissioner Windhoek, 22.7.1961).

¹⁵¹ Original Afrikaans text: "Volgens die Etnoloog Dr. Köhler, wat pas terug gekeer het van 'n paar maande se verblyf onder die Barakwengas [Khwe] waar hy navorsing gedoen en 'n taal- en woordeboek oor hul taal opgestel het, is die mense nie juis baie gunstig teenoor die Inboorlinge (Naturelle) gesind nie en kan hulle – die Boesmans – deur goeie behandeling aangemoedig en gebruik word om vir baie doeleindes die oog in die seil in die Westelike Caprivi te hou" (National Archives of Namibia: SWAA BAC 65 HN 1/25/8 Vol. 6: Letter of the Chief Native Commissioner Windhoek to the Secretary of South West Africa, 7.11.1962).

¹⁵² Original Afrikaans text: "Die Barakwengas [Khwe] het gesê dat daar wel van hulle familie en rasgenote in Angola sowel as in Betsjoenanland is maar dat hulle met die niks in gemeen het nie. Hulle land is die Caprivi en hulle wil daar bly want die Goewerneur (die Administrateur) het ook gesê hulle is sy kinders en hy sal na hulle kyk" (ibid).

¹⁵³ National Archives of Namibia: BAC HN1/25/8 Vol. 6: Letter of the Chief Native Commissioner to the Director of the Department of Agriculture, 5.2.1962.

affected, by pointing out that similar events in Kaokoland and Ovamboland had not provoked any reaction from the side of the Portuguese government.¹⁵⁴ After the authorities at Cuangar¹⁵⁵ had been called in, Cutende gave the cattle back to the Khwe but, obviously, felt he had been treated unjustly since the tracks proved that his cattle had been driven to West Caprivi by two Bushmen. The Native Commissioner in Rundu gave the following comment:

Whatever the pros and cons of this case may be, it is certain that the incident rankles with Chief Cutende and that we have antagonised an influential person on our vulnerable Eastern border.¹⁵⁶

Such turmoil caused by the theft of a few head of cattle belonging to native people clearly indicates that something much more serious must have been behind the whole affair. And this was nothing else than the “vulnerable Eastern border”, vulnerable because of the liberation struggles in Angola, Zambia, and later also in Namibia (see below).

In 1965, the Khwe in Mutc'iku finally received 40 head of cattle from the Bantu Commissioner in Rundu as a “development action”.¹⁵⁷ According to Köhler he himself had put in a word regarding this matter and also for the construction of a school which was run for the Khwe in Mutc'iku between 1970 and 1974.¹⁵⁸ He ascribes the permission for cattle to be kept by the Khwe in Mutc'iku to the effects of a large-scale campaign against the tsetse-fly, which had ended the danger of cattle disease transmission from Caprivi to the farm area.¹⁵⁹ The Khwe who fled from Angola into Namibia during the late 1960s and 1970s (see below) were, however not allowed to bring their cattle along.¹⁶⁰

In the mid 1960s, the Caprivi Strip had gained enormous strategic importance. SWAPO's armed struggle began in 1966 and during the first years of the liberation war, the Caprivi Strip served as the main route of infiltration for PLAN (People's Liberation Army of Namibia) fighters. They entered the country across its border with Zambia, which achieved independence in 1964. During the late 1960s, police and army forces in the Caprivi Strip were considerably reinforced. In 1974, the SADF officially took over the police duties in the area while already having been secretly engaged in combating insurgents before. West Caprivi effectively became a no-access zone for civilians.¹⁶¹ The

¹⁵⁴ National Archives of Namibia: BAC HN1/25/8 Vol. 6: Letter of the Director of the Department of Agriculture to the Chief Native Commissioner, 16.8.1962.

¹⁵⁵ Cuangar lies opposite Nkurenkuru and west of Rundu on the Angolan side of the Okavango River at S 17°34', E 18°38'.

¹⁵⁶ National Archives of Namibia: BAC 65 HN 1/25/8 Vol. 6: Letter of the Native Commissioner Rundu to the Chief Native Commissioner Windhoek, 10.9.1962.

¹⁵⁷ “Entwicklungsmaßnahme”, cf. Köhler, *Kxoé-Buschleute*: 515.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.: 475, 532.

¹⁵⁹ Köhler, *Grundlagen*: 543.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.: 551.

¹⁶¹ Kangumu, *Corner*: 32 ff.

arrival of the armed forces in West Caprivi is remembered by the Khwe as the time “when the Whites came”, “the borders were made” and “Komicari did no longer come to see them”.¹⁶² Some Khwe were employed by the police as trackers searching for poachers as well as “terrorists”. A number of boreholes were drilled along both borders.¹⁶³ The Khwe living in the eastern part of Caprivi had to leave their settlements and move to the military camp at Sifuma on the Kwando which had been built by Khwe workers and where they were provided with food.¹⁶⁴

The Tutakos¹⁶⁵ told us that we were no longer allowed to stay where we wanted. They also told us that foreigners – they were talking about SWAPOs – were in the area. The Khwe should no longer live in the bush. [They further said:] ‘If they raid you we won’t know anything about it.’ That’s why we went to Sifuma.¹⁶⁶

The SADF built a military camp at Bwabwata and the so called Golden Highway running in a zigzag line between the Angolan and the Botswana border. In September 1974 construction work started for the military base Alpha, which was later renamed Omega.¹⁶⁷ Apart from the base at Omega two other big camps were erected: Pika-Pau

¹⁶² AM, 27.12.2000. By “making the border” they obviously meant the clearing of a one-kilometer-wide fire strip along the Angolan border (Barbara König, *Namibia: The Ravages of War, South Africa’s Onslaught on the Namibian People*, London, International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, 1983: 11; PN, 3.8.1999).

¹⁶³ KC, 18.11.2000.

¹⁶⁴ KS, 12.8.1999.

¹⁶⁵ The Khwe used to call the SADF ‘Tutako’, a name also used by the Bantu-speaking groups in Kavango for the SADF and SWATF meaning ‘buttocks’. It is interesting to note that the Khwe used the same derogative name as their Bantu-speaking fellow Namibians (Kletus Likuwa, personal communication, email 19.9.2008).

¹⁶⁶ JT, 30.1.2001.

¹⁶⁷ The name ‘Alpha’ is still used by the Khwe in the mutilated form ‘Ofa’, a name which they use for Omega until today. Since this is a case in which the life story of a Khwe man fits with a particular event described in a publication I want to quote both in full here: “In order to assist with the building of the base [Commander] Linford recruited 15 local Bushmen out of 50 who congregated at the main gate of Babwata [Bwabwata] military base. These Bushmen were of the Baraquena [Khwe] tribe and under the leadership of ‘Keppies’. They were to play an important role in the history of West Caprivi. Keppies was a Baraquena, originally from Bagani [on the Okavango] whose family had been murdered by FAPLA [Forças Armadas Popular de Libertação de Angola, the military wing of MPLA]. With him was Jack Bambo, an Afrikaans-speaking Bushman, who had worked on the mines. He was to prove to be a friend and guide to Linford in the difficult times that lay ahead. Jack was later to be the first of the labourers to train as a soldier” (*Uys, Bushman Soldiers*: 9). – And this is how Jack himself describes how he became involved in the SADF: “When I went to Djwaeni for the forth time I did not finish my contract. We were sent back and I lived at Yiceca for one year. Other Khwe were employed by the Tutakos. One day I went to Bwabwata in order to buy tobacco. My brother was working there as a kitchen aid. He told me that the army was going to recruit workers the next day. I told him: ‘No my old people sent me to buy tobacco. I should go back.’ But my brother said: ‘If you want to get a job, you must not miss this chance. I will take the tobacco to the old people on one of my patrols.’ Then I agreed and stayed for the night. Then my brother went first and Keppies and I followed. We saw a huge lot of people gathering there. It was difficult to come close. Then the Qúva [White] told us to come closer and not to be afraid. Keppies stayed were he was but I went. The White asked for my *kúri kx’am* [nationality, ethnic group]. I told him in Fanagalo [lingua franca on the mines]: ‘Bushman. My language is

(later Buffalo) on the Okavango and Fort Doppies on the Kwando. The preliminary camp at Sifuma was disbanded and the inhabitants moved to Fort Doppies. Another base at Chetto was used by the SADF only between 1976 and 1983 and afterwards was left to UNITA troops.¹⁶⁸ A second UNITA-base was located at Dodge City, a place south of Omega III close to the Botswana border which is called †Qowexa by the Khwe.¹⁶⁹

In Angola, battles between the former liberation movements FNLA (Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola), MPLA (Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola) on the one side and UNITA on the other, started before the official date of independence on November 11th 1975. This was the beginning of a civil war which, despite several armistices and peace agreements lasted for more than 25 years and did not come to an end until UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi died in February 2002. The new power relations in Angola caused most Angolan Khwe and !Xun to flee into Namibia in order to escape the violence committed by all parties involved in the war.¹⁷⁰ The Bushmen refugees from Angola were received with open arms by the SADF. This was especially true for those who had been employed as so-called *flechas* ('arrows') by the Portuguese secret service Direção General de Segurança (DGS) in Angola in order to carry out espionage and to fight the liberation movements in that country.¹⁷¹ The SADF, in turn, recruited them for its own war against SWAPO as well as for its secret operations in Angola and Zambia. The refugees did not have many alternatives to working for the South Africans since they would have had to leave the area if they refused.¹⁷² As Taylor argues, there is little information available on how and why the Angolan San made the choices they did and on the extent to which they were coerced to do so, given the sensitivity of conducting research on SADF collaborators in Caprivi.¹⁷³

Fanagalo.' He asked whether I came from the mines and requested me to tell my name. He also asked Keppies whether he was a Baraquena. He repeated the question again and again and demanded that we speak to each other. Then he said: 'Oh what a Bushman. Let me look at you.' Then we were registered. On the next day we went to build Camp Omega. I am the first Khwe who started working for the SADF." (JM, 19.1.2001).

¹⁶⁸ BK, 11.8.1999; see also Diemer, *Barakwena*: 22.

¹⁶⁹ SK, 17.11.1999. The SADF supported the UNITA troops in the Angolan civil war in order to prevent the establishment of a communist regime in its immediate neighbourhood. It allowed UNITA to use bases in West Caprivi and conducted secret operations in support of UNITA inside Angola (Uys, *Bushman Soldiers*).

¹⁷⁰ Peter Stiff, *The Silent War. South African Recce Operations 1969-1994*, Alberton, Galago, 1999: 99. Even at this stage, loyalties didn't necessarily run along ethnic lines. Köhler noted that the common fate of having to seek refuge faced by large parts of the population in south-east Angola, tended to bridge differences between the Khwe and the Bantu (Köhler, *Kxoé-Buschleute*: 327). Some Khwe also fought on the side of SWAPO and the MPLA or were suspected of doing so and punished for it (JM, 31.8.1999, see also Köhler, *ibid.*: 511).

¹⁷¹ Uys, *Bushman Soldiers*: 6.

¹⁷² Gordon, *Bushman Myth*: 190.

¹⁷³ Taylor, *Naming*. After Namibian independence, many of the Angolan Khwe and !Xū agreed to the SADF's offer of resettling them in South Africa (Sharp & Douglas, "Prisoners": 324). Research into such questions among the Khwe in South Africa is also still a desideratum.

According to Brenzinger, almost all of the approximately 2.000 or 3.000 Khwe who had lived in south-eastern Angola before 1965, fled to Namibia.¹⁷⁴ Of the 6.000 !Xū who left Angola, 2.000 came to live at Omega, while 4.000 went to Western Bushmanland. The SADF did not foresee problems when they decided to resettle the Angolan San in West Caprivi and invoked the nature conservation status for the purpose

The occupants were Bushmen, with the exception of a company of South African troops at Bwabwata and two platoon bases on the cutline between the Caprivi and Angola. The area had been a game reserve and was thus completely underdeveloped. There was therefore no objection to the SADF resettling anyone there.¹⁷⁵

The SADF preferred to employ the former *flechas* from Angola who were already trained to track poachers and guerillas, rather than the local Khwe in West Caprivi. According to Uys, the West Caprivi Khwe felt deprived because of this since the newcomers were allowed to carry weapons and received salaries about three times as high as the camp workers. As the SADF was in need of more soldiers, the army soon undertook a recruitment campaign in the whole area between Bagani and Kongola.¹⁷⁶ The number of Bushmen soldiers quickly rose to about 1.000.¹⁷⁷ Their families had to live in or close to the army bases as well. In 1978, Omega alone accommodated 750 to 800 Bushmen soldiers and about 3.000 dependents.¹⁷⁸ According to Liddell, who received the numbers from the authorities at Omega, 2.600 San were living at Omega, 643 of them being soldiers plus their immediate families and 842 people from the extended kin.¹⁷⁹ Suzman gives the number of 4.500 San in Omega for the late 1980s.¹⁸⁰ Virtually the whole population in West Caprivi became economically dependent on the army.

The SADF ultimately became the centre of the Kxoe [Khwe] socio-economic and political world. Its presence resulted in greater dependency on the cash economy, a commensurate change in livelihood strategies, the sedentarisation of large portions of the Kxoe population, and a radical and traumatic transformation of the Kxoe worldview.¹⁸¹

The reasoning behind the recruitment of the Bushmen was not only their legendary arts of tracking and bush skills but also their allegedly natural antagonism against their black

¹⁷⁴ Brenzinger, *Report*: 12 f.

¹⁷⁵ Uys, *Bushman Soldiers*: 9.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*: 12.

¹⁷⁷ Kangumu, *Corner*: 35.

¹⁷⁸ Uys, *Bushman Soldiers*: 69)

¹⁷⁹ Christine Liddell, "The Social Interaction and Activity Patterns of Children from two San Groups Living as Refugees on a Namibian Military Base", *Journal of Cross Cultural Psychology*, 1988, 19 (3): 341-360 (342 ff.).

¹⁸⁰ James Suzman, *Regional Assessment of the Status of the San in Southern Africa. An Assessment of the Status of the San in Namibia*, Report Series, Report No. 4 of 5, Windhoek, Legal Assistance Centre, 2001: 56.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

oppressors, which the SADF was about to exploit for its own goals.¹⁸² This antagonism was actively encouraged by the SADF. Mbukushu and other Black People daring to come into the military camp at Fort Doppies out of hunger were declared fair game for the Bushmen soldiers, who could do as they pleased with them and even children were encouraged to throw stones at black beggars.¹⁸³ Again some Khwe claimed to have felt pity for the beggars and to secretly have supported them with food which common sense suggests must have been the reason why they came at all.¹⁸⁴

The new situation after Angola's independence allowed SWAPO to operate from Angolan territory and after 1975 it did so mostly in the western border zone. West Caprivi, however, remained an exclusively military zone where soldiers were trained and then deployed in northwest-Namibia, Angola and Zambia. Caprivi was the only area under South African control where soldiers could exercise under tropical conditions and West Caprivi housed secret training camps of 'Recces', short for Reconnaissance Commandos, and the paramilitary Koevoet, who were infamous for their brutal action.¹⁸⁵

Camp Omega was used as a model camp for propaganda purposes proving the cooperation between the SADF and indigenous people to be a reality,¹⁸⁶ and demonstrating how the army was "Winning the Hearts and Minds" (WHAM) of the Namibian people.¹⁸⁷ At Omega, the army built schools and clinics. The women were trained in so-called home industries such as bread baking and sewing in order to prevent a cultural gap between the soldiers and children trained at work or in school on the one hand and the women whose life allegedly remained unchanged on the other.¹⁸⁸ In fact the militarized society in the army bases had dramatic effects not only for inter-ethnic relations, but it also eroded gerontocracy and gender relations within Khwe families.¹⁸⁹ The position of the women was particularly weak in the patriarchal military society. Liddell, one of the few researchers allowed into the Omega army base during that period, noticed that women had a considerably reduced status both within their own families as well as at the military base as a whole.¹⁹⁰ Even Köhler who was more

¹⁸² E.g. Uys, *Bushman Soldiers*: 5; Breytenbach, *Eden's Exiles*: 16.

¹⁸³ SM, 30.10.2000.

¹⁸⁴ KN, 30.12.2000.

¹⁸⁵ Cf. Kangumu, *Corner*: 17, 37.

¹⁸⁶ Uys, *Bushman Soldiers*: 84. The training base for the Recce, however, had been shifted before the journalists and visitors were invited to Omega (ibid.: 86).

¹⁸⁷ For the WHAM-campaign the SADF also employed ethnologists to assure the support of the local population (Robert J. Gordon, "Ethnological knowledge is of vital importance: The martialization of South African anthropology", *Dialectical Anthropology*, 1987, 12: 443-449).

¹⁸⁸ Uys, *Bushman Soldiers*: 47.

¹⁸⁹ Cf. Boden, "People".

¹⁹⁰ Liddell, "Interaction": 357; see also Linda Waldman, "Women and the Army: 'Bushman' Women at Schmidtsdrift Military Camp", Paper presented to the Pan African Association of Anthropologists Annual Conference, Nairobi University, 16-21 October 1995, Nairobi 1995.

concerned with the loss of Khwe culture than with the social position of women, noticed that the life of Khwe women underwent changes during the military period:

That the Kxoé [Khwe] in Omega have been pampered to the degree of alienation from the bush by all these reforms and that especially the children in Omega, during the process of their enculturation, were no longer trained to cope with the challenges presented by the life in the bush on an everyday basis and that the women also gradually lost their bush skills did not enter the minds of the camp managers who were keenly occupied with the development of the Bushmen.¹⁹¹

The SADF's concern, however, was not simply the development of the Bushmen. On the contrary, it was the officially proclaimed aim that the Bushmen should not lose their particular cultural knowledge in the course of the civilizing efforts. That was why the young men were sent to the bush to refresh their tracking skills.¹⁹² It is obvious that the real reason for this kind of 'cultural preservation' was rather to preserve and develop those skills of young men which were useful for the army. In general, the rewards that Bushmen received were in direct proportion to their usefulness to the army, which can also be seen from the fact that Khwe soldiers were fired when sick.¹⁹³ Evaluations of the military period from the side of the Khwe are again far from uniform. While young adults, who went to school after Namibian independence complain that their fathers were exploited by the SADF,¹⁹⁴ many of those who profited most from the army when they were young adults themselves, represent the time as one of prosperity and an unprecedented high social status.¹⁹⁵

The withdrawal of the SADF at Namibian independence not only left the Khwe in an economically disastrous position, but also with a tarnished reputation for having been unpatriotic to independent Namibia. Fears of revenge were fed by memories of own deeds¹⁹⁶ as well as some real instances of revenge in the first months after

¹⁹¹ Köhler, *Grundlagen*: XIV. Original German text: "Daß die Kxoé in Omega durch all diese Neuerungen bis zur Buschfremdheit verwöhnt wurden, und dass vor allem die Kinder in Omega in der Enkulturation den 'Busch' mit seinen Herausforderungen nicht jeden Tag aufs neue kennen lernten und auch die Frauen ihre 'Buschtüchtigkeit' allmählich verloren, drang nicht in das Bewusstsein der entwicklungsbehafteten Lagerleitung ein."

¹⁹² Uys, *Bushman Soldiers*: 47.

¹⁹³ E.g. AS, 13.8.1999.

¹⁹⁴ BD, 7.12.2000.

¹⁹⁵ Cf. Piet A., Erasmus, "The Harmless People: From Stone-Age Hunter to Modern Soldier", *South African Journal of Ethnology*, 1997, 20 (4): 165-170.

¹⁹⁶ SM, 30.10.2000. Most of the former soldiers did not want to talk about what exactly happened during military action (e.g. TG, 28.1.2003). In her study about gender relations in Schmidtsdrift in South Africa where many former Bushmen soldiers were resettled after Namibian independence, Waldman (1995) notes that the latter did not even talk about it to their own womenfolk. In the first volume of his Khwe encyclopedia Köhler argues that due to a "lack of informants" he was not able to document developments from the 1970s onwards which is at the least astonishing given his good relationships and the otherwise meticulous nature of his documentation (Köhler, *Kxoé-Buschleute*: 327).

independence.¹⁹⁷ During the crisis of 1998 to 2002 the Khwe had to face accusations of collaborating with both the secessionist movement in East Caprivi and UNITA rebels, who started raids on Namibian territory after the country became involved in the Angolan civil war in December 1999. Reasoning referred to the fact that the Khwe had formerly collaborated with the SADF and UNITA what made them generally suspect of allying with the enemies of independent Namibia.¹⁹⁸ The Khwe even more than the !Xun were considered the “ideal warriors” by the SADF:

In some dim distant past his [Cuamama Makua, leader of the Kazamba (Khwe) tribe of Bushmen] ancestors had merged with a black tribe in Angola and produced the ideal warrior – combining the strength of the black with the cunning of the Bushman.¹⁹⁹

Parallel to the monopolization of administrative responsibility for West Caprivi by the SADF and different from the inconsistent and conflicting ethnic identifications by different ministries during the decades before, the perceived mixed ethnic category of the Khwe was now constructed as a perfect blend.²⁰⁰ The ramifications of the Khwe involvement with the SADF are long-lasting and complex and cannot be presented here.²⁰¹

Summary and conclusion

At the onset of colonialism the Khwe participated in the wider trans-regional networks in trading and client relationships. The German colonial power did not profoundly affect the daily lives of West Caprivi residents. The West Caprivi as a stretch of land and the Khwe as a group of people were rather regarded as unsuitable: the first as an area for White settlement and the latter as an agricultural labour force. The most significant long-lasting effect was the definition of the boundaries which in the decades to come became crucial in rendering activities illegal, delineating territories of refuge and marking out areas affected by conflicts in the neighbouring countries. While the German sources can

¹⁹⁷ David Robbins, *On the Bridge of Goodbye. The Story of South Africa's discarded San Soldiers*, Johannesburg & Cape Town, Ball, 2007: 133.

¹⁹⁸ Boden, “Impacts”: 190 ff. In the service of the Portuguese, the Khwe had also fought against UNITA (Sharp & Douglas, “Prisoners”: 325). The history of the San in Angola and their involvement in the wars of that country have not yet been researched at all (for a first attempt see Julie J. Taylor & Alyssa K. Battistoni, “Indigenous identities and military frontiers: Preliminary reflections on San and the military in Namibia and Angola, 1960-2000”, *Lusotopie*, (forthcoming).

¹⁹⁹ Uys, *Bushman Soldiers*: 4.

²⁰⁰ During fieldwork, Khwe also represented their ethnic category as a ‘good blend’, though not necessarily a perfect one. People maintained that they knew both, how to hunt and live and find bush food as well as how to fish, plough and keep cattle, to be capable of speaking Khwedam as well as some Bantu languages, etc. They stressed that they had acquired more cultural techniques than both the !Xun as their next San neighbours and the Mbukushu as their next Bantu neighbours. This opinion was especially voiced by the Khwe in Mutc’iku who at the same time represented and ridiculed their ||Xo-Khwe fellows as ‘mere’ Bushmen (Boden, *Prozesse*: 254 ff.).

²⁰¹ For first steps on this terrain see Sharp & Douglas, “Prisoners”; Boden “Impacts”; id., “People”: 122 ff.; Taylor & Battistoni, “Identities”.

be read as supporting the Khwe claim that they were the only people who settled in West Caprivi, the Khwe were certainly not the only people who used that area. During the first decades of South African Administration, the situation on the ground was not much different from that under German 'control'. From 1940 onwards, however, the state intervened in local interethnic relations as well as in the economies of West Caprivi's residents in manifold ways. West Caprivi was made a livestock free zone in 1938, a nature conservation area in 1963 and became a territory reserved to the South African Defense Force from the 1970s until Namibian independence. The Khwe were allowed to stay in West Caprivi, protected from slave raids, accepted as mine workers, befriended by food distributions, empowered by receiving political leaders, courted as potentially useful people for the South Africans and hired in great numbers as soldiers by the SADF. Ethnic ascriptions of Khwe as mixed or hybrid as a result of miscegenation or acculturation played a decisive role for their economic and political options in the course of the 20th century which was, however, far from definite or constant. The race biologist and geographer Franz Seiner in the service of the German colonial administration gives a first example of the difficulties others had in classifying the Khwe. From a biologist's standpoint he treated them as sharing too many, from an economist's standpoint as sharing too few traits with their Bantu-speaking neighbours. In racial theory and within the colonialist discourse on racism on the one hand, but also in cultural anthropology and Bushmen preservation politics on the other, physical or cultural 'hybridity' was considered a disqualifying or bland aberration respectively. In practice, however, the stigma turned out to open up a number of otherwise inaccessible economic options as well as an increase in social prestige, especially for Khwe men. Thus, their trans-ethnic or trans-cultural position was at the same time ideologically denigrated and practically exploited by the apartheid state. It allowed for multiple interpretations emphasizing only one aspect of their mixed Bushmen-Bantu categorization or both at the same time. While it disqualified them as Bushmen for preservation within Bushmen politics, and at the same time constructed them as non-Bantu, non-Native, or non-Agropastoralists within veterinary and land politics, the Khwe became simultaneously regarded Natives within the field of labour politics which accepted Khwe as migrant workers to the mines in South Africa during the 1940s to 1960s. On the positive side, this meant access to valuable working opportunities and an increasing recognition of West Caprivi as a Khwe 'homeland'. On the negative side it meant that they had to refrain from keeping stock or had to keep their animals on the other side of the border in Angola. The respective benefits were associated with only one of the co-existing aspects of an ambivalent ethnic categorization through a kind of furcated apperception. Tragically, the representation of the Khwe, which merged their qualities into an integrated whole was that of the 'ideal warrior'. Different from learned cultural techniques like stock-breeding, agriculture or multilingualism which were of relevance for state decisions concerning land and labour matters during the 1940s and 1960s, the ascription of the 'ideal warrior' was based on rather primordially appearing qualities such as physical strength and a cunning character. Because the war, which these ideal warriors fought, was lost, the Khwe have

today to carry an incriminating legacy and since independence have suffered from the stigma as collaborators of Namibia's enemies in the eyes of their wartime opponents.

Post-independence issues fall outside the scope of this article. My aim was rather to present some details on the 'pre-histories' of current discourses, contests and conflicts as well as some Khwe voices and views on their pre-independence past. I hope to have shown here that the stereotypical notion of Khwe 'hybridity' allowed for multiple and even contrary uses from 'impure' to 'perfect' for the state authorities. Unfortunately not only the written sources but also the documented biographies allow for only a few glimpses of Khwe agency. The Khwe obviously embraced the new economic opportunities of mine work and soldiering. They also seem to have used the means at hand for pressing the Administration to allow them to keep cattle. Less visible but still discernible are their own interpretations of Khwe leadership as well as some insubordinate action such as warning the Mbukushu of Muyatwa's imminent punitive expeditions or the clandestine support of black beggars in the military camps. The memories and trajectories of Khwe agency together with those of their fellow Namibians within the processes described here, deserve a great deal of further illumination and are strongly recommended for future research.

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