

RESISTANCE ON THE BANKS OF THE KAVANGO RIVER

Edited by: Marius Kudumo and Jeremy Silvester





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Museums Association of Namibia

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In publishing this book, first and foremost, I am indebted to the Embassy of Finland for providing the funds that finally enabled our research on the history of anti-colonial resistance and the liberation struggle to reach a broader audience. I would also like to thank the Museums Association of Namibia (MAN) for facilitating the project that will not only result in a publication, but also an exhibition that will be mounted in Rundu.

The original research was initiated by the Archive of Anti-colonial Resistance and the Liberation Struggle project which was supported by the GTZ, an agency of the Federal Republic of Germany and the Embassy of Finland. The original funding enabled us to conduct research and organise various workshops in Rundu. The original research was undertaken by competent historians in 2003. However, the support of the Embassy of Finland enabled us, over ten years later, to conduct additional research and to locate photographs that could be used in both the publication and the exhibition.

Public discussion of our research took place at two important Conferences which took place at Rundu College of Education in 2005 and Kavango Regional Council Auditorium in 2007. The public dialogue reinforced our impression that there was a strong demand that the history of resistance in the Kavango Regions should be documented and made available. We believe that this publication will enable many more people to read and discuss our work.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the residents of the region who contributed both memories and materials to our diverse research. Without your support, we would not have been able to produce this book. Of course the views expressed in this publication are those of the authors

and not, necessarily, those of the people who were involved in the earlier stages of the research and the public forums. Finally, I would like to thank Dr Marius Kudumo and Dr Jeremy Silvester for their professional editing of the manuscript.

Preface

This book is a wide-ranging collection of scholarly research, historical narratives and evidence on the role played by the inhabitants of Kavango to liberate Namibia. It is derived from the papers and proceedings of the Archives of Anti-Colonial Resistance and Liberation Struggle (AACRLS) conferences held in Kavango which were authored by a variety of people.

This book will help to promote and develop basic knowledge of Namibia's history and encourage a wide-range discussion of the empirical range of existing sources and broader debate on the contribution of the inhabitants of the two Kavangos to the liberation of our motherland, Namibia. The verbatim discussion and debate is, of course, too lengthy to reproduce in this book. The assumption behind this book is that many scholars will be challenged to research more on this history of Namibia. There is still a lot to be done to research and document the history of our people and the various roles they played in their communities during the liberation of our country.

In order to fulfil the aspirations of the project and the people who attended the conference, the committee decided to produce this book. The committee sought the assistance of two historians, Dr. Marius Kudumo and Dr. Jeremy Silvester, to edit the book and put it in a historical context. With their assistance, we are now able to publish this book.

Contemporary students of history should find this book stimulating. They might use the book to identify questions that can lead to further research on Namibian history. Learners might use it as a reference book.

It is a reality that little had previously been written on the contribution of the inhabitants of Kavango to the liberation struggle. This book is thus intended to put some facts on the table and reflects our concern that

it is rare for the story of the inhabitants of Kavango to be put on paper and, rarer still for this work to be available to readers in the region. Thus by publishing this book, it is hoped, that students and lecturers will find a local publication that can be used for academic and supplementary purposes.

The book includes the contribution of traditional leaders, church leaders, students, workers and women to the liberation struggle of Namibia, thus reflecting that we were active participants. The authors use some terminology derived from RuKavango and Afrikaans in order to portray the current social reality in Namibia.

The contributions differ, not only in length but in scholarly rigour. Yet what combines them all is these authors' common concern for the contribution of the inhabitants of Kavango to Namibia's liberation and independence. Their endeavour is not simply of relevance to those whose interest is in finding out more about the contribution of the inhabitants of Kavango to Namibia's liberation and independence as much as it is also a challenge to historians to re-explore the past through the eyes and political perspective of those who have been exploited, brutalised and traumatised by the colonial regimes in Namibia.

Sebastian H. Kantema

Chairperson

AACRLS Kavango Committee

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Dr Marius Kudumo grew up at Mekena in the Kavango and schooled at Nyangana Roman Catholic Mission School, Linus Shashipapo Secondary

School and Rundu Secondary School. He has a BEd and Med from UNAM, an Masters in Policy Studies from SARIPS in Zimbabwe accredited by the Universities of Fort Hare and Zimbabwe and a PhD in Education Policy from the University of Pretoria. He was a teacher at Rundu Secondary School (1988-91) and became the National Project Coordinator of the teachers' union, NANTU in 1991. He served as the Secretary-General of the Namibia National Commission for UNESCO (2010-2014) and is currently the Director: International Relations at the Namibia University of Science and Technology. Email: mkudumu@nust.na

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Dr Jeremy Silvester was born in the UK and campaigned for Namibian indendence as an anti-apartheid activist with the Namibia Support Committee. He worked for eight years as a lecturer in the History Department of the University of Namibia and is currently the Project Development Manager with the Museums Association of Namibia. He is committed to a vision of museums in Namibia as spaces for dialogue and creative expression about local cultural and natural heritage. He has written extensively on Namibian history. His most recent publication being *Re-viewing Resistance in Namibian History* (UNAM Press, 2015). He can be contacted on jeremysilvester3@gmail.com

Acronyms

AACRLS	Archives of Anti-Colonial Resistance and the Liberation Struggle
BAC	Bantu Affairs Commissioner
BIC	Bantu Investment Corporation
CMIS	Church Monitoring and Information Service
DEMKOP	Democratic Cooperative Development Party
ECSA	Episcopal Church people for a Free Southern Africa
ELCIN	Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia
FNDC	First National Development Corporation
FNLA	Frente Nacional de a Libertação de Angola
KAYEC	Kavango Catholic Youth Committee
KLC	Kavango Legislative Council
KOV	Kavango Onderwysers Vereniging
MANWU	Metal and Allied Workers Union
MUN	Mineworkers Union of Namibia
NACAYUL	Namibian Catholic Youth League
NADEL	National Association of Democratic Lawyers
NAFAU	Namibia Food and Allied Workers Union
NANSO	Namibia National Student Organisation

NAPWU	Namibia Public Workers Union
NANTU	Namibia National Teachers' Union
NATAU	Namibia Transport and Allied Workers Union
NDUP	National Democratic Unity Party
NLO	Northern Labour Organisation
NNIP	Namibia National Independence Party
NUNW	National Union of Namibian Workers
ONO	Okavango National Organisation
OPO	Ovamboland Peoples' Organisation
PIDE	Polícia Internacional e de Defesa do Estado
PLAN	Peoples' Liberation Army of Namibia
SADF	South African Defence Force
SLO	Southern Labour Organisation
SWANLA	South West Africa Native Labour Organisation
SWAPA	South West Africa Progressive Association
SWAPO	South West Africa Peoples' Organisation
SWASB	South West Africa Student Body
SWATF	South West Africa Territorial Force
UNAM	University of Namibia
UNITA	União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola

UNTAG	United Nations Transitional Assistance Group
WHAM	Winning Hearts and Minds
WNLA	Witwatersrand

Introduction: Making History in the Kavango Regions

– Dr Marius Kudumo

The Kavango is situated in North-eastern Namibia and is traditionally inhabited by the Hambukushu, Vagciriku, Vasambyu, Vambunza and Vakwangali. The history and contribution of the Region to the national liberation struggle is inadequately represented in existing literature and, indeed, is almost none existent. Whilst, in the pre-colonial period, boundaries were known in terms of the loyalty to a particular traditional authority, in the colonial period a region defined as 'Kavango' started to appear on maps with boundaries that changed over time. Today this Region forms two political regions – Kavango East and Kavango West, but throughout this book we will mainly refer, for consistency, to Kavango as the historical territory of the five traditional authorities listed above.

History students from the Kavango have selected research topics in their postgraduate studies since Namibia obtained its political independence that address the inadequate representation of the region in the historiography of Namibia. The objective was to address the absence of the Kavango in the liberation struggle narrative of the country.

Some of these students also participated in the Archives of Anti-colonial Resistance and the Liberation Struggle (AACRS) project, which was supported by the GIZ, an agency of the Federal Republic of Germany and the Embassy of Finland. The funding enabled the participants in the project to conduct research and facilitated discussion and validation conferences at the Rundu College of Education and the Kavango Regional Council Auditorium in 2005 and 2007 respectively.

The main aim of their project was to research and document the contribution of the Kavango Region to anti-colonial resistance and Namibia's national liberation struggle and to fill the gap in existing literature. Further funding from the Embassy of Finland twenty-six years after Namibia's independence has facilitated further research that culminated in the production of this book that is intended to complement a photograph exhibition that will be mounted in Rundu in early 2016.

The introduction to the book provides an overview of the ten chapters of the book. The overview highlights the main points of interests covered in each chapter. Various social structures such as traditional authorities, contract workers, trade unions, students' organisations, women, PLAN combatants, the Churches and political activists played significant roles in shaping political consciousness in Kavango and the development and movement from a regional to a national identity.

The authors of the book analyse the roles of the various social structures in Kavango in resisting the South African plan of developing a homeland identity based on the Odendaal Plan and thus attempting to present an alternative to SWAPO's vision of a united people in a unitary state. The book also provides a historical overview of how the resistance evolved over time and the main actors who were involved and played critical roles in the resistance.

In his contribution on the 1903 uprising against German Imperial Government in Kavango, **Shampapi Shiremo** demonstrates in chapter one how the communities of Kavango like other Namibian communities were affected by German expansionism and colonialism. The communities through their traditional leaders resisted expansionism in their areas of jurisdictions. The chapter offers explanations why the traditional leaders resisted German expansionism and gives examples of the various

skirmishes that took place in the territory between German colonial forces and the traditional authorities. It also explains why the German Imperial Government abandoned its expansionism in Kavango to focus on Central and Southern Namibia.

In a wide-ranging analysis of the contract labour system and its social, political and economic implications on the population of Kavango, **Kletus Muhena Likuwa** in chapter two interrogates the impact of the contract labour system on the Kavango during the South African colonial period. Likuwa provides a historical context to the process of colonial control with particular reference to the Kavango and how the contract labour system has created social and economic hardships for the inhabitants of the Region. The chapter also explains the pull factors of the exploitive contract labour system and the work destinations of the contract labourers, which amongst others, included the mines and farms. Kletus Likuwa also explains how the shared experiences of the contract labour system contributed to the growth of a nationalist political consciousness in Kavango.

Sebastian Kantema in chapter three describes the contribution of students in Kavango to the national liberation struggle, especially during the 1980s. The chapter provides the contextual conditions that prevailed at most secondary schools in the region and argues that the conditions, compared to other regions in Namibia, make political mobilisation in Kavango during the period very difficult - if not impossible. These conditions included predominantly white teachers at secondary schools and the establishment of South African military units near or, even, at schools. The chapter also explains the historical genesis of the student movement in the region. Students organised themselves to participate in political mobilisation despite the militarisation of the Region through

their linkages with the Namibia National Students Organisation (NANSO) national leadership, students from the region who were studying at universities, progressive teachers and the liberation movement SWAPO. The chapter further explains how the conditions contributed to a significant exodus of students into exile and the role of students in Kavango during the implementation of Resolution 435.

In chapter four, **Sebastian Kantema** explains the role of the workers in resisting South African rule in Kavango, especially during the 1980s and the consequent suspensions and expulsions of teachers. The chapter pays particular attention to the teachers strike in 1989 and the role of teachers and their union in registration and voter education during the implementation of Resolution 435. The chapter highlights that teachers also served as interpreters, observers and polling agents during the 1989 election. These roles were critical for citizens who were exercising their democratic right to vote for the first time in their lives and in a context where misinformation by the South African apparatus was the order of the day.

In Chapter five, **Aaron Nambadi** describes in detail the role and contribution of women in Western Kavango during the armed liberation struggle. Their roles included regularly preparing food for the PLAN combatants, nursing injured combatants and providing intelligence information about the whereabouts of South African soldiers, despite the great risk involved. It was a risk as both the PLAN combatants and the South African security forces expected their assistance and collaboration in a military contested context. Nambadi asserts that the absence of womens' voices in Kavango writing from their own perspective on their role during the armed liberation struggle is a matter of great concern. He suggests that it is imperative and urgent that women from the region

record and document their own memories of the struggle.

Aaron Nambadi in chapter six examines the role of the Church during the liberation struggle in Kavango. The chapter explains the relatively late introduction of Christianity in the Region and also provides insight into the role of the Church in education, in politics during the establishment and functioning of the Kavango Legislative Assembly, in providing legal assistance to victims of human rights abuses during the liberation struggle and as a link to the outside world to inform the international community about the atrocities of the South African war machinery in Kavango.

Chapter seven focuses on forced removals around Rundu. In this chapter, **Kletus Likuwa** and the late **Mandhavela Kasera** demonstrate that the experiences of forced removals around Rundu are of historical significance against the backdrop that the existing literature on the historiography of forced removal in Namibia is limited to the 1959 forced removal from the Old Location in Windhoek. The chapter explains the rationale behind the forced removal in the context of the South African policy of separate development and influx control and the impact thereof on the affected residents.

Karangane Karapo in chapter eight documents the involvement and contribution of traditional leaders during the struggle for national liberation. The contribution included supporting SWAPO and, especially, PLAN combatants to operate in the Ukwangali area. The focus is on selected traditional leaders, especially the Ukwangali Traditional Authority and invites further research to properly document the role of all the traditional authorities in Kavango in a comprehensive manner. The chapter analyses the dilemma that traditional leaders faced, as they were caught between serving the interests of the South African Government through their representation in the Kavango Legislative Assembly and nationalist

expectations from SWAPO to reject the homeland establishment.

In chapter nine, **Karangane Karapo** and **Jeremy Silvester** give an account based largely on the living memories of inhabitants of the Kavango Region as a contested theatre of war and how the conflict impacted the inhabitants. The authors also provide insight on how the Kavango Region served as a route to exile from the early sixties. The role of the Region as a war zone and as a route to exile and for early military infiltrations had, previously, been inadequately documented.

Jeremy Silvester in chapter 10 provides an overview of the evolution of the electoral process in Kavango. The process includes the 1973 election for the Kavango Legislative Assembly, the 1978 and 1989 elections. The chapter explains how the political dynamics of the Region initially brought traditional leaders together in a form of 'regional nationalism', but that this identity was challenged over time by the growth of nationalism resulting in the critical role of the Kavango in the SWAPO electoral victory in 1989.

All the chapters demonstrate that further research is required to fully understand the role and contributions of the Kavango Region to the historiography of national liberation. The authors of this book are pioneers and they invite upcoming researchers and inhabitants of the Region to conduct further research and record and document the history of the Region and their experiences and memories. By doing so, the history of the Region will become integrated into our national history. We believe that the documentation and sharing of our different perspectives on the processes that led to the birth of our nation will play an important role in nation-building.

1. The 1903 Kavango Uprising against the German Imperial Government: A Forgotten Historical Episode in Namibia's Anti-Colonial Resistance historiography

- Shampapi Shiremo¹

Introduction

One might argue that anti-colonial resistance dates from the start of the colonial period. Once the efforts of colonial authorities to intervene in the administration and governance of traditional authorities became substantive they were bound to provoke opposition. Opposition to the early encounters with colonial rule by Kavango traditional leaders took a number of forms during the German colonial period (1884-1915). Whilst this chapter focuses on the events that took place along the Kavango River between June and July 1903, it is important to provide some historical context describing the earlier confrontational relations between the local Kavango population and the German imperial government and its agents.

Evidence suggests that by 1903 the anti-colonial spirit amongst the five Kavango Kingdoms (then still labelled by the Germans as Owambo

¹ He holds the following qualifications from the University of Namibia: B.Ed (2003), MA in History (2009), B.Juris (2014).

kingdoms) alongside the Kavango River was very high². The traditional leaders of the Kavango in 1903 were *Hompa* Himarwa Ithete and his nephew Kandjimi Hawanga zaShikongo of Ukwangali, *Hompa* Nampadi zaMbanze of Mbunza, *Hompa* Mbambangandu waShimbenda of Shambyu, *Hompa* Nyangana waMukuve of Gciriku and *Fumu* Diyeve dyaKushamuna of Mbukushu. It is clear that these leaders sent messages to each other to stand in unison and fight the German threat against their sovereignty. For example, there is evidence that in 1903 *Hompa* Nyangana of the Vagciriku sent emissaries to his counterpart, *Hompa* Mbambangandu I of the Vashambyu to urge him to raise up in arms in solidarity against the German traders and agents. (Kamwanga & Haushiku, 1995:33-34)

The main reason behind the anti-colonial attitude of the different leaders was the warnings they had received from the Ovaherero regarding the land and cattle theft which they had experienced since they have accepted German sovereignty in the late 1880s. This view debunks the colonial perpetuated notion that situates all the skirmishes and battles that took place between the Kavango population and the Europeans as a symptom of the bloodthirsty tendencies of black people. It is not disputed now that, at that time, Europeans regarded Africans as uncivilised and thus not their equals, a racism that was at the root of most contemporary conflicts. Most of the Kavango monarchs remained alarmed and ready to challenge German intrusions into their kingdoms. Moreover, there is archival evidence that, as early as 1891/1892, the German imperial

government in Windhoek banned the sale of firearms and ammunitions to Africans across the length and breadth of 'German South West Africa'.

² A German map published in the *Deutsche Kolonial Zeitung* on 12 November 1903 shows two areas where the local people were uprising against the German Imperial Government. In the north-eastern area of Namibia an area along the Kavango is was labelled as an Owambo area.

Most Namibian communities, including those along the Kavango River, immediately became suspicious and hostile towards the movement of German officials and traders in the country.

The proclamation on gun sales reflected a broader strategy within the various colonial territories in Africa which had been brought about by the Brussels Conference of 1889/1890. In a book titled 'Britain and Germany in Africa', Miers (1967:108-110) points out that the Brussels' Act recommended that all colonial powers in Africa effect the ban on gun and ammunition sale to the natives. Thomas Tlou (1985:78) argues that the said law itself reflected a European fear of the military modernization that was taking place in Africa. One could also argue that the ban redefined European-African relations, and especially the relations of African natives with European traders. Subsequently, communities were angered by the ban and became mistrustful or acted violently towards the European traders who came to their land.

In his book *Deutsch-Südwest-Africa: Geschichte der Kolonisation bis zum Ausbruch des Krieges mit Witbooi April 1893*, Curt von François reveals a broader picture of the general outbreak of violence against traders as the ban was effected in GSWA. Von François (1899:161-163) wrote that the prohibition on the import of ammunition turned the local population against the German government and, he felt, that rebellion was near. For example, he described the Herero-German traders' relations in the year 1892 and 1893 as follows:

In December 1892, the trader Krebs, who travelled from Windhoek to the Mbanderu, had £ 17 confiscated on the order of Chief Nikodemus, (with the motivation that this was done) because the Germans had stopped trade in ammunition. This should be done to everybody who

came from Windhoek. – all traders were recalled from Hereroland in December 1892 and January 1893, on the order of Samuel Maharero. In February 1893 Maharero ordered the closure of all shops in Okahandja. Shameless begging, blackmail and robberies by the chiefs created intolerable conditions for the traders in Hereroland.

In Kavango, amongst the Vagciriku, a German and an English trader, Phillip Wiessel and Robert Arthur Faraday were killed for the same reason and the revenge attack that followed in March 1894 through *Kgosi* Sekgoma Letsholathebe from Nakalachwe, Ngamiland in present Botswana resulted in what is known today as the Vagciriku-Lishora Massacre'. There is archival evidence that *Kgosi* Sekgoma of the Batawana was recruited and armed to massacre the Vagciriku by German and British South Africa Company agents such as Georg Reinhardt, Frederick Scheepers, Isaac Johan Bosman and Andries Mathys Joubert. However, this is just to highlight the fact that as from the early 1890s the Kavango kingdoms were affected by colonial laws in the same way it affected their Ovaherero and Nama counterparts in central and southern Namibia. Restrictions on trade had significant economic consequences.

The first military German official to visit the Kavango area (only eastern Kavango) was Major Curt von François in 1891. It is apparent that the visit was to explore that part of the 'German territory', to evaluate its resources and to include it in the development schemes for the colony. Thus, a German concession map of 1895 designated the whole of the Kavango as belonging to the South West Africa Company- a German colonial mining company. Dr. Hartmann, the manager of the South West Africa Company informed Governor Theodor Leutwein in 1895 that the Owambo Chiefs (which included the Kavango Chiefs) were preparing for

war against the Germans. He argued that this hostility was due to reports of the conquest of Hendrik Witbooi which had reached their kingdoms. The report by Dr. Hartmann, who was in regular communication with the Owambo Chiefs, led the Governor, Theodor Leutwein, to abandon a planned visit to the north due to fear of a possible attack, (See Silvester, J & Gewald J-B, 2003:228). Theodor Leutwein, the successor of Major Curt von François as *Landeshauptmann* (from 1894) might not have visited the Kavango area, however, the evidence is that he did play a major role in convincing German subjects in the forms of missionaries to start penetrating the Kavango area to spread the gospel, and, also German culture.

One might speculate that Leutwein's objective was to let the missionaries pacify the local population before the army followed to occupy the land. Major Theodor Leutwein played a crucial role in encouraging the Catholic missionaries to consider establishing mission stations among the Kavango population in 1903. The Kavango area had, already, been exclusively allocated to the Catholic Church by the German imperial government in the early 1890s.

Beris A.P.J. (1996:188), states that the pioneers of the Catholic Mission admitted in their writings that their first unsuccessful expeditions to Kavango (to Ukwangali) was also based on a political mandate from the German imperial government. The establishment of Grootfontein in the mid-1890s (which served as a seat for the Chief District Officer who administered a large area including the Kavango area) also evidenced the ambition to extend German authority over the Kavango. It was from the German military base in Grootfontein, that Lieutenant Eggers visited the Kavango in 1899 to assess the impact of the *Rinderpest* disease that, in 1896-1897 wiped out cattle and livestock across the territory. In 1901,

1902, and 1903, Lieutenant Richard Volkmann who was also stationed at Grootfontein, as District Chief, also visited the Kavango area from Grootfontein.

This chapter aims to provide historical information which is not adequately reflected in the main official anti-colonial historiography of Namibia. It is therefore hoped that it will fill a major gap in Namibia's anti-colonial historiography. The chapter uses a variety of sources, namely; archival, primary and secondary literature. The chapter also uses some oral sources, although due to the length of time since the events took place, these are second-hand in nature. The chapter does not make any pretension to claim that my reading is the only perspective that might be taken of events, but my approach is to view events through an anti-colonial lens.

The Catholic Missionaries in Ukwangali and Mbunza in 1903

When looked at from an anti-colonial perspective, 1903 can be described as the year the Kavango population rose up in arms against the German colonial government in Namibia. In this sense, it links to the Bondelswarts uprising that took place in October, 1903 and which is seen by many historians as the first conflict of the major war of anti-colonial resistance. This view is backed up by some contemporary written statements that were made in Germany itself. For example, in the *National Zeitung* of September 1903 and the *Deutsch Kolonial Zeitung* of November 12, 1903.

It all started when, in late February, 1903, the Oblate Fathers Hermandung, Filliung and Biegner accompanied by lay-brothers Bast and Reinhardt left Grootfontein for Kavango. They reached the Kavango near Nkurenkuru

on March 18, 1903 (Beris puts the date at March 16, 1903). The aim of the expedition was to establish a catholic mission station on the southern bank of the Kavango River in the Ukwangali area. Ukwangali was at the time under *Hompa* Himarwa zalthete.

Hompa Himarwa and his nephew Kandjimi Hawanga strongly rejected the missionaries' presentation that *Hompa* Himarwa previously consented in a treaty with Dr. Gerber who visited him in 1902, to allow Catholic missionaries in their land, See Beris (1996:200). It appears that already before 1903, *Hompa* Himarwa was known to the German South West Africa government as a 'troublemaker'. According to Beris (1996:201), Governor Theodor Leutwein warned Prefect Natchwey about *Hompa* Himarwa's 'perfidity' (untrustworthiness). This took place in Windhoek when the Catholic missionaries were preparing for the Kavango expedition. When the missionaries arrived in Grootfontein in January 1903, Mr. Gasz, a Catholic missionary who had accompanied Dr Gerber, the previous year, also warned them about *Hompa* Himarwa. It is not clear as to why Governor Leutwein had such a negative view about *Hompa* Himarwa, but one can deduce that it related to the latter's lack of cooperation with the government.

Adrianus Beris (1996:202-203) who did extensive research into the Oblate Catholic missionaries' saga in Ukwangali in 1903 established the following; Father Biegner explained the reason for their arrival while he showed the written document in which *Hompa* Himarwa had promised Dr. Gerber to allow Catholic missionaries into his territory and that children would be allowed to attend mission school. The *Hompa* denied any knowledge of this promise and, as a consequence, refused them permission to stay in his kingdom. After a lot of persistence from Father Biegner, *Hompa* Himarwa eventually admitted that he had signed the letter, but nevertheless he

persisted in his refusal to allow them to settle in his area. After two days, *Hompa* Himarwa's nephew (most likely, Kandjimi Hawanga) appeared for further negotiations but these also came to a naught (Beris, 1996:203).

According to Governor Theodor Leutwein, the problem lay in the lack of diplomacy from the Catholic missionaries. He pointed out that one of the missionaries was foolish enough to inform *Hompa* Himarwa that he was not in his own territory, but that he was standing on German soil (*auf deutschmem Boden*), and that they as Germans should not be interfered with. This 'arrogance', as Governor Leutwein puts it, "*knocked the bottom out of the cask*" and the good missionaries found it very expedient to retire (disappear) without delay (Silvester & Gewald, 2003:231)

After it was clear that the Vakwangali were not going to concede to the missionaries' demands, the catholic missionaries decided to move eastwards to ask for permission to settle in *Hompa* Nampadi's Mbunza Kingdom. The missionaries reported that *Hompa* Nampadi welcomed them and even allocated a plot to them, but retracted his decision due to threats of war from *Hompa* Himarwa (Beris, 1996: 206). Oral reports from both the Vambunza and the Vakwangali do not acknowledge this version of history, but situate *Hompa* Nampadi's refusal in the context of the brotherhood that existed between the two *vahompa*. It was then decided by the German authorities to punish *Hompa* Himarwa so far as this could be done "*without breach of Portuguese boundaries.*" In July 1903, Lieutenant Richard Volkmann with a party of men and maxims (heavy machine guns) drew up on the south bank of the Okavango River and treated *Hompa* Himarwa's village on the northern bank (in Portuguese territory) to an exhibition of volleys and quick firing which lasted for a whole day.

It was reported that the Owambos (Vakwangali) returned the fire, while

their losses were reported as numerous (*'zahlreich'*). There were no German casualties. The Catholic missionaries actively participated in the shooting incident under the command of Lieutenant Richard Volkmann. However, missionary reports indicated that, at one point, the German *Schutztruppe* were nearly encircled by Hompa Himarwa's men (Beris, 1996: 205). Beris writes that, while the shelling of *Hompa* Himarwa's palace was in progress, a number of his men crossed the river upstream and tried to encircle Volkmann and his men. It is said that *Hompa* Himarwa was forewarned about the advance of the German *Schutztruppe* and well prepared. He had assembled 150 armed men on the Angolan side of the river.

Seeing the impending danger of encirclement, the German *Schutztruppe* withdrew, and arrangements were made in Windhoek for another punitive expedition on a larger scale to move against the 'Owambos' (Kavangos), as soon as the rainy season had passed. According to Silvester and Gewald (2003:231) the outbreak of the Herero Uprising in January 1904 and the subsequent general uprising of the Namas in the south distracted the German Imperial Government's attention so effectually that the Kavango were left in peace and retained their traditional authority structures. *Hompa* Himarwa's resistant attitude and actions in 1903, led to the Catholic Missionaries to declare him an enemy (*persona non grata*) of the Germany imperial government (Beris, 1996: 207). The German-Vakwangali skirmish of July 16, 1903 is remembered in the collective memory of the Vakwangali and the Vambunza as *Yita yaKatautau* (War of Katautau)³.

3 This skirmish was described as Katautau by the Lates Alex Hamunyera Muranda and Vitus Kasire in interviews with a group of local historians in May 2003. Katautau could refer to the volleys of gun shots/sounds that characterised the said skirmish between the German *Schutztruppe* and the Vakwanagali populace on July 16th, 1903.

The Paasch-Arndt Shooting Incident in Gciriku and Shambyu

Four weeks before the German-Vakwangali skirmish of July 16, 1903, the Vagciriku and the Vashambyu also rose up in arms against two German traders and their families. Rainer Bruchmann, (1996:52-53) described it as a 'war' between the earliest German settlers/traders and local residents that took place on the 17th - 18th June 1903. Mauritz Paasch was a German settler and most people who knew him well, including Dr. Georg Hartmann, the manager of the South West Africa Company described him as a difficult and cruel person. Paasch had a bad temper and it was reported that he used to mistreat his own family and many other farmers in the Otavi area.

On several occasions, his fellow European farmers protested against his behaviour to the imperial government (Bruchmann, 1996:50). His bad attitude had once put him in trouble with the Otavi Land and Mining Company over a farm that he occupied at the time. After the farm dispute was settled in court in favour of the Otavi Land and Mining Company, he became disgruntled and decided to move away from GSWA to either the Transvaal, Southern Rhodesia or Mossamedes in Angola. In a letter dated August 8, 1903, Axel Wedberg who travelled with Mr. Paasch from the Grootfontein area up to the present Muhembo border post in Kavango East Region, wrote the following report to Magistrate Marwyn Williams who was stationed at Tsau, British Bechuanaland Protectorate;

As you know I left Damaraland last March (month) with 778 head of cattle belonging to the late Mr A.W. Eriksson's estate, which cattle I have undertaken to deliver on the estates farm on the Crocodile River near Palla camp. At

the same time there was another party in my company by the name of Mauritz Paasch with family leaving Damaraland with 185 head of cattle bound for Transvaal. But on our arrival on the border of Batawana Reserve on the Okavango River we received your (message) that a proclamation was issued (prohibiting) cattle to pass through the Protectorate. Receiving this said news Mr. Paasch altered his intended journey and at once returning not to Damaraland which he could not travel to on account of scarcity of water. But to follow the Okavango River and from there into the Portuguese Colony of Angola. Where he was intent to settle (...) But which country he never reached because on the road along the Okavango River he was attacked by the vicious native Chief (Yangana) and his followers who brutally murdered Mr. Paasch and his whole family with him numbered all in all 8 souls, besides 3 native servants and afterwards looting everything consisting of 185 head of cattle, (....) 1 waggon and two carts.

It is clear that Axel Wedberg did not have complete information about the incident he was reporting to the Magistrate. This is clear from the way in which Wedberg's letter attributes the death of Mr. Paasch and all members of his family to *Hompa* Nyangana and followers alone. The truth is that only two young men were killed by *Hompa* Nyangana's people and Mr. Paasch was only fatally wounded. The rest of the family members were killed on the flood plain of Kadjeredjedje by the followers of *Hompa* Mbambangadu I. The latter had been requested by his cousin *Hompa* Nyangana to stand with him in that war. Wedberg also did not mention

the real cause of the incident but simply explained it as a consequence of *Hompa* Nyangana's 'viciousness'. However, Rainer Bruchmann (1996:51), who did quite extensive research into the matter, established that actually *Hompa* Nyangana did not initiate the attack. Bruchmann argues that Mr. Paasch's attitude was a significant contributing factor and oral history supports this argument.

According to Bruchmann (1996:51), Mr. Paasch had previously sold two exhausted horses, one rusty gun and some gunpowder (of which half was wet and unusable) in exchange for four strong oxen and one cow. *Hompa* Nyangana felt aggrieved and cheated and sent some of his followers to demand their cattle back, but also to return the goods they had received from Mr. Paasch. When *Hompa* Nyangana's messengers related their message, Mr. Paasch was very angry and he chased them away with his gun. At one point as the followers of *Hompa* Nyangana approached, Mr. Paasch even fired in the air and this led to a stampede for cover in the surrounding bushes. Mr. Willem Arndt who joined the party of Mr. Paasch at Mahango from the Transvaal and on his way to *Ohamba* Weyulu of Oukwanyama attempted to persuade Mr. Paasch to be more diplomatic in his behaviour, but the latter didn't listen. In his research, Bruchmann discovered that Mauritz Paasch was infamous for his bad character- even amongst the white community, including his own family. Thus, Dr. Georg Hartmann, the Manager of the South West Africa Company is quoted as saying about the death of Mr. Paasch: '*anybody who knew Paasch could understand*' why the natives attacked him. (Bruchmann, 1997:50)

In reaction, *Hompa* Nyangana declared war on Mr. Paasch and mobilized his men to engage the traders. On June 17, 1903 a serious skirmish took place between the party of Mauritz Paasch and Willem Arndt and a number of casualties were suffered on both sides. According to Bruchmann, there

were several men killed on the side of *Hompa Nyangana*. On the side of the German traders, two young men were killed and Mr. Mauritz Paasch was fatally injured at the skirmish in the floodplain of Rughughu. The rest of the traders' party had to flee in the direction of *Hompa Mbambangandu's* Shambyu kingdom. It is at this point that *Hompa Nyangana* had to send emissaries to his cousin, *Hompa Mbambangandu I* of the Vashambyu to continue the fight against the survivors who had now crossed into his territory. The two emissaries, Mundambara and Shamuvhe ran along the Angolan bank of the Kavango River and told *Hompa Mbambangandu* the weighty message from his cousin, *Hompa Nyangana*.(Kamwanga & Haushiku, 1995:33-34).

It is confirmed by oral sources that upon receiving this message from the two Vagciriku men sent by *Hompa Nyangana*, the Vashambyu responded by dispatching a group of warriors to engage the traders. The Vashambyu's group of warriors were led by *Hompa Mbambangandu's* son and nephew, Shipapo and Prince Ndango. During this attack, on the plains of Kadjeredjedje, Willem Arndt, Mauritz Paasch himself, his wife, daughter and granddaughter were all killed. Seemingly, this took place on June 18, 1903. The only survivor was Mr. Paasch's eight year old daughter, Selma (locally known as Sherema). In a letter dated February 3, 1904, Magistrate Marwyn Williams wrote that a German patrol was sent up to Andara but returned to Damaraland (Central Namibia) for reinforcements and instructions and then travelled to Mbambangandu to retrieve the little girl. After three months, Selma was rescued by a group of armed white settlers from Grootfontein armed with 50 rounds of cartridges each by Lieutenant Richard Volkmann.

Two prominent Vashambyu men, namely Princes Shipapo and Prince Ndango were arrested during the rescue operation but escaped while

enroute to Grootfontein when they were released by some Ovaherero men who had accompanied the white settlers to Kavango. One of the Ovaherero men who released the duo is remembered in oral history as 'Tjimi', however, his real name was *Omuhona* Kanjemi. He, himself, would later become a rebel against the German government from 1903. He was eventually captured and publicly hanged and it is even believed that his head was decapitated in Windhoek in around May 1911.⁴

The escape took place in utmost secrecy during the dead of the night because the Ovaherero men felt pity for the two Vashambyu royal members. Catechist Richard Mavara (Interview: early 1990s) narrated that the two men ran throughout the night and were guided by local San men to reach their homes. According to Kamwanga and Haushiku (1996:35), when the duo reached home, the Vashambyu's entire community (fearing further reprisals from the German government) fled to Limbaranda and Shikambakamba deep in south-eastern Angola. *Hompa* Ndango and Prince Shipapo were heavily beaten. A cartoon that appeared in the *Allgemeine Zeitung* in 1954 reflected their treatment.

Catechist Richard Mavara narrated that the Vashambyu feared for their lives after the arrest of Prince Ndango and Shipapo. The palace of *Hompa* Mbambangandu I, which was situated on the Angolan side of the Kavango River, was placed under an intense barrage of gun fire from the group of white settlers from Grootfontein. Consequently, the Vashambyu remained in exile in Angola and Zambia from 1903 until the end of the German era, only crossing south of the river again after 1915. *Hompa* Nyangana invited them back at that time, because 'peace' had returned to the country. However, *Hompa* Mbambangandu I never

4 Shiremo, R.S (2011) *Omuhona Kanjemi, ±1875-1911. The brave Guerrilla Combatant of north-eastern Namibia*. New Era, Friday edition, 7 January 2011.

returned to his homeland because he died in the German imposed exile at Shikambakamba in Angola. The Kavango uprising of 1903 was widely reported in the press inside GSWA and also in Germany itself. Viewing it as an insult to 'German supremacy', in September 1903, the *National Zeitung* in Windhoek published a contemptuous letter regarding the events that took place in the present Kavango East and Kavango West regions;

On German territory, on the right bank of the Okavango, the following German subjects were murdered by the Ovambos [Kavango] who are under Portuguese suzerainty. Messrs Emmerich and Lang who were going from Okavango to the Zambezi to buy cattle were murdered by Nambaze's [Nampadi] people; their property is still in the wharf of their murderers. The Paasch family consisting of four members [were murdered], the youngest daughter of which was moreover kidnapped by Bambakautu's [Mbambangandu] people is held prisoner. These people are also responsible for the robbery of cattle, horses & c., up to the value of about M. 5000. The Chief Niangana [Nyangana] and his people assisted in these excesses. Finally Chief Kimarua [Himarwa] drove away and robbed a Catholic priest engaged in founding a missionary settlement on the Okavango and murdered five of his servants. The wharves of the murderers are on the left Portuguese bank of the Okavango...⁵

5 Precipis of letter in "National Zeitung" dated Windhoek, September, 1903.

The *Deutsche Kolonial Zeitung* (German Colonial Newspaper) in Berlin also reported on the situation in Kavango. On November 12, 1903, the *Deutsche Kolonial Zeitung* published a report regarding the Paasch and the Catholic missionaries' fate along the Kavango River in 1903 and described the incidents as an uprising against the German government. A map was included with the article in the newspaper.

It is significant that, at that in November 1903 only the Kavango and the territory of the Bondelswartz in the south were marked on the map as areas where uprisings against German rule were taking place. In a confidential letter dated November 2, 1903, Arthur Lawley, High Commissioner of the Bechuanaland Protectorate wrote to Alfred Lyttelton in the Colonial Office the following; *It further appeared from the report that the murder of Mr. Paasch and his family was one result of a general outbreak of lawlessness extending beyond Nyangana's tribe to other (.....) chiefs, with whose aid he would probably have some three thousand fighting men at his disposal.* This statement makes it clear that the Kavango population, from the area of the Vagciriku up to Ukwangali, were up in arms against the European intruders and that this was viewed as open resistance and rebellion by colonial officials.

The German Imperial government's response to the 1903 Uprising

It is indicated in the reprint of the official Blue Book of 1918 (2003:231) that the German Imperial government was preparing for a full scale war against the Kavango population for 1904. This was due to the fact that the so-called punitive expeditions of 1903 did not yield a clear victory as the local population stood their ground and their leaders were neither killed

nor captured. However, one stumbling block was the fact that most of the royal seats and most of the communities lived on the Angolan bank of the Kavango River, which was in Portuguese territory. International relations would have been complicated if Germany had authorized its armed forces to invade Portugal's territory without its consent. A confidential letter from the Foreign Office in London by F. Graham, dated October 21, 1903 revealed that the idea of a possible German attack on the Kavango population was considered even by the Imperial Government in Germany itself. The letter stated":

I am at the same time to request you to call Lord Lansdowne's attention to the telegram from Berlin which appeared in the "Daily Chronicle" of the 21st instant, which apparently refers to the incident in connection with the report of a possible expedition to be undertaken by the Government of German South West Africa against the Ovampos (Kavangos).

It appears that both the British and the German Imperial authorities sought permission from Portugal to enter its territory for the purpose of protecting the lives of Europeans. A letter dated November 3, 1911 by the Portuguese Minister, Martin Gosselin, indicated that Portugal would have excused any violation of its territory which might have been necessitated by the expedition to Andara to protect European lives in the area. The British colonial authorities in Botswana, more especially magistrate Marwyn Williams did all he could to convince the British authorities to take drastic actions against the people of *Hompa* Nyangana and Mbambangandu. This is evident in many of the letters he wrote to his seniors in South Africa and London. In one of this letters dated August 30, 1903, he wrote that he had received letters from Mr. Wedberg and Chief

Sekgoma concerning another most brutal murder by *Hompa* Nyangana who lived just beyond Andara at the junction of the Okavango and Kwito Rivers:

This man has been reported to the government both by previous Magistrate here and by myself for the murder of white men and slave raiding that doubtless his name must be familiar. (...) The number of murders committed by these people within the last few years can be numbered in the hundred, both whites and blacks, and no government has taken actions. And, I assure Your Honour that unless immediate steps are taken these northern parts will become quite uninhabitable for white men..."

What is clear though is that the German attention was distracted from the Kavango area by the Ovaherero Rebellion against the German imperial government on January 12, 1904. The initial Herero attacks targeted civilian German male settlers and traders with the *Schutztruppe* mobilized to reimpose German control over the land. The same kind of reaction by the German *Schutztruppe* was already witnessed in Kavango (Ukwangali) when Lieutenant Richard Volkmann marched with his men across the Kavango from Ukwangali up to Andara and the Mbukushu in July 1903.

Marion Wallace (2011: 99) writes that, in 1903, in revenge for the expulsion of Catholic missionaries from Ukwangali, Richard Volkman, the administrator of Grootfontein, launched an unauthorised punitive expedition against the Vakwangali polity, attacking *Hompa* Himarwa's palace and killing six people. While in Kavango he learned about the killing of the Paasch family by the Gciriku and Shambyu. The infamous 'Paasch incident', as it came to be called, aroused further anger among whites in

German South West Africa. Plans for a punitive military campaign against the Kavango populace were drawn up, but were abandoned when the German military were forced to ride south to confront the Bondelswarts uprising in October 1903. After the German imperial government, under the command of General Lothar von Trotha, cruelly quashed the Herero-Nama Uprising of 1904-08, the German agenda for the Kavango was revisited.

Conclusion

It is not correct to argue that the Kavango polity were unaffected in any way by German colonialism. This chapter demonstrates that, just like other Namibian communities, the communities of the Kavango, were affected by the imposition of German colonialism and resisted these interventions. A point in case, is the prohibition on the sale of firearms and ammunition which emanated from the Brussels' Conference of 1889-90 which many Africans interpreted at the time as an act of hostility. One might argue that the prohibition led directly to the killing of European traders in the Gciriku kingdom in 1892. The colonial response to this event of 1892 led to the Lishora Massacre of the VaGciriku in 1894. The events of 1903 challenge the accepted version of Namibian history that the war of national resistance began with the Ovaherero on January 12, 1904.

The contemporary statements of the German Imperial Government and the map that was published in the *Deutsche Kolonial Zeitung* support the view that general resistance against German imperial government rule began in June, 1903 in Kavango East and West regions and in October, 1903 with the Bondelswartz in the //Kharas Region in southern Namibia. This

view does not detract from the coordinated rebellion that Chief Samuel Maharero of the Ovaherero started in January 1904. The chapter merely seeks to bridge the gap in Namibia's historiography and link a series of events that were previously interpreted as isolated and separate from each other. The Kavango Uprising of 1903 against German colonial rule also challenges the perception that the Kavango East and West regions have not played a significant role in Namibia's anti-colonial resistance and liberation struggle historiography.

2. The Contract Labour System during the South African Colonial Period in Kavango

– Kletus Muhena Likuwa ⁶

Introduction

The systematic official organization of the contract labour system in the Kavango took root in the early 1920s and only ended in 1972 after which recruitment was taken over by labour bureaus under new labour agreements. Contract labour was a system in which labourers were recruited to work in the central and southern part of Namibia for six to eighteen months, with contracts becoming longer over time. Under this system, any men above the age of sixteen years or mature enough to work and not having any disability could be recruited. The recruiting agency effectively sold these labourers to various employers. Although some men from the Kavango migrated as labourers during the German colonial period (1885-1915), these were in small numbers compared to the South African period.

The chapter uses oral interviews, archival materials and a review of the literature to discuss the contract labour system from the Kavango during the South African colonial period. The aim is to provide a historical context to the process of colonial control and oppression in the Kavango.

Colonial control created social and economic hardships for the locals and

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eventually compelled men to leave their villages to work in the colonial economy. Furthermore, the chapter aims to explain why the process of recruitment, the exploitation of contract labourers at the work place and the social impact on family life led contract labourers to organize to protest against SWANLA and the contract labour system. I argue that colonial laws and oppression in Kavango denied people access to local resources and added to their social and economic hardship which eventually compelled them to join the exploitative contract labour system. Instead of becoming a solution to poverty the contract labour system became another problem that workers resisted increasingly over time, culminating in the 1971-1972 workers' strike. The focus on the Kavango, as a significant supplier of contract labourers during the colonial period, helps to expand our knowledge of contract labour history in Namibia beyond the previous focus on Ovamboland.

Early colonial recruitments and the formalization of recruitment in the Kavango

Colonial labour recruitment in the Kavango had existed before 1925, but it was unorganized with limited numbers of recruits collected by colonial officials. During the South African military occupation of Namibia (1915-1918), military patrols to the Kavango gathered information for the administration with regard to the estimated figures of the population with the hope to induce a flow of labour from these localities (Administrator, 29 January 1917). Chiefs became an important influence on labour supply in Namibia (Stals, 1990). The approach of the South African administration was that of co-option of the traditional leadership and indirect rule through them. In the Kavango, missionaries also played a role in early

labour recruitment by providing rations and travelling passes for contract labourers to travel to the southern part for work. They also stored the rifles which were provided to African escorts who took contract labourers to the south. Their role in the contract labour system gave them a double image in the eyes of the local people who saw them as God's people, but also as colonisers (Shikiri, 2009).

A notable feature of the first ten years of South African rule in Namibia (1915-1925) was the ability of the northern areas (both Kavango and Ovamboland) to resist the pressure of the colonial state to extract a migrant labour force (Emmet, 1999). It was only after 1925 that the South African administration finally managed to formally organize labour recruitment with the formation of the Northern Labour Organization (NLO) and the Southern Labour Organization (SLO) in 1925. "The NLO mainly recruited in the Kavango regions and sent their recruits to the copper mines and the commercial farms, whilst the SLO mainly recruited in 'Ovamboland' and was the main source of labour for the diamond fields" (Cooper, 1999, p. 121). An Anglo-American recruitment association named Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WNLA – commonly known as 'WNLA') also began its recruitment operations targeting both Angola and Kavango from the late 1930s. The WNLA campaign challenged the NLO monopoly as more Kavango men chose to be recruited by WNLA for jobs on the South African mines and Zimbabwean tobacco farms. In 1943 the NLO and SLO were amalgamated into the South West Africa Native Labour Association (SWANLA) which recruited labourers from both Kavango and Ovambo up to 1972. The objectives of SWANLA were as follows:

To recruit and distribute African labour; to carry on business in the recruiting areas as retail general dealers and hawkers; to watch, protect and further the interests of

the employers and of the recruited labourers; to purchase or otherwise acquire, sell, lease or hire any movable and/or immovable property; to lend or invest money with or without security, and to borrow money or mortgage bond or otherwise; to use profits to centre a reserve fund; to reduce recruiting charges subject to the improvement relating to recruiting, to the reduction of recruiting charges; to do all such other things as the Association may consider to be incidental or conducive to the above stated objectives (SWANLA, 1943).

SWANLA had its main offices in Rundu and Ondangwa and a recruiting depot in Grootfontein. Originally SWANLA recruits signed contracts for a period of 12 months but in the 1950s this was changed to between 18 months to two years with the right to renew the contract for an extra six months.

Labour migration from Kavango

In the Kavango, the lack of clothing was a major challenge and was a major motivation for the decision of many men to become part of the labour migration system. The love for clothes had been introduced to the Kavango people by colonialists (European hunters, traders etc). The mission stations in the area were not providing clothes and the colonial prevention of the killing of animals reduced accessibility to animal skins for traditional clothing and people therefore left as contract workers not to supplement food supplies (as they always had these in abundance), but to acquire money to purchase clothes (Shikombero, 2009).

The young men felt inferior to a returning labourer as a result of the

change in his appearance as migrant workers returned with clothing such as hats and goods that gave them status in the community and indicated visually that they had been on contract. The men discussed stories about the experiences of those who had been on contract as they herded cattle in the valleys. The community also organized feasts for returning contract labourers all of which gave them the encouragement to join the contract labour system. The *shiperu* dance feasts for returning labourers became platforms of entertainment for other men on their way to the Rundu compound. Some men thought that while childhood associated a boy with domestic or family work, manhood required that a man leave home and search for goods or the means to support his family. The contract labour system became one of the male rites of passage to manhood. Men in Kavango also explained that the need to start a family was another reason for joining the contract labour system. Although the contract labour was not a prerequisite for marriage; the commissioner promoted this idea as a means of labour control. As the following report indicates:

It is stressed that parents should not allow their daughters to marry youngsters, who, through laziness have acquired nothing on which to maintain a home, a wife and children. Labour ennobles and parents should insist on their sons going out and earning cash wages. After all, the parents have to rear off their offspring and it is up to the latter to say thanks in a material manner (Commissioner, 1952)

Contrary to archival reports, oral interviews from the Kavango indicate that labour migration from Kavango was not the result of hunger and starvation, because men from royal palaces, where food was in abundance, also became contract labourers. Rather, the desire to acquire European clothes which were not easily available locally provided a greater role in

stimulating migration as men sought access to the material goods that could only be obtained through access to the cash economy.

Before the introduction of lorries as transport in Kavango, the returning contract labourers used to pay for boat services from the mission stations to transport their acquired goods along the Kavango River. When other men saw the boats full of clothing, it encouraged them to go for contract work. Young men felt grown up when they no longer had to continue to depend on provisions from their parents and could provide for themselves through the contract labour system. Young men felt the pressure of reciprocal responsibility as young men meaning that at a certain point they had to take over from their parents' duties. Some men also regarded contract labour migration as an act of *kudanaghura* (playing around).

The concept of *kudanaghura* (playing around) among the Kavango people mainly refers to a simplistic, non-serious oriented engagement in any particular activity for the purposes of fun. Participation in the contract labour system was not regarded by some of them as a crucial aspect of their lives but simply as an opportunity for fun. Men migrated because the south was becoming famous as a place of opportunity and they wanted to also try their luck. Contract labourers went because they hoped '*tukawane ugavo kuvamakuwa*' (to find/accumulate wealth from the whites).

However, whilst, with hindsight some of those who went on contract remembered it as a choice, it was often also a response to the economic and social hardships that resulted from the colonial policies. Once they embarked upon the migration journey the contract labourers observed and became aware of the co-operation of the recruiting organization, the colonial administration and the employers in their subjugation and exploitation.

Some Kavango contract labourers had been on contract labour system as far as Djwaini (Johannesburg), Salisbury (Harare) and Angola and then went on contract labour system within Namibia but this chapter focuses on contract labour inside Namibia. A contract labourer was medically examined twice, first in Rundu and then in Grootfontein. The testing procedure was extremely degrading and embarrassing for contract labourers. Labourers at Rundu were taken to a hall surrounded by a short wall made of reeds near the SWANLA shop to be medically examined, naked, by a male testing officer. The labourers were then sent to the hospital to what they called the *wahahesera* (don't breathe) x-ray machines to test if they had tuberculosis (TB). The x-ray machine were described this way because labourers were usually asked to breathe in and hold their breath for a few seconds while an x-ray was taken.

The medical tests were to determine their health status and only the healthy ones were selected. In the beginning, migration from the Kavango to Grootfontein took long because of the lack of transportation. Apart from a few cases where some labourers got a lift with the Catholic missionaries' as transport between Grootfontein and Nyangana mission station, took a very long time. The walk usually meant that job seekers took about seventeen days to reach Grootfontein (Toivanen, no year). Contract labourers had to bear the burden of carrying their goods on their shoulders and providing for their own meals on the journey and they were also hampered by Bushmen attacks and thirst (Shikiri, 2009).

The attacks on migrant labourers were a serious problem in the early years of recruitment and the administration was left with the serious task of finding a lasting solution. The annual report of 1925 indicates an incident in which a group of *Vacu* (San) had attacked returning labourers, but had been captured by the colonial police and taken to Grootfontein

to stand trial (Administrator, 1925).

Transport was finally introduced by the NLO in 1938 to take workers from Kavango to the south. Mr. Gaerdes Kemp (locally known as *Kemba*) was appointed to transport contract labourers and to run the only NLO shop at Rundu. The lorries that transported migrant labourers followed the road from Rundu via Karukuvisa and Tsintsabis to Grootfontein. This was a deep sandy road and slowed down the speed of the lorry. It made the journey very long and it was worse during the rainy season. Shirengumuke explained his experience of the route to Grootfontein: 'The lorry moved by constant pushing. Even as it moved, one could just stand along a bush to urinate and then later run after it and was sure to catch it. The route was extremely sandy' (Shirengumuke, 2009).

There were two border control posts between Kavango and the police zone. One was the Nurugas border control point which was an entry point to the police district of Grootfontein for the labourers from the eastern part of Kavango. The other one was Tsintsabis border control point between Ukwangali and the police district of Tsumeb which was an entry point for the labourers from the western part of Kavango. The border control points were used as disease control points for Africans from the communal areas. Before labourers reached the police border points, they had to dip their feet in a medicine bowl the labourers referred to as 'D.P.' which the colonial authorities apparently intended to disinfect them and prevent the spread of disease.

Whilst contract labourers were checked for diseases during their journey to the police zone, the same exercise was not performed upon their return to the Kavango. The colonial authorities were clearly only worried about the spread of diseases to the white man's area rather than from the white man's area to the Kavango. In 'Ovamboland', for example, women

were completely prevented from leaving 'Ovamboland' because of the allegedly immoral effects and this discourse of 'responsible patriarchy' was shared by both administration and Ovambo male elders (Hayes, 2000). Furthermore, the Christian missions, the commissioner and the chiefs collaborated to impose this way of thinking about women's place (Hayes P. , 1996). Similar to the colonial practices in 'Ovamboland', in the Kavango, the colonial administration together with the chiefs collaborated to prevent women from leaving and labour escorts who did not adhere to this order and took women to the south were fined. As one labour escort in 1936 declared under oath:

I was fined five head of cattle by Chief Shampapi because I took two women down to Grootfontein last year [1935]. These women were not in possession of a pass. I often heard Nakare [commissioner] order that no were to be taken south and also heard Chief Shampapi give similar orders. The two women bothered me so much that I eventually took them down to Grootfontein (Kanyinga, 1936)

The official view was that Africans, especially women, were carriers of diseases and as such they were not allowed to cross into the police zone and those unmarried African women in the urban areas were compelled to compulsory testing, a practice which made women very angry (Wallace, 2000). Apart from the D.P. disease control on the contract labourers, the labourers believed they were also inspected for security purposes by the police at the police border posts as an interviewee explained:

At Nurugas police border post, they would inspect us to ensure that we did not carry along any unwanted thing. Nurugas police post was the border with Grootfontein

and was the place where the presence of the police began (Shihungu, 2009)⁷.

The police border points which are still in place after Namibia's independence was also used as a measure to control and prevent the spread of livestock diseases (Miescher, 2012).

The Grootfontein depot was the main recruiting and distribution centre of contract labourers from the Kavango and 'Ovambo' in Namibia. All contract labourers met there on their way and return from contract work. Upon arrival, labourers were dropped at the main gate and were usually led by police officials inside the labour depot compound. Such police escorts were a security and control measure to ensure that contract labourers did not disappear into the nearby African locations upon arrival but got to the work for which they had been brought to do. The next morning after arrival at the Grootfontein compound, labourers reported to the office of the placement officer who distributed them to their various work destinations.

After a labourer was placed in a job, he was provided with a blanket (two blankets if you were sent to Walvis Bay where it was colder), a long sleeved shirt and one pair of shorts (regardless of the worker's size), bread (the quantity depended on the length of the journey) and two cans of jam. They were then provided with a train ticket attached to a permit of employment form of each labourer which indicated their names, the name of the area where they were to work and that of the employer and they travelled by train to their various work destinations.

⁷ Shindimba Ndumba Shihungu was born in Kavango east region at Nyondo village in 1932. His parents were Shihungu and Wayera. Upon his final return to Kavango from contract work, he worked as a tailor in a Portuguese shop until he later crossed and settled at Ndiyona village (Namibia).

Kavango contract labourers on farms

Labourers, upon their arrival at work destinations, had to hand over the employment form and their passes. The documentation was only returned to the labourer after the contract period had expired and the magistrate of that area had signed the forms to certify the expiration of contract. In these new places of work there was a tendency for labourers to be given European names by their farm employers and for contract labourers to also give African names to the employers. The farmers claimed that the African names were too long and difficult to pronounce and thus gave labourers new European names for identification. The term 'Ovambo' that was used by colonial authorities to refer to all the contract workers was interpreted in different ways by the Kavango contract labourers. Some believed that the white employers were ignorant to identify them properly or to differentiate between black people and therefore used the word Ovambo to mean 'black persons'. As one interviewee, Muyenga Shintunga Unengu pointed out:

Vavo vanya vamakuwa ashi vapongora ndi? Vavo keheghuno ashi Vambo, natuvantje tuvashovaganisha! Makura ashi Vambo

[Do whites make a difference? To them, everyone was an Ovambo; we were all black and so then Vambo] (Unengu, 2009)⁸

The labourers on farms usually slept in small rounded houses called pondoks that were situated in the backyard of the main house of the

8 Muyenga Shintunga Unengu was born +- 1915 in Kavango East region at Rucara village. He left for his first contract in 1930 on foot under the labour escort of Langhals Kanyinga and was sent to work in a kitchen in Windhoek. He later went for his second contract to Karibib farms and again for his third contract to Usakos and on a fifth contract to Omaruru at an open cast mine. He later left on contract to Djwaini [Johannesburg] mines.

farm. The number of labourers per pondok depended on the availability of pondoks and could range from one to as many as five labourers in a pondok. The labourers did not receive blankets from the farmer but used those which they received at the Grootfontein recruiting depot. Since there was no bed or mattress, the labourers usually slept on the floor. The poor sleeping arrangements meant that many complained that it was difficult to sleep. During the cold seasons, labourers suffered from extreme cold and it was worse for labourers who worked in the colder and more mountainous farm areas of Namibia. Many workers complained that their accommodation had leaking roofs and cracked walls and were rarely renovated or fumigated and so became the breeding ground for *ntjanya* (bugs) as an interviewee expressed:

All the workers slept in pondoks. And then there were bugs my dear? Goodness! No! That was plain suffering. The bugs were in the rooms within the cracks of the wall, all red-red-red-red! But there was no other place for you to go and sleep except there! They did not even disinfect the rooms, there were no such things. You just stayed like that. At times when it was fitting we slept outside otherwise you slept inside turning around your body in pain from the stings. During the rainy season, you had nowhere else to go and the water from the roofs again leaked on you and you woke up in mud (Shevekwa, 2009)⁹

The Kavango contract labourers on farms worked alongside Ovambo contract labourers, and locally recruited Herero, Damara and Nama

9 Frans Tuhemwe Shevekwa was born on 18 August 1946 in Kavango East region at Sharughanda village. He first went in 1970 to work at a farm in Grootfontein. He returned to Kavango in 1971 but left again for a second contract and was sent to Outjo farms where he experienced great mistreatment. He returned to the Kavango in 1972 but left for his last contract to Walvis Bay in 1973.

workers. Contract workers on farms herded cattle, goats, sheep and other livestock, fixed fences around the cattle posts, worked in the gardens and fields or any other tasks they were asked to perform. A herd boy also milked the cows. Unlike at home where cooking was regarded as a woman's responsibility, contract labourers on farms had to cook for themselves. Labourers reported that it was often the farmers' wives who reported any mistakes and demanded that they be punished and so they often had a difficult relationship with these women. Stories about the alleged cruelty and abuse of particular farmers circulated widely amongst contract workers.

Some labourers were beaten for failing to greet the 'baas' as he passed by or were kicked in the buttocks by the farmer's wife (workers only remembered working for male farmers) as they pushed the car of their master to try and get the engine started. One remembered being beaten for hitting a calf during the milking process, for the death of livestock and for not being able to operate a water pump (Maghundu, 2009).¹⁰ In some cases the farmer even called the police to come and beat up his contract labourers on his behalf when he believed they had been 'cheeky' or disrespectful (Shevekwa, 2009). A widespread belief existed amongst contract workers that labourers who disappeared under mysterious circumstances had been killed by the farmer. The only option for farm labourers who felt mistreated and that they had no legal protection was to secretly leave the farm, but this was viewed as 'desertion' and 'breaking contract' and was a crime that could lead to their arrest and imprisonment (Ndadi, 1989).

There were cases where farmers displayed kindness to some labourers

10 Martin Maghundu was born in 1942 in Kavango East region at Divundu village. He first worked as a contract labourer at Kamukaru farms in Grootfontein in 1966 and by 1969 he worked at Walvis Bay in the fish factory and later at a beer factory in Swakopmund.

but this selective favouritism from farmers could actually create tension, suspicion and conflicts within the workforce. The conflict was usually between established workers and new recruits but it is not clear if it related between local and contract workers or between contract labourers too. Nevertheless, workers were unhappy when a newcomer was placed in charge over them. Internal rivalry sometimes also made workers feel vulnerable and threatened by their colleagues so that they were forced to leave the farm (Shevekwa, 2009).

Contract labourers provided differing accounts of the wages they received and this could be a result of the fact that the recommended wages for contract labourers in Namibia varied over time and between different employment sectors. During the Second World War which ended in 1945, the Farm Labour Commission recommended wages for farm workers as follows: the first four months at 8/- per month, the second four months at 9/- per month, the third four months at 10/- per month, the fourth four months at 12/- per month, the fifth four months at 13/- per month and the last four months at 14/- per month (Administrator, 1939). By 1966 it was stated through an official publication that a contract worker with no previous experience working on commercial farms in central and southern Namibia would start at R7.50 per month, raised to R8.25 per month after 12 months, to R9.00 six months thereafter, and to R9.75 another six month later (Bauer, 1994, p. 49).

The wages that were paid to those working in the urban area or the mines also varied, but were significantly higher than those paid to farm workers. The official monthly average wages for mine workers in 1967 was R45.34 for skilled workers, R23.03 for semi-skilled, R31.14 for clerks and R17.58 for unskilled workers'. Robert Gordon has also provided examples of the wage rate for contract labourers after the 1971 to 1972 general workers'

strike. Workers at Arebeb Mine were paid from R24.00 to R56.10 per month (Bauer, 1994, p. 49). . Oral testimony about wages focuses on the impression that wages were disappointingly low and unreliable. The small wages meant that workers often spent all their savings on shopping at the end of their contract and returned to Kavango with no money. Sometimes contract workers renewed their contract as they did not want to return unless they were able to provide something to their family.

Kavango contract labourers on the mines

Contract labourers from Kavango were seldom sent to the diamond fields in southern Namibia but were mainly sent to the copper mine of Tsumeb and Kombat as SWANLA largely maintained the labour distribution pattern that had been established by the NLO and SLO. SWANLA had various depots in the police zone where labourers were picked up by their employers to be taken to their work places and these included Otavi, Tsumeb, Outjo, Otjiwarongo, Windhoek, Omitara, Seeis, Steinhausen, Gobabis, Rehoboth station, Kalkfeld, Omaruru, Usakos, Okahandja, Mariental, Kub, Maltahohe, Keetmanshoop, Karasburg, Bethanie and Uis. Oral interviews indicate that novice contract labourers arrived in the early morning hours of the morning (usually around seven o'clock) at the train station which was usually situated in close proximity to a compound. They were then escorted by a police officer or guards to the compound entrance from which the labourers were then led to the hall by an African foreman who was given the title *kamukomboni* (a Kavango coined word which means a compound manager) where they were immediately introduced to the strict rules of the compound (Shampapi, 2009).¹¹

11 Bernhard Limbangu Shampapi was born on 24 August 1946 in Kavango East Region. He first worked as a contract labourer at Walvis Bay in 1966 where got politicized by SWAPO after

All contract labourers in the urban area had to live either on premises at their place of employment, but the stringent racial laws and efforts to control the workforce meant that larger employers and urban areas usually provided a confined compound for migrant workers. In the early compounds, facilities were primitive and the pondoks were unhealthy providing ideal conditions for the spread of disease. Contract labourers faced health hazards resulting from the cold and overcrowded conditions (Stals E. , 1967, pp. 222-223).

Each labourer was provided with a card number which was used to receive meals. Each labourer also received a metal plate, cup and a spoon which was used during his sojourn in the compound and returned at the end of his contract. Unlike on the farms, at the compounds, labourers did not cook but were served with breakfast, lunch and supper. A labourer could collect the meal tickets of other colleagues, usually placed on the table in the evenings, and go to collect breakfast for them.

Gordon's account of meals in a mine compound in 1973 shows that a single daily meal consisted of half a loaf of bread, mealie-meal and either meat or fish with an occasional serving of vegetables (J.G. Gordon, 1977, p. 58). This was the case in the municipal run compounds as well. Although interviewees spoke of sufficient food in the compound, the menu lacked variety and this became a cause for discontent among some labourers (Shampapi, 2009). In Namibian mines, workers found employment as boss boys, machine boys, spanner boys, drivers and lashers. Inside the mine, each contract labourer had to carry his numbered metal disc around his neck. This was a useful way to identify a contract labourer by the supervisor at work but it was also easy to identify the labourer in case of death or injury at the mine.

which he worked at a mine in Windhoek. After his return to Kavango in the 1970s he worked for the Portuguese in Angola and got entangled in Angola's civil war.

Contract labourers in the compounds were not restricted in their movement and could leave the compound after hours and return late. In the case of a mine compound, labourers could leave the mine compound provided they got permission and a pass from the compound manager (J.G.Gordon, 1977, pp. 53-54). But in compounds such as Tsumeb and Otavi all were expected to return to the compound between 9pm to 10 pm, unless with the permission of the compound manager. Contract labourers usually left the compounds to go to town for small shopping or simply to visit the communities in the nearest African locations. When their contracts expired, labourers were given back their permits to allow them to return to the Kavango and were also eligible to apply for another labour contract. Upon return to the Kavango, returning contract labourers reported at the church mission stations or at the Native Affairs Commissioner at Rundu before they returned to their various home villages.

Economic and social impact

Contract labourers were able to buy clothes for themselves and their families and it was common for them to buy secure boxes that they could carry home with clothes and other items which they distributed to the extended family members. The returning contract labourers also made use of the local means of transportation to carry their goods. This had an impact on the fortunes of local business people. As Shikombero shows, contract labourers often paid boat owners to transport their goods along the Kavango River from Rundu to their village (Shikombero, 2009). A few contract labourers, especially those who worked in towns, sent money home to their families through friends. As such the celebration of the

return of contract labourers was not only an appreciation of the contract labourers' safe return but was an expression of appreciation of the few goods that were brought for them. Contract labourers had realistic ideas as to what they wanted and, if they were able to save, often used those saving to purchase cattle. Owning large herds of cattle was a sign of wealth in the community and some contract labourers became relatively wealthy and used these cattle to plough the fields, drank milk from it and sold the meat when the cattle died. Cattle ownership improved the social standing of the owners and also made one's heart feel at peace and reduced one's worries.

The contract labour system was believed to have had negative impacts on women despite the small benefits. Complaints included the fact that women contracted sexual transmitted diseases from husbands who became infected whilst on contract (Yeboah, 2000, p. 20). Some women never saw their husbands again as these husbands either died in the mines or used the recruiting system to help them leave for exile and then died during the armed struggle. There were cases when contract labourers did not bring anything back home or felt that they came with inadequate goods to show for a year or two's work. Mathias Shikombero, for example, remembers returning from his contract work in Angola with only a simple, ugly blanket with pictures of lions on it and concern that they were unable to meet the high expectations of family members for presents was a cause of embarrassment for many workers (Shikombero, 2009).

One argument is that contract labourers became used to alcohol consumption and continued to do so upon their return to the Kavango. The long wait at the Rundu compound for transport to return home resulted in many spending their remaining money on alcohol in

Mangarangandja. The contract labour system instead of helping to bring an end to the hardship of contract labourers became another form of colonial oppression due to the harsh working conditions, low wages and inadequate accommodation. Some contract labourers went so far as to see the contract labour system as a form of slavery which denied their humanity. As Shikombero who worked in Walvisbay by the time of the strike indicated:

We began to demand in various places that the contract labour system should be broken down. Letters were sent to various compounds that on the 15th of December, contract labour system must stop. The Ovambos decided that contract labour system should be done away with and all of us including the Kavangos joined hands that contract labour system must stop because it was enslavement. People were asking where all the money goes that they were paid so little. So they demanded that contract system be done away with so that labourers can be free to search for jobs of their own liking without being limited by contract.¹²

Another contract labourer Tuhemwe Shevekwa saw contract labour as work for people who were unsettled psychologically and were running around under indescribable circumstances in search of solutions (Shevekwa, 2009). He creates a powerful image of unsettled, restless people engaged in a kind of self-defeating activity. However, the contract labour system brought previously isolated, Kavango workers in close contact with Africans from other parts of Namibia and they exchanged

12 Interview with M. N. Shikombero, Rucara village, 28 July 2009.

stories of colonial exploitation and learnt more about changes taking place in other parts of Africa. Ironically, the contract labour system that was established to run the colonial economy provided the environment in which worker consciousness and political awareness grew to enable workers to challenge the colonial state. Their exploitative work conditions rendered them ready for political mobilization by members of Ovambo People's Organization (OPO). OPO was formed in 1959 and by 1960 had been renamed the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) with Sam Shafishuna Nujoma as its president.

The name OPO had suggested a focus on the Ovambo, whilst the new name showed a commitment to appeal to members across ethnic boundaries. Although OPO mobilized among contract labourers in the compounds, its membership extended beyond contract labourers. The fact that workers in the north-east of Namibia were also recruited to work in South Africa meant that the recruiting system could also provide one route for people seeking a way to go into exile. For example, Ambassador Andrew Anyanya Intamba, Stephanus Markus Nghashiko and Naeman Abed, found their way to SWAPO contacts in Botswana after being recruited as migrant workers in Nkurenkuru.¹³ As a result of such political mobilization returning contract labourers became instrumental in the demands to end SWANLA operations in the Kavango. Furthermore it led many contract labourers from the Kavango to join the 1972 general strike of workers which saw an end to contract labour system by 1972. Although Bauer shows that striking workers were sent to Ovamboland, there is no explanation as to what happened to the contract labourers from the Kavango (Bauer, 1994, pp. 60-61).

Shikombero suggests that all Kavango contract labourers were also sent

13 'Go Well Gallant Fighter', SWAPO Party Web Site. http://www.SWAPOparty.org/go_well_gallant_fighter.html Accessed, 26th August, 2015.

to Ovamboland from which they found their own way to the Kavango (Shikombero, 2009). Although it is possible that the invisibility of the Kavango workers during the strike could have been a result of their smallness in numbers in the striking areas of Walvis and Swakopmund compared to their presence in the Tsumeb Kombat mine areas, it could not be well established under this study. Equally, it could not be established how far former contract labourers from Tsumeb mobilized for SWAPO in the Kavango after the 1972 strike. In the former Ovamboland, returning workers were credited with enabling SWAPO to become a mass movement in northern central Namibia. Although not to an equal extent, there was a similar experience in the Kavango with regard to political mobilization by returning workers. Some contract labourers believed that only the Namibian led government after independence will address their social and economic hardships and, therefore, supported or personally joined the armed liberation struggle by SWAPO in exile.

Inside Kavango, the 'Muzogumwe' (one move) political movement was formed by 1973 with David Ausiku, a former contract labourer, as its president (Ausiku, 2005). Its first meeting was held at Sauyema village on 31 May 1973 where more than fifty people signed up as members and another two hundred signed up as supporters (Ausiku, 2005, pp. 85-88). 'Muzogumwe' acted as a 'false front' [pseudonym] for SWAPO in the Kavango. It operated by creating a false impression that it was anti-SWAPO and communism. It held meetings in secret and recruited more members for SWAPO, provided food and other supplies to PLAN combatants until it later leaked out to the colonial officials that 'muzogumwe' was SWAPO and its leader was arrested and brutalized (Ausiku, 2005, pp. 85-88). But Muzogumwe members in the Kavango continued to play the central role in providing support to SWAPO combatants throughout the 1970s and the 1980s.

Despite the political mobilization by workers for SWAPO, it proved difficult to mobilize support for SWAPO as the Kavango was heavily militarized whereby almost every household had someone working as a Koevoet or SWATF member (Kudumo, 2005). Unlike in former Ovamboland, the militarization of almost every household in the Kavango made it easy to spy on SWAPO activists. The militarization of Kavango homesteads which made mobilization for SWAPO a daunting task is one of the historical factors that explain the different depths of support for SWAPO in the two Homelands. Teachers' mobilization of youth for SWAPO in the Kavango was equally important although this remained in their personal capacities until March 1989 after NANTU formation. Teachers in Kavango provided guidance and advice to students on how to deal with difficult national questions in a militarized area such as the Kavango and the role of teachers in student politics could be ascribed as a symbiotic and interdependent relationship (Kudumo, 2005). Despite the high massive support that DTA received, the powerful political campaigns by students through NANSO in the 1980s saw SWAPO winning majority of the votes in the Kavango in the first ever 1989 democratic elections (Nyambe, 2009).

Conclusion

Men from Kavango initially went to work in the police zone in small numbers due to the isolation of the region as they were only able to travel when escorted by visiting colonial officials or missionaries. From 1925, the labour recruiting system was organized and better provision made for the transport of workers from the Kavango regions. Many of the men interviewed suggested that the desire for new fashionable clothing was one of the main motivations that they had for seeking a contract as

restrictions on hunting also made it difficult to make traditional clothing. Migrant workers sometimes mitted that there were serious economic pressures to join the contract labour system, whilst others preferred to explain it as an opportunity to travel and have new experiences – *Kudanaghura*.

Labour migrants on farms and mines both suffered mistreatment and the fact that these experiences were shared with workers from other ethnic communities contributed to the development of a broader 'national' consciousness based on common grievances. Migrant workers were able to participate in the cash economy, but often struggled to build up their savings due to the low wages that they received. The individual action of 'breaking contract' might be viewed as one of the 'Weapons of the Weak' which enabled workers to 'resist' the most oppressive working conditions and contributed to the development of a belief in the possibility of effective, broader, opposition to the colonial administration. The shared experience of contract workers provided the foundations for political mobilization and the liberation struggle which eventually resulted in SWAPO in the Kavango emerge victorious during the 1989 elections which led to Namibia's independence on 21 March 1990.

3. The Contribution of Student Activists to the Liberation Struggle: A Regional Perspective

– Sebastian Kantema¹⁴

Introduction

Students in the Kavango regions made a significant contribution during the struggle for liberation. However, a brief glimpse through Namibian historiography suggests that there is little written about the north-east of Namibia. This chapter will demonstrate that student politics in the Kavango played an important role in the liberation struggle in this part of Namibia. The chapter will focus, particularly, on the student uprising that developed during the 1980s.

Markus Kampungu was a former member of the Namibian National Student Organization (NANSO) who, later, became a leader of the Namibian National Teachers' Union (NANTU). In a paper entitled 'Restoring our Past' presented at Rundu in 2007, he clearly outlined the role played by students during the 1980s. Two former student leaders, Rudolph Haingura and Ndumba Jonah Kamwanyah, also presented a paper that contributed substantially to the debate. The memories of these student leaders from the region has been supplemented in this paper with information contained in newspapers.

¹⁴ I would like to thank Dr Marius Kudumo, Hon Sebastian Karupu, Mr Robert Mbambi, Mr Fabianus Kandjeke Kavera and Dr Ndumba Kamwanah for their assistance with the paper and, particularly, with helping to recall the names of student activists.

Early Student Activism

Alfred Moleah argues that student organization in Namibia can be dated from the 1950s. Attempts were made to organise students, and the South West Africa Student Body (SWASB) was formed in 1952. Later, the South West Africa Progressive Association (SWAPA), launched in 1958, provided another platform for student activism. The scope and operations of these early student movements were very limited and they did not exist for long. After SWAPA had collapsed in 1959 there was little student organization until the 1970s. Early student mobilization started in Windhoek and amongst students who travelled to South African colleges (Maseko, 1995: 116).

One reason why it took time for students to become organized in the regions was the slow pace of educational development under South African rule. In 1962, there were only 42 primary schools in Kavango with 3,444 learners and 91 teachers (Gibson, Larson and McGurk, 1981: 27). The first secondary school in Kavango, Rundu Secondary School, was only opened in 1967 and the second, Linus Shashipapo, in 1974. However the SADF consciously recognized that the development programme contained in the Odendaal Plan led to a significant increase in the number of schools and learners in the 'operational areas'. In 1962, the northern regions contained only 212 schools and 32,000 learners, whilst twenty years later (in 1982) there were 757 schools and 757,000 learners (de Visser, 2011: 86). The transition resulted in a dramatic increase in the number of youth at schools and made the education sector an important battlefield. Young minds faced contrasting visions of the future – either a network of ethnically defined homelands or SWAPO's vision of a single, inclusive, state.

The student protests (against the use of Afrikaans as a medium of

instruction) that took place in 1976 in Soweto, in South Africa, also sent ripples through schools in Namibia. Students at Martin Luther High School boycotted their exams and classes at the school and were, subsequently, taught in English from 1977 (Harber, 1997: 119). Schools in the Kavango Regions were involved in these early strikes. In 1978, the students at Linus Shashipapo Secondary School also boycotted classes. Young people from Kavango were crossing into exile in the 1970s through Fort Cuangar, Calai and Mukoso to SWAPO camps in Angola and Zambia.¹⁵ Among them were students and youth from Mpungu mission school, Nkurenkuru Mission School, Kandjimi Murangi Secondary School, Rupara Mission School, Levi Hakusembe Secondary School, Mupini Mission School, and schools in Rundu. Students who left at this time included Salome Naingwendje-Kambala, Ingrid Luciano-Aipinge, John Luciano, Thomas Kambinda Kandjimi, Frans Yirombo, Paulus Likuwa, Daniel Titus, Malia Yiwangu Mwengo, Katavhu Ndala, Willihema Haiyambo, Michael Kambokoto, Petrus Mayambi Ndala, Malakia Malengi, Hambyuka, Olie Kazungura, Raimo Muhako, Matias Mayundu and Reino Siyamba¹⁶

It should be noted that, during the 1980s, all the schools in the Kavango Regions were headed by white staff members and most teachers were also white (de Visser, 2011: 86). It was also common for South African army units to be based near or at school premises to 'protect' them from 'terrorist' attack. For example, an army camp was even located within the school premises at Kandjimi Murangi Secondary School, with some of the soldiers as teachers. Ndumba Jonah Kamwanyah remembers

15 Haingura, Rudolf Tino and Ndumba Jonnah Kamwanyah 'Anti-colonial Resistance and Student Activism in the North-eastern Region (1984-1990), Paper presented at the 'Recording and Restoring Our Part in the Past' History Conference, Rundu, 23rd-24th August, 2007, p1.

16 Many of these students and youth became members of the PLAN. While others such as Malakia Malengi, Petrus Mayambi, Malia yiwangu Mwengo, Katavhu Ndala were caught up in the SWAPO-UNITA split and remained with UNITA. Willihema Haiyambo and Olie Kazungura would be killed in action by Koevoet/SWATF at Mpoto and Mburuuru in the Kavango region.

Personal communication. Mr Kamwanah and Mr Kavera, 11th January, 2016.

being taught by two South African soldiers, Mr De Koning and Mr Peters, with their guns in class, in 1984 when he was in Standard 5 at Kandjimi Murangi Secondary School. Whilst Fabianus Kandjeke Kavera also remembers being taught by the SADF in the same fashion at Linus Shashipapo in 1982.¹⁷ The insertion of soldiers into schools was deliberate to intimidate and propagate in order to win the heart and minds of students. South African strategists argued that success in the war would depend 80% on psychological victory and only 20% on military success. South Africa developed the WHAM project, aimed at 'Winning Hearts and Minds'. Major-General Charles Lloyd argued that "We want the NSM [national serviceman] to teach the black man whilst his rifle is standing in the corner of the classroom" (Cock & Nathan, 1989, 180). Kampungu argues that the strategy backfired in Kavango schools as soldier-teachers used unacceptable language towards learners and carried weapons into the classroom whilst the proximity of army bases to schools nationwide created a threat. The strategy, therefore, actually provided a direct focus for student action that linked school level grievances directly to the national liberation struggle.

The Establishment of NANSO Branches in Kavango

Rudolf Haingura and Jonah Ndumba Kamwanyah described the growth of student activism and political consciousness in the mid-1980s as the armed struggle made an increasingly visible impact in the Kavango. They recalled that: "Rudolph Ngondo, the then Minister of Education in Kavango gave students at Leevi Hakusembe Secondary School a Saturday off for studies in 1986. Students at Kandjimi Murangi Secondary went on a strike to demand the same right" This was done in protest against

¹⁷ Personal communication. 11th January, 2016.

the unfair colonial practices in that region which divided students by preferentially treating them differently to compete against each other - the notion of divided and rule” The consequence was that students such as, among others, Jonah Ndumba Kamwanyah, ‘Doc’ Himarwa and Thom Mpembo were removed as prefects for having participated in the boycott.

It is also important to note that before the NANSO activism, many of the students (and teachers), in one or another way, in the Kavango had direct contact with the PLAN fighters and helped them. *Nontana/nontwedu domomusitu*- ‘The Bulls from the Bush’-as they were referred, including PAN combatants with combat name such as Festus Nuyoma, MundirowaAfrica, Hakushinda, Abisayi, djaKamati, Kahenge, Kamati and Olie Kazungura were given support by the local youth. The help provided took the form of information about the whereabouts of Koevoet/SWATF, as well as fetching water and food. Because of this material support to SWAPO and PLAN, many students in the region were detained, tortured and even killed. For example, Ndumba Joah Kamwanyah remembers vividly (one of many encounters) being beaten and tortured for hours in 1983 at the Mpungu mission when a PLAN commander by the name of Festus Nuyoma shot and killed Olavi Munango who was suspected of working for the SADF/SWATF as an informer- “The SADF/SWATF soldiers wanted to get information from us about the whereabouts of Festus Nuyoma (and we fully knew where he was) but after realizing that they were failing, they paraded all the boys inside a circle in front of the girls. They insulted, humiliated, tortured and beat the hell out of us.”

Haingura and Kamwanyah remembered that: “Students such as Faustinus Ndjengwa, Faustinus Wakudumo and many others at Rundu Senior Secondary School would openly sing freedom songs in public

. . . also politically orientated teachers such as Elia Nghilundilwa from Mpungu, Clemens Namwira, Sebastian Kantema, Maurus Nekaro, Marius Kudumo and Markus Kampungu were in contact with the students who were studying in Windhoek and elsewhere, such as Ignatius Nkotong Shixwameni, Vincent Kapumburu Likoro, Karoline Mokorabi, George Makuki, Angaleni Kangayi, Sirkka Ausiku, Tjekero Tweya, Gerson Kasama and Joe Diescho.”

The former student activists explained that their involvement with the establishment of NANSO branches in the Kavango can be dated from May, 1986. As members of a group of Catholic students from Rundu Senior Secondary School, they travelled to Windhoek to attend a vocational retreat at St. Paul’s College in Windhoek. It was decided that the group should proceed to attend the Namibian Catholic Youth League (NACAYUL) Annual Conference at Dobra, just outside the city on 3rd July, 1986.

The event coincided with a NANSO Conference which had started at the same venue two days earlier. Rudolf Haingura recalls that:

“NANSO was established on the 02nd of July 1984 at the same venue, which was two years earlier. Upon our arrival at the college the first people we met were in the first hall in which NANSO was in progress with the meeting. It was addressed by Cde Ignatius Nkotong Shixwameni who was standing in front of the hall. As we entered we could see Faustinus Ndjengwa and Faustinus Wakudumo and we thought that it was the right hall and we were given chairs to sit down. Eventually, we decided to attend the remaining three days of the congress, which really inspired us so much. When we returned, we used to see some senior students like Faustinus Wakudumo and Faustinus

Ndjengwa and many others singing freedom songs in front of the male hostel. A few months later we received a letter from Ignatius Shihwameni encouraging us to establish a NANSO branch at Rundu Senior Secondary School”.

The students established the Catholic Youth Organisation (CAYO) as a regional forum to involve the youth in discussions about national issues and political underground activities. The early leadership of CAYO included Pankratius Kutenda, Martin Kutenda, Fabianus Kandjeke Kavera, Josef Bernardino, Manfred Muyambo, Bertha Nyambe and Rudolph Tino Haingura.¹⁸ The idea of establishing CAYO was to disguise student mobilization and to secure a safe place for meetings at the Rundu Catholic Parish, remembered Kavera. The nuns at the parish were so helpful that the students were always given permission to gather at one of the small rooms at the premises of the parish when they approached them.

One of CAYO's main activities was the planning and organizing of a march to denounce the inhuman killing of Mr John Mwira with battery water allegedly by one of his white co-worker at the Kavango Government Garage. Many activists feel that this demonstration was the defining moment in the history of student mobilisation against the colonial government in the Kavango. For the first time students marched publically and in defiance of the authorities to oppression and injustice. The successful march boosted the moral of the students and gave them the strength to stand in unity and solidarity and to become a force to be reckon with.

By the end of 1987 the first NANSO Committee was established in Kavango with Mr Engelbert Kathumbi as the first Chairperson of the

¹⁸ Haingura, Rudolf Tino and Ndumba Jonnah Kamwanyah 'Anti-colonial Resistance and Student Activism in the North-eastern Region (1984-1990), Paper presented at the 'Recording and Restoring Our Part in the Past' History Conference, Rundu, 23rd-24th August, 2007, p1.

Kavango Regional Executive Committee. Gellah Katanga (Ndango) was the Vice Chairperson. Rudolph Tino Haingura became the Secretary of Information, whilst the other Committee members were Gondolph Kanyinga, Fabianus Kandjeke Kavera, Bertha Nyambe and Martin Kutenda.

The formation of NANSO in the region was very important as it was the first time students/youth and parents overtly started to defy the colonial government as opposed to the previously under-ground forms of mobilization. At the beginning of 1988 the second leadership of NANSO was elected with Gellah Katanga as the Chairperson; Martin Kutenda as the Vice-Chairperson; Rudolf Tino Haingura as the Secretary; Fabianus K. Kavera as the Secretary for Information and Publicity; Bertha Nyambe as the Treasurer and Christoph Kudumo as the Vice Treasurer.

During 1988 student activists under the umbrella of NANSO made sure that the new school prefects, who were de facto referred to as the first Students Representative Council, were dominated by activists and progressive students. Among those activists elected were Gondolph Kanyinga, Gellah Katanga, Fabianus Kandjeke Kavera, Ndumba Jonah Kamwanyah, Marthin Kutenda, Josef Dibwere Bernadino, Gere Ngalangi, Thom Mpepo, Bertha Nyambe, Astrid Mavandje Ndumba, Leena Shikwambi (Hoof meisie), Pauline Himarwa, Emma Haiyambo, John Ngola, Lukas Hamutenya, Eveline Mayongora, David Ndjamba (Hoofseun- he was kidnapped in 1988 and never seen again) Following the National Congress of NANSO on 2nd July, 1987, under the leadership of the charismatic Cde Shixwameni (NANSO Secretary-General), student politics really intensified country-wide and this was the time when

the slogan became popular amongst NANSO activists that stated: “Liberation first and Education later”.

The influence of NANSO spread to other schools in the region, including Kandjimi Murangi Secondary School, Linus Shashipapo Secondary School, Max Makushe Senior Secondary School, Leevi Hakusembe Secondary School and Rundu Teachers College. Some of the notable activists at these junior secondary schools were Marina Kandumbu, Robert Mbambi, Andreas Diyeve, Leonard Kambala Kaveto, Peter Kamwanga, Iria Ausiku, Maria Sisenge, John Mbambo, Peter Shinguwe, Michael Mbangu, Elivira Kavara, Julius Mwambu Mukuve, Mathias Haushiku, Joseph Mpuku Likoro, Ben Haingura, Bonny Shifwaku, Paulus Limbere, Benjamin Makayi, Julius Hamunyera Hambyuka, Saara Nuyoma, Regina Nakare, Kristin Shilima, and many others. The increasing effectiveness of NANSO as a movement that could mobilise students and school learners would be deployed most dramatically in the nationwide schools boycott that swept Namibia in 1988.

The 1988 Schools Boycott in Kavango

The launch of the Namibia National Student Organisation (NANSO) in July, 1984 created a militant organization that sought to mobilise students throughout the country (Maseko, 1995: 119). NANSO sought to organise peaceful demonstrations and marches throughout the country showing their rejection of inequality and the unfavourable Bantu education system which was in place at that time. Bantu education only prepared Namibians for semi-skilled work. The programme of action followed by students at the regional level emanated from the resolutions and plans of actions and decisions that were taken by NANSO at the national level.

Mr John Kandombo argued that the main issue behind the nationwide schools boycott of 1988, was the demand for the removal of the South African military bases near schools. It was believed that they had been deliberately located close to secondary schools in the north and north-east Namibia thus increasing the risk of civilian casualties when there were military attacks. When freedom fighters attacked a camp near Ponghosi Secondary School in Ohangwena in northern Namibia, some learners were killed in the crossfire. A monument at the school shows that the first death at the school took place on 9th April, 1981 when Mr Benjamin Nakale, a teacher was killed. A learner, Ms Hilke Mwanjekange, died the following year on 10th February, 1982 and another student, Ndahafa Haikali, sustained a broken leg. In 1983 two students were fired at as they were walking in the bushes near the school. One was killed (Silvester, Nampala & Ndalikokule, 2010: 51).

Samson Ndeikwila wrote to *The Namibian* describing the way in which the threat to the learners at the school continued to escalate: “On 16-18 January 1987, all students were sent home for a long weekend. In the early hours of 18th January, the base was attacked. A mortar was fired in the boys’ hostel. It went through the roof and exploded right in the centre of the boys’ dormitory. The interior of the room was left full of holes and windows shattered. A big part of the roof was ripped off. Eighteen boys used to sleep in this room. Had they been inside on that morning many of them would have been killed.

On 12th March 1987 the base was again attacked. One mortar hit and exploded on top of a high concrete cubicle inside the girls dormitory. Most of the fragments flew upwards and blew off the roof. Eighteen girls were

asleep in this room. One girl, Albertina Nghikongelwa, was killed instantly. Eight girls were injured. Because of the dusk-to-dawn curfew in the North, the injured girls had to wait till daylight to be taken to hospital. Victoria Nghikofa died later in hospital” (on 16th April, 1987).¹⁹ Similar incidents were also recorded in Kavango with residents remembering the death of a male and a female learner at Kandjimi Murangi in 1986 when they were killed in cross-fire during a battle between PLAN and Koevoet forces. A teacher, Jonas Hekki Simanya, was also beaten to death. Such local examples added fuel to student activism to challenge the military threat to schools.²⁰

The deaths led to the spread of protests as the membership of NANSO expanded and branches were established in schools throughout Namibia and there were growing calls from the NANSO leadership for the removal of army bases. Significant debates took place at NANSO conferences held at Otjiwarongo, Okahandia and Windhoek during 1987/8 where resolutions were taken calling for protest actions at schools throughout Namibia. After the Administrator-General had announced that army bases would not be removed from areas close to schools, a student protest was called for 17th March, 1988.²¹ The protests started, understandably, at Ponhofi Secondary School, (whose Principal at the time was Mrs Martha Hishindimbwa). The protests led to the immediate arrest of seven students: Ms Kashidulika (who was reportedly assaulted), Willibard Haimbodi, Oscar Kashimba, Paulus Timotheus Haihambo, Mr Samuel and

19 Ndeikwila, Samson 'On the boycotts', The Namibian, 24th-30th June, 1988, p12.

20 Personal communication. Ndumo Kamwanah, 11th January, 2016.

21 'Boycott Continues in North', The Namibian, 3rd-9th March. Shipanga, Chris 'Ponhofi dispute continues in north', The Namibian, 1st-7th April, 1988.

Mr Jason.²² In response to the growing unrest amongst the youth, the South African President himself, P.W. Botha and his military commander, General Magnus Malan, visited Windhoek in April, 1988 just before NANSO launched the largest schools boycott in Namibian history. David Lush states that P.W. Botha used the opportunity to clearly state that the South African administration and security forces would be given extra powers. Proclamation AG9 would allow the authorities to clamp down on political activity and any media which were judged to be 'promoting subversion' (Lush, 1993: 184).

'Cassinga Day' provided the opportunity for NANSO to organise a mass demonstration in Windhoek. Students, under the leadership of NANSO, organized a protest march that was meant to start in Katutura and end in Windhoek's city centre. The march took place on 4th May, 1988 to commemorate the massacre that had taken place during the attack on a SWAPO base on 4th May, 1978. The students were, however, unable to reach their destination as they were met by a wave of rubber bullets, tear gas and baton wielding policemen. Students, parents, community activists and representatives of progressive churches and trade union were outraged by the police brutality. Cassinga Day also provided a focal point in Kavango. Students from both Rundu Junior Secondary School (now Dr Romanus Kampungu) and Rundu Senior Secondary Schools and Education Certificate Primary (ECP) gathered on the 4th of May 1987 behind the Rundu Senior Secondary School Kitchen to commemorate Cassinga Day.

The national demand for the removal of military bases from schools was supported by NANSO activists in the Kavango Region. The national demand for the removal of the army bases was the direct result of the NANSO national conference held in Okahandja in 1988 that called for the

22 'Koevoet Close School', The Namibian, 18th-24th March, 1988, pp1-2.

total removal of the bases near the schools. A conference in Windhoek followed where it was decided that if the authorities did not meet the students' demands NANSO would call a national schools boycott. One of the resolutions taken was "no exam to one, no exam to all" and it was agreed that teachers should establish a national organization that would support the student boycott.

Political activities, in support of the liberation struggle, in Kavango were more difficult to organise than in Windhoek and other towns beyond 'the red line'.²³ Public political activities could only take place in the late 1980s when the students formed a strong support base in Kavango under NANSO, which publicly backed and supported political activists. One example was when some students were expelled from school by the authorities as they were labeled as 'trouble makers', but returned to school following public and student protests, as one of the students, Fabianus Kandjeke Kavera, re-calls. Each school in the Kavango had teachers who were either soldiers or who worked for the state security apparatus. During this period, every village in the Kavango had someone who was either in 202 Battalion or Koevoet, or somebody who was married to somebody serving in one of those units. 202 Battalion was a unit of the South West Africa Territorial Force, that was specifically recruited in the Kavango Region and that fought with the South African forces. Koevoet was a 'counter-insurgency' unit of the South African Police that was notorious for its violence (Cock and Nathan, 1989: 26).

The relationships which existed between some of the soldiers and school girls made it easy for the authorities to obtain information and to clamp down on the NANSO leadership in the region. One such incident was a

23 The 'Red Line' was a veterinary control line, but that was used by the authorities to control not only the movement of animals, but also of people. Most people entering Kavango passed through the Mururani or Bravo check points.

march planned for August, 1988 which was cancelled when it became clear that the security forces knew that the students are prepared to stage demonstration in Rundu. However when the students learned of the security force planned disruption of the march, some students from Rundu Senior Secondary School staged a peaceful walk through the streets of Rundu at around 10am. The students all dressed in white T-shirts that commemorated the launch of the armed struggle on 26th August. The security force was so embarrassed that they could not take any action as the student walked in the streets in small groups. During that day you could see the army's armoured cars constantly patrolling around town ready to clamp down on any action from the students.

Students at Rundu Senior Secondary School also participated in a school boycott to mark Cassinga Day on 4th May, 1988 and demanded that the Kavango Legislative Assembly uld recognize it as a 'national day of mourning'. It was reported that 15 students had been entified as ringleaders and arrested, but that: "The headboy of Rundu Senior Secondary School, David Ndjamba, has warned, however, that any action by the Kavango Education Authority against those who participated in the Cassinga class boycott could precipitate counteractions by the students".²⁴

Twelve teachers at Kandjimi Murangi Secondary School namely, Ms Sirkka Ausiku, Mr Mangundu Shixwameni, Mr Joseph Dinyando, Ms Natalia Mundjele Amadhila, Mr Josef Sikongo, the late Mr Olavi Mukuve, Mr Petrus Sivera, Mr Alexander Kudhumo, Mr Festus Sirungu, Mr Sixtus Muyeu and Mr Ben Kakonda walked out of the school in June after they had been told to quit before being expelled by the School Inspectors for the Kavango, Mr Josef Kandjimi and Gawie van Zyl.¹³ The teachers joined a march of the students marching from Kandjimi Murangi Secondary

24 'Teachers quit after Cassinga Day boycott', The Namibian, 20th-26th May, 1988, p4.

13. Personal communication, Ms Sirkka Ausiku, 11th January 2016.

School to Kahenge. Students staged a mass-walkout demanding that their teachers should be reinstated. This precipitated a mass walkout by students who demanding their teachers back. The Minister responsible for Education in the Kavango Administration, Mr Rudolf Ngondo, travelled to the school to speak to the students and teachers.

When the students boycotted classes to commemorate the Cassinga Day on 4th May, 1988, Mr. Ngondo, the former Minister of Education in the Kavango Administration was sent to address students. The former Administration for Kavangos was not happy that students commemorated the Cassinga Day. Mr. Ngondo was, allegedly, sent to warn students not to repeat the commemoration of Cassing Day in the future. Rudolph Haingura, and Ndumba Kamwanyah recall that Mr Ngondo's efforts to 'diffuse' the situation actually led to the spread of the boycott in the Kavango. "The protests that were staged by the students ended up with all the students being called together at the Dr Romanus Kampungu Hall where Mr Rudolf Ngondo was instructed, by the regime, to address them to distance themselves from subversive activities. While Ngondo was busy addressing the learners, all the learners who were present subsequently decided to leave the hall while Ngondo was still on the podium speaking". The schools boycott subsequently spread to Kandjimi Murangi Secondary School and Rundu Technical College (where Dr Elia Tjitunga Ngurare and others were based).²⁵

The student protest escalated with learners from Rundu Secondary School and Rundu Junior Secondary School staging a protest that was broken up, violently, by the police. The Namibian reported that:

²⁵ Haingura, Rudolf Tino and Ndumba Jonnah Kamwanyah 'Anti-colonial Resistance and Student Activism in the North-eastern Region (1984-1990), Paper presented at the 'Recording and Restoring Our Part in the Past' History Conference, Rundu, 23rd-24th August, 2007, p1.

“Scores of students were injured . . . some seriously, when police waded into Rundu Junior Secondary School firing rubber bullets, teargas and laying into students with sjamboks and batons according to sources in the area”. The journalist reported that: “Prior to the arrival of the police at the school, students marched and sang freedom songs peacefully . . .”. The Director of Education for the Kavango Authority, Mr Chris Taaljard, was accused of having requested that the police attack the demonstration on the advice of the Principal of Rundu Junior Secondary School (although he claimed that he had only asked the police to monitor the student protest and not to stop it).

The tension in Rundu escalated further when allegations were made that four white teachers at Rundu Junior Secondary School had participated in beating the students and a parents meeting demanded the removal of these teachers from the school and the Kavango region. It was noted that there were ‘unconfirmed reports’ that Kandjimi Murangi Secondary School and Leevi Hakusembe Secondary School in western Kavango had joined in the schools boycott” (that had started on 13th June in the Kavango).²⁶

The 13th June, 1988, in the context of Kavango student uprising, might be seen as the equivalent of the 16th June (1976) Soweto uprising in South Africa. On this day students from all the school in Rundu as well as from the Teacher Training College-ECP marched and sang freedom song in the streets of Rundu, shouting SWAPO slogans. Koevoet, police and SWATF were immediately deployed to disperse the students. As a result students retreated back to Rundu Senior Secondary School. The soldiers followed the students inside and pinned them against the

26 ‘Riots in Rundu’, The Namibian, 17th-23rd June, 1988, p5.

fence, and chaos broke out as the 'security forces' used tear gas and rubber bullets. Rundu Secondary School and the streets of Rundu were turned into a battlefield as students were being chased by soldiers both on foot and in Casspirs.

By the end of the day during the 13th June boycott more than 20 students from Rundu Junior, Rundu Senior Sec School and the ECP were arrested, and scores of them teargassed and injured. In court, Ndumba Jonnah Kamwanyah remembers, Reverend Ludwig Hausiku (Kamboroto) defiantly waving a placard to denounce the arrest of the students, a move which resulted him also being arrested for a contempt of court. It is important to note whilst Mr Rudolf Ngondo was part of the Kavango Administration, students also often approached him to support our activities. He would, for example, authorize his manager Mr Mbandu to arrange transport or provide finances to assist students. At one occasion Fabianus Kavera, Tino Haingura and Gellah Katanga approached him for such assistance upon which he jokingly told them that he would assist though "we are always 'downing' them in our meetings".²⁷

A Parents Committee was established to support learners and teachers who had been suspended or arrested. However, the notorious AG9 proclamation was used by the police to detain members of the Committee and those who were alleged to be involved in organising the protests. Those detained included Mr Maurus Nekaro, the Principal of Rundu Senior Secondary School, Dominee Samuel Mbambo, a teacher at the school, Sebastian Kantema, a teacher, Thadeus Mukoya (matron at the school), Faustina Caley, a teacher at Rundu Junior Secondary School, Edelberth Katamba, teacher at Rundu Junior Secondary School and Martin Kutenda, NANSO's branch chairman and student at Rundu

²⁷ Fabianus Kandjeke Kavera. Personal communication, 11th January, 2016.

Senior. Simon Maruata, a member of the Parents Committee and Mr Raymond Kangura Mundumbi, Chairperson of the Parents Committee were also reported to have been detained. Other students detained included Fabianus Kandjeke Kavera and Leena Shikwambi.²⁸

It is clear that local grievances contributed to the spread of the schools boycott in the Kavango, although it was part of the growing nationwide boycott. By the end of May it was claimed that 168,000 learners and 518 schools and colleges were taking part in the boycott. Participating schools across Namibia included Otjikoto Secondary School in Tsumeb, Dobra Training College, Augustineum College, Katutura Senior Secondary School, Andreas Shipena Secondary School and Martin Luther High School.²⁹

The violent disruption of the protests in Rundu seems to have strengthened the schools boycott in the town. By 29th July, 1988, it was reported that all the schools in the town as well as most schools, including primary schools, in the region had been closed down by the boycott by pupils. “. . . demanded the dismissal of five white teachers who allegedly joined police in assaulting pupils during boycotts last term”. On 20th July, 1988, 24 students appeared in court in Rundu on charges of ‘public violence’ following their arrest at the protest. One student, Martin Kutenda, who had been released was re-arrested”.³⁰ The boycott continued with learners in six secondary school reported to have been boycotting classes for over a month: Rundu Senior and Junior Secondary School, Max Maukushe, Linus Shashipapo, Leevi

28 ‘Rundu residents and students held’, The Namibian, 24th June-30th June, 1988, p3. Personal communication, Dr Marius Kudumo, 5th December, 2016. Personal communication, Marius Kudumo, 11th January, 2016.

29 ‘Schools boycott reaches a crisis stage’, The Namibian, 10th-16th June, 1988, p8.

30 ‘No End in Sight to Current Schools Crisis’, The Namibian, 29th July – 4th August, 1988, p1-2.

Hakusembe and Kandjimi Murangi.

The student protests were successful when the Kavango Administration agreed to the removal of five teachers from Rundu Junior Secondary School who had become the local focus for the protest, due to allegations that they had participated in the suppression of NANSO protests at the school. Protestors demanded that the teachers be removed from their posts at the school and not permitted to teach in Kavango. However, the Kavango Administration, having agreed to remove the five teachers, changed the suspension to 30 days 'special leave' during which Parents Committee asked to produce evidence to support their allegations. The teachers, including the Principal of Rundu Junior Secondary School, Mr Piet Bezuidenhout were removed – as had been demanded, whilst one was transferred from the school to the regional office.

Students returned to their classes, but they had gained a sense of power and an increased confront allegations of injustice or racism in schools. For ple, on 25th October, 1988 learners at Leevi Hakusembe Secondary School, supported by several black teachers, boycotted classes after they accused their Principal, Mr Gawie van Zyl of abusing them and calling black teachers at the school 'lazy'and 'unqualified'.³¹

One challenge for student activists after the mass mobilization that was the result of the 1988 schools boycott was that many student leaders decided to cross the border and go into exile. This was a result of a SWAPO Youth League decision taken at the Catholic church after the initial implementation of 435 in November failed. At this meeting it was

31 'Students boycott over offensive speech', The Namibian, 28th October – 3rd November, 1988, p7.

decided that students and the youth should cross the border to support the liberation struggle and join the PLAN. For example, on 11th November, 1988, a group of seven students consisting of Gellah Katanga, Jonah Ndumba Kamwanyah, Bertha Nyambe, Martin Kutenda, Gondolph Kanyinga, Fabianus Kandjeke Kavera and Josephine Mwengere Maghambayi crossed the border. Mr Nimrod Muremi and the late Rafael Dinyando had already scouted an exit route and made contact with the SWAPO representative in Botswana. Mr Muremi, Kana Thimbunga and Mr Siwombe Ngondo helped the group to cross the border. Other students followed, including Astrid Ndumba, Christopherus Kudumo, Manfred Muyambo, Petrus Tjandja, Sebastian Mukoya Thimbunga, Patrick Haingura, Bartholomeus Ndara, Julius Mukuve, Theophilus Kakonda, and Basilius Kana. The third group consisting of Peter Shinguwe, Robert Mbambi, John Mbambo, Marina Kandumbu, Jacobine Siyamba, Louw Shipopa, Karina Nairenge, Ester Nairenge, Iria Ausiku, Benhardt Wakudumo, Petrina Shipopa and Klementine Shihako followed.

The other students who left from the Kavango Region during the student exodus were Josef Bernadino, Elvira Kavara, Hertha Karufere, Gerhard Thighuru, Heinrich Makanga, Engelbert Kathumbi, Leonard Kambala Kaveto, Sikerete Kapango, Bertha Kandundu, Lucia Mpareke, John Ernesto Mushinga, Andreas Tovororo, Edward Kavara, Stanislaus Dikuwa, Melani Shinduvi, Peter Ruyendo, Andreas Ndara, Hilia Mpepo, Maria Sisenge, Willem Mushongo, Mayavero Kudumo, Steven Mbambo, Servatius Kapinga, Dominikus Ndara and Marbort Shikerete. The departure of so many young leaders left what Haingura and Kamwanyah call a 'leadership vacuum', however this was filled by others such as

Eugen Likuwa, Julius Hambyuka and Herbert Shixwameni.³²

The scale of the exodus of young people was unprecedented in the history of the region and the return of these students would lay a significant role in the success of SWAPO's election campaign in the region. Most of them were assigned by SWAPO to different parts of Kavango from Omega and Tsumke to Katwitwi to conduct mass mobilization before the first ever democratic election in 1989. Students played a major role in supporting SWAPO's 1989 election campaign, with the youth determined to campaign despite the heavy military presence in the region. NANSO and SWAPO bought a joint application to court on 17th March, 1989 in an attempt to prevent Koevoet from intimidating SWAPO supporters. The application referred directly to an incident in February when Koevoet members had broken up a student meeting in Rundu. A member of SWATF was reported to have fired more than 80 rounds of ammunition at Rundu Junior School causing injuries to a number of learners (Harlech-Jones, 1997: 97). The campaign was a tough one, but the final results showed that whilst the DTA had obtained 22,046 votes, it was SWAPO that had won the highest number of votes in the region, having obtained 27,256 votes (Diescho, 1993: 214). The DTA used SWATF and Koevoet to intimate people to vote for them. If teachers, workers and students had not been heavily involved in campaigning, the results might even have been in favour of the DTA.

32 Haingura, Rudolf Tino and Ndumba Jonnah Kamwanyah 'Anti-colonial Resistance and Student Activism in the North-eastern Region (1984-1990), Paper presented at the 'Recording and Restoring Our Part in the Past' History Conference, Rundu, 23rd-24th August, 2007, p1. Additional names provided by Dr Marius Kudumo, personal communication, 4th January, 2016.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the student uprising in Kavango made a significant contribution to Namibia obtaining its independence. The role and determination of the student body in Kavango is an undisputed fact and needs to be acknowledged. Whilst the participation of students in a national organization, NANSO, contributed to the building of nationalism in the youth, students were also able to use local grievances to mobilise learners. The students, like the churches, trade unions and civil society, played a symbiotic and mutually supportive role that complimented the work of SWAPO. Youth protest and the rejection by parents and teachers of the methods used by the security forces to suppress protest was central to ensuring that SWAPO won the majority of votes in the region in the 1989 election.

4. The Role of Workers and Trade Unions in the Resistance to South African Rule in Kavango

– Sebastian Kantema

Introduction

Workers (and teachers in particular) played a central role in mobilizing opposition to South African colonial rule, but little has been written about their activities in the Kavango Region. Kletus Likuwa has argued that the contract labour system made men more politically conscious. The shared, harsh, experience of the labour recruiting procedures, work in mines and large industrial complexes and the encounters with hundreds of other men living in compounds with hundreds of other workers created the conditions for the development of a labour movement based on shared grievances. The establishment of a 'Native Commissioner' for Kavango as an agent of the South African administration at Nkurenkuru in Kavango, from 1921, was also a turning point as it gave a physical identity to the state.

The arrival of the Native Commissioner marked the introduction of a large number of new regulations to control the movements and activities of the residents of Kavango. Before the arrival of the Commissioner, the inhabitants of Kavango could hunt animals without any prohibition. When the Commissioner was posted to the Kavango, the laws to protect wildlife became a factor that prevented people from enjoying their traditional access to these local natural resources. People were fined and flogged if they were found guilty of causing a veld fire, killing wild animals or even

maltreating their own oxen. Residents could no longer kill an animal to make clothing from the skin or simply for consumption purposes and this made life difficult. Mathias Shikombero as quoted by Likuwa explained:

In the past, you could survive even if you did not go on contract. There was always a variety of wild skins to wear simply because there were no clothes! Where else would you get the skins to make the traditional dress? There was nowhere to get it since the whole forest was now full of the nature conservation officials who protected those animals. Where else would one get skin for dresses since you could no longer kill a buck to use its skin and soften it into a traditional skin dress? Previously it was possible because there were no nature conservation officials and that was why it was possible to get a skin to make a traditional dress. But later on when the animals were prohibited, where else could we get animal skins. (Likuwa: 2012.5)

When the state denied the community control and access to local resources that had always been seen as community resources it resulted in economic and social hardship of families. Such family hardships finally compelled men to seek recruitment in the exploitive contract labour system.

Contract Labour and Worker Consciousness

Contact labourers often complained that they were not treated like human beings, but this meant that the workers' compounds were fertile ground for political mobilisation. Benhard Limbangu Shampapi, a former

contract worker, said that he first encountered political mobilization whilst he was on contract in Walvis Bay:

On Sundays when there was no work, we usually attended meetings of that old man, Maxuili. On other days, the meetings were held in the evenings, after work, and we would stay there the whole evening. My goodness, that was the man ! He never used to panic at those meetings. The police were also in attendance. He used to insult those Boers who attended such meetings. That man was never secretive and held his meetings in the open.

The Sunday meetings usually began at three o'clock in the afternoon and he would talk until perhaps six o'clock after which we would march from the meeting place, singing their Oshiwambo language liberation songs and take him back to his house (Interview, Shampapi, 2009).

Workers who returned from contracts in Walvis Bay or Tsumeb or from Johannesburg were politically conscious and would then mobilise the youth in the region. Kletus Likuwa argues that one of the most influential of these early workers to return to the region and start political mobilization was David Kudumo Ausiku (nicknamed *Lyangurungunda*). He returned from contract having already obtained a SWAPO membership card in Windhoek in 1962. Ausiku explains:

When I was in the old compound, I started recruiting for SWAPO. I became a member of SWAPO in 1962 through John ya Otto in Windhoek. He had known me from Okahandja. My fellow recruiter was John ya Otto. Together, we recruited many members from within the

migrant workers' compound in Windhoek. We encouraged members to steal from the bad, rich whites and to help the good ones . . . By the time I had returned to Windhoek after my four months absence, recruiting people from SWAPO had become spontaneous and included many gang members from outside the compound. We told them to leave and become guerillas outside Namibia. Many who left travelled through Botswana and into Zambia where there were training camps. (Ausiku, 2005: 75-76)

The Early Political Mobilisation of Workers in Kavango

It was returning migrant workers who were the first SWAPO activists in the Kavango. Ausiku later became the leader in the formation of an organization called *Muzogumwe* ('One Path' or 'One Way') as a political body in the Kavango. *Muzogumwe* was formed in 1973 with David Ausiku as its Chairperson and acted as a front for SWAPO. It operated openly by creating the false impression that it was anti-SWAPO and against communism. Its first meeting was held in Sauyema village on 31st May, 1973, where more than fifty people signed up as members, whilst a further two hundred signed up as supporters (Ausiku, 2005: 85-88). Members of the organization held meetings in secret to recruit more members. However, later the authorities discovered that *Muzogumwe* was a cover for SWAPO and Ausiku was arrested and brutalized by the South African authorities. The other clandestine way in which it was possible to recruit support was by using football games as a cover for meetings.

Football was encouraged by the authorities as they believed that sport prevented people from engaging in destructive activities like alcohol

abuse. Government employees and school learners met after work for soccer practice, but where they also discussed the political ideas of SWAPO. The Rundu Chiefs Club was founded in 1976 and provided a platform where members could discuss politics. The use of the soccer club enabled the effective mobilization of the youth.

The establishment of trade unions was both a political and an economic strategy for resistance. The new union structures emphasized the link between workers' issues and resistance to the South African colonial occupation. Alfred Moleah argued:

The Africans in Namibia fit into the colonial set-up strictly as disposed workers whose relevance is only their labour. They were brought on to the labour market, not as free labour, but as forced labour. They are a coerced and highly regimented labour force whose labour is brutally and ruthlessly exploited. Therefore the Africans in Namibia were under a labour code akin to slavery. The chief operative concepts of this labour code are coerced and controlled which in return saw the chiefs benefiting from the process of recruiting labourers to the colonial master (1983: 111).

The Establishment of Trade Unions in Namibia in the 1980s

The National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW) was established following a decision made on 24th April, 1970 by the SWAPO leadership in exile. However, it was only in the 1980s that it was possible to successfully

form industrial trade unions inside Namibia and for them to affiliate to the NUNW as an umbrella body. The release of SWAPO activists from Robben Island Prison in 1984 was one of the factors that helped the formation of the new unions. In 1986 two former prisoners, Ben Ulenga and John Pandeni became leaders of the Mineworkers Union of Namibia (MUN) and the Namibia Food and Allied Workers Union (NAFAU).

The following year the Namibian Public Workers Union was launched under the leadership of another 'graduate' of Robben Island, Petrus Ilonga, whilst the Metal and Allied Workers Union (MANWU) was also launched under the leadership of Barnabus Tjizu. The year 1988 saw the launch of the Namibia Transport and Allied Workers Union (NATAU) led by Willy Matsi and in 1989 the Namibia National Teachers Union (NANTU) was launched with Mr Marco Hausiku as Chair and Redemptus Kamari as Vice-President (Jauch, 1999: 12; ILO, 1990: 65). The aim of all these unions was twofold. Firstly, to organise workers and make them understand the way in which they were exploited in a capitalist economy. Secondly, to organise workers as active participants in the Namibian liberation struggle.

The Role of the Trade Unions in Kavango in the Liberation Struggle

The National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW) called for a three day 'stay-away' from work in June, 1988 in support of the schools' boycott that had been organized by NANSO. However, workers at the Kavango Administration received warning letters regarding their participation in the stay-away. The letters quoted the Government Civil Service Act of 1980 which stated that "It is an offence for an employee to play an active

role in party political matters or use his position in the government to further or undermine the interests of a political party” and “It is an offence for an employee to stay away without leave or reasonable grounds from work”.³³

By 1989 the Namibia Public Workers Union (NAPWU) and the Namibia National Teachers Union (NANTU) were fully operational in the Kavango. The NUNW, therefore, decided to set up a Steering Committee in the region. The chairperson of the committee was Gabriel Kangowa (the former Deputy-Director of the Emergency Management Unit).³⁴ The goal of the Committee was to organise and mobilise workers who had not yet established branches and elected workers’ representatives to NUNW affiliated unions. The Steering Committee would then play an important role in linking new branches with the headquarters of their union in Windhoek. The NUNW regional Steering Committee was also responsible for co-ordinating union activities that related to cross-cutting issues. For example, they would facilitate the organization of May Day activities that took place on 1st May every year.

The Steering Committee targeted work places, especially retail outlets and garages where many workers had serious complaints about the treatment that they received at the hands of the owners. In Rundu Garage, for example, it was alleged that Comrade David Mwira was poisoned by his supervisor and killed. Meetings were organized with employers and negotiations were often very tough. However, these platforms opened a window of opportunity for workers to organise themselves and unionise. Meetings were usually held during lunch time.

33 ‘Kavango Admin Renege on Expulsions’, *The Namibian*, 29th July – 4th August, 1988, p7.

34 Kudumo, Marius, ‘The Role of Teachers in the Student Political Activities of the Late 1980s in the Kavango’, Paper presented at the ‘Recording and Restoring Our Part in the Past’ History Conference, Rundu, 23rd-24th August, 2007.

Prior to 1989 Namibia did not have a national teachers' union. The lack of a union made it difficult for teachers to respond to the national educational crisis that prevailed at this time. The dilemma led to the formation of the Namibia National Teachers' Union (NANTU) on 11th March, 1989. In many regions of the country teachers were organized into ethnic associations. In Kavango the *Kavango Onderwysers Vereniging* (KOV) had been established. Whilst KOV was led by credible and respected members of the education sector it was unable to respond effectively to a national crisis because of the nature of its establishment and location.³⁵

Dr Marius Kudumo, who was one of the black teachers at Rundu Secondary School can still recall that, when they started to teach at that school, the number of black teachers at secondary schools in the region was negligible. Not only were the majority of the teachers white, many were members of the South African military. Kudumo remembers that one teacher at the school, Mrs Brand, was the wife of Sergeant Brand, the Head of the Police's Special Branch in Rundu. The few black teachers who obtained appointments had a culture of responsibility and accountability as they had to serve as role models to the learners. After the launch of NANTU regional structures were established. In the Kavango, which was in the 'north-east region', NANTU members were divided into seven or eight branches with almost every school in the region establishing a school committee.

The Teachers Strike of 1989

NANTU challenged the Administrator-General, Mr Pienaar, after he

35 Kudumo, Marius 'The Role of Teachers in the Student Political Activities of the Late 1980s in the Kavango', Paper presented at the 'Recording and Restoring Our Part in the Past' History Conference, Rundu, 23rd-24th August, 2007.

suspended and fired seven teachers in the region. The announcement was made at the occasion of the coronation of *Hompa* Matumbo Ribebe as the Shambyu leader. The argument was that the teachers were political activists who should not be allowed to influence learners in during the months leading up to the UN-supervised election that was scheduled for 7th-11th November, 1989.

The NANTU Regional Committee, led by Dr Samuel Mambo, the current Governor of Kavango East, organized a successful strike of all the teachers as a response to the expulsion and suspension of teachers and the refusal of the Administration to reinstate them. The political climate of the time is clear from the fact that a group of 'concerned parents' (who were members of the 202 Battalion of the South West Africa Territorial Force) also sought to have ten teachers suspended from duty to prevent them 'influencing learners'.³⁶

The way in which the different organizational structures worked together to try and increase pressure on the state is evident from the fact that Rundu Technical Institute was closed by a teachers' protest in support of the suspended teachers and the Teachers Training College was closed by a student boycott in solidarity with NANTU.³⁷ A further solidarity strike by workers at the Kavango Administration was organized by the NAPWU branch in Rundu under the leadership of Mr Erwin Likoro.³⁸ The strike was called off by NANTU and NAPWU after an agreement was reached with the Administrator-General, Advocate Louis Pienaar, in which he agreed that he would consider reinstating the two suspended and five expelled teachers if the workers and teachers returned to their jobs. The

36 'Kavango Teachers' Boycott', *The Namibian*, 30th May, 1989, p3.

37 'Schools Crisis: Two colleges closed in Kavango and in Ovambo region, boycott continues', *The Namibian*, 1st June, 1989, p1.

38 'Kavango Strike on Horizon', *The Namibian*, 5th June, 1989, p3.

teachers were subsequently all reinstated.³⁹

Conclusion

The role of the teachers was to provide leadership and guidance to learners and to present alternative views to the propaganda that was pervasive at the time. Dr Kudumo argues that the black school principal at Rundu Secondary School, Mr Maurius Nakaro, who had been trained at Fort Hare and other black teachers were influential. Teachers played an important role in voter education and encouraging people to register for the 1989 election. Hon. John Mutorwa was serving as the Vice-Chairperson of the North-Eastern Region of NANTU at the time of the election and argues that his members played an important role in explaining the requirements for voter registration, whilst many teachers also served as interpreters, observers and polling agents (Jauch, 2004)

39 'Strike Postponed', The Namibian, 8th June, 1989, p3. 'Teachers Reinstated: Rundu situation reported as 'back to normal', The Namibian, 15th June, 1989.

Appendix 1: Translation (from Afrikaans) of Archive Documents

24 May 1989

To the AG

Subject: **Suspension and Expulsion of Teachers**

With regard to the Administrator – General’s announcement that seven (7) teachers in this district / region are suspended and expelled, the teachers in this region under the leadership of NANTU held a meeting and decided and demanded the following:

1. The decision must be revoked because of the following reasons:
 - (a) Nantu was advised by their lawyers that the expulsion is illegal
 - (b) The teachers regard the suspension and expulsion as illegal because:
 - (i) The offence is not proven.
 - (ii) The source of your information is not trustworthy and is questionable.

- (c) We are very much dissatisfied with the manner and the platform on which the announcements were made.
 - (d) The Administrator – General must give reasons that let you believe that the civil servants have transgressed rules which make them guilty to be charged with misconduct. Article 18 of Public Service Act 1980.
 - (e) We regard your action as a direct intimidation and abuse of power and position of the Administrator – General. We demand that such intimidations be stopped.
-
- 2. We demand that the offenders be charged in a competence court to prove whether they are guilty or not.
 - 3. We demand the findings of the Department of Education in this administration on this matter.

You are given until Monday, 29 May 1989 at 13H00 to respond to our demand.

S. Kantema

Secretary

24 May 1989

6 June 1989

The Secretary: Administration for Kavangos

Expulsion and suspensions

Your letter of 5 June 1989 has reference.

- 1.1. NANTU is disturbed to learn that the expulsion of teachers was based on one-sided witnesses. The source of information and witness is strongly doubted and questioned.
- 1.2. NANTU is encouraged to learn that the Administrator- General is willing to listen to other witnesses objectively for a possible reversal of the expulsion and suspension.
- 1.3. NANTU believe that if the suspension and expulsion is reversed, normal academic activities will resume.
- 1.4. The resumption of normal academic activities will depend upon your quick, honest and objective action to solve this problem,

for the benefit of this country, Namibia, particularly at this time when reconciliation and peace are the watch words.

- 1.5. We know that black children are the ones affected, but children and parents understand our just cause to strike. Therefore we are still demanding the lifting of the suspensions and expulsions of teachers. NANTU is aware of the intimidations which is still going on, in the form of the interdict. Any action from your side which will be done as a result of your interdict will be viewed seriously and dealt with accordingly.

S.K. Mbambo

S.H. Kantema

Chairperson

Secretary

Telefax

To: Secretary: Administration for Kavango's

From: General Secretary: Representative Authorities and the Government of Reboboth

With regards to your appeal of the involved teaching staff regarding their suspension and expulsion and the latest information which we received, the Administrator General decided to undertake departmental investigation. The AG further decided that until the investigation is finalized, these teachers should be reinstated in their positions.

Dr. J.J. Korf

5 June 1989

The Chairperson

1. NANTU
2. NAPWU

Demand regarding the expulsion and suspension of teachers

The following answer regarding your demands was sent to me:

1. The Administrator – General is not prepared to withdraw his decision to suspend two teachers and expel five staff members. The suspension and expulsion was based on *prima facie* witnesses which were accepted by the High Court and the AG indicated that he will not change his decision.
2. The two suspended teachers will soon be charged with misconduct, which will give them an opportunity to state their case. The Administrator General is actually prepared to consider written requests which these suspended teachers can submit to him and may even consider to withdraw the suspension. Such requests must be handed to the Secretary of the Administration

for Kavango's.

3. With regard to the expelled staff, the Administrator – General is prepared to receive written requests which clearly argue that he reconsiders his decision objectively. These requests must be submitted via the Secretary Administration for Kavango's.
4. If other facts are provided, the AG. Is prepared to reconsider his decision.

K.D. Botha

Secretary: Administration for Kavangos

6 June 1989

The Secretary : Administration for Kavango's

Appeal: **Expulsion and suspension**

Your letter date 5 June 1989, has reference. We are requesting the following:

1. We are illegally and unjustifiable expelled and suspended.
2. We were summoned to appear in court, but we were suspended and expelled before the court hearing.
3. With regard to paragraph four (4) of your letter, we would like to inform you that all facts regarding this matter are available at our Lawyer – thus you are urgently requested to contact Mr. Mark Euijen our Lawyer at Tel. No. 223356, Windhoek , during office hours.
 1. Karel Buruta
 2. Richard Hausiku
 3. Manfred Haipopo
 4. Johannes. J. Thimbunga
 5. Bernhard Shikanga
 6. Joseph Shininge
 7. Moses Sirunda

5. The Role of Women during the Armed Struggle in Western Kavango

– Aaron Nambadi

Introduction

Liberating a country is not an easy task and the woman of Kavango actively contributed and participated in the struggle immensely. It can be argued that without the enormous logistical support provided by people living inside Namibia, the armed struggle would have failed. Woman used to shoulder the responsibility of regularly preparing food for combatants. The SADF used to conduct patrols at all times of the day and night in search of PLAN fighters. As it was known that local people were providing supplies to PLAN fighters, they were constantly questioning local residents to try and obtain intelligence about the movements and plans of the guerillas. Due to the impact of both the migrant labour system and the movement of men into exile to join the struggle, it was often women who were heading households in the region. Women were, therefore, the ones who were involved in the logistics of supplying food to guerillas and had to deal with the questioning that provided the intelligence that both sides relied upon.

Women's' Role in the Logistics of the Struggle

Commander Ndeulitufa Kalomoh (the former PLAN commander responsible for operations in the Kavango Regions) singled out some

women who were instrumental in the Kavango in supporting the fighters:

The late OnyaMuremi, (Mrs.Lydia Nehova Muremi), OnyaVilho-Selma Shikukumwa, OnyaNdambu (Elizabeth Murangi), and OnyaSihako Rebbeka Shaningwa. These women were beaten and tortured. In fact it was so severe that one of them, OnyaSihako relocated to Angola. OnyaMuremi was frequently tortured by the Koevoet soldiers because she was suspected of being instrumental in assisting the PLAN fighters and also because two of her sons (Elia Muremi and Reinhold Muremi) went into exile.⁴⁰

Commander Kalomoh recalled a number of women in Kavango who really risked their lives to support SWAPO. Some of the women he mentioned that sacrificed a lot were OnyaKanuni–Sirongo Lahia from Mpungu, OnyaMuremi, NduvaNkuru, OnyaSihako at Gava, OnyaVilho at Kaparara, OnyaSihako-Rebecca Shaningwa at Mpungu OnyaLineya Ester Neromba at Rupara. He argued that these women really sacrificed their lives to assist the PLAN fighters. OnyaNdambu Elizabeth Murangi, was the elder cousin of the late Sientu Mpasi, the *Hompa* of the Vakwangali who stayed in Etapa, Kasimba⁴¹. Kalomoh gave an example of how, Pauline Kahandja Petrus, the daughter of NyaNdambu, would cook for the combatants, send her children into the woods and give food, sometime they would have to cut branches and destroy the footprints of the combatants. Whilst they used to be abused physically by Koevoet, these women did not disclose any information relating to the movements of PLAN fighters

40 Interview by Aaron Nambadi with Kalomoh Ndeulitufa, Tutungeni, Rundu, 13th May, 2005. It is believed that a third son, Sakaria Muremi, was also detained. Rev. Johannes Sindano, Personal communication

41 The wife of the late foreman Matjayi and one woman at Tjau-Tjau, NaimiNkuru, the wife of the late Jakko Kangayi at Kamupupu, the wife of late Mungungu at !Cancana were also some of the women who are remembered as brave women.

in their vicinity.⁴² There were also some women in the eastern part of the Kavango region who Kalomoh particularly remembered because of the assistance that they provided to PLAN fighters. Incuma was the wife of Mr. Kandjimi and there were also women who provided important supply points at Baramasoni, Vikota, Taratara, Samangomba and Livayi.⁴³

Madam Sirka Kapango Ihemba, a woman in her late fifties, from Kehemu, a suburb close to Rundu, argues that it is also important to remember the impact the struggle had on women and the harsh treatment given to any individual who was suspected of giving assistance to PLAN fighters in Kavango. Ihemba was inspired to support SWAPO by a well-known SWAPO activist in the region, David Ausiku (also known as *Lyangurungunda*). She was a business woman selling groceries in the shop of her late husband, Samuel, in their community when she first became involved in SWAPO activities and supporting PLAN fighters. Ihemba stated that it was very strange to collaborate with mysterious armed men who were always dressed in civilian clothing. She remembered that her first encounter with PLAN fighters in the late seventies was a dramatic introduction to the world of SWAPO activities.

Learning more about SWAPO as a movement enabled Ihemba to easily identify the PLAN fighters when they started operating in the whole of the Kavango region. The role of women, according to Ihemba, was preparing food for the PLAN fighters whenever they visited a civilian homestead. The fact that one of her brothers had gone into exile also motivated her to give support to PLAN fighters. Whenever PLAN fighters used to visit civilian homesteads they would introduce themselves and explain the aim of the PLAN fighters to liberate the country from white minority

42 The women interviewed indicated how they were beaten up and their Mahangu fields destroyed by the colonial soldiers.

43 Interview with Kalomoh Ndeulitufa

rule. The political education that was given to the people by the PLAN fighters motivated civilians to support them.

Ihemba recalls one day when she cooked *Mahangu* porridge (*yisima*) and slaughtered a big chicken for the SWAPO guerrillas. She remembers that her neighbour and friend, Nyalhemba, also slaughtered a chicken too. The soldiers ate and the two also gave them *Mahangu* flour and they then left. The first group was followed by another group, so they cooked again. After they had finished eating, the PLAN fighters told her that they would come the next day for some traditional soft drink (*sikundu*) in the night. The next morning Ihemba and her family went to their fields and when the PLAN fighters came back, as they had promised, Ihemba gave them the traditional soft drink. The guerillas left as if they were going deep into the bush, but then they made a U-turn in a valley and came back to Kehemu, near the camp of Hamutenya.

Food was also given to them the next day and after having their meal, they left and Ihemba and her people continued working in the field. In the evening, it was the same routine of cooking food for the PLAN fighters. Preparing food for the guerillas became like a daily routine for them and this was the way they used to survive. Mr. Siyere elaborates:

*Ngatu vape nondja sinene vana wiza momambo getu.
Ngatu tereke usimbu-simbu makura tatu vape, yipo
vadongonoke, morwa ose kwakere noutjirwe sinene vana
kugwana vaKoevoet to terekere vaPLAN, makura eparu
lyoge moudigu*

*[We used to give them food. If they came to our
homesteads we prepared them food. We prepared the
food quickly. Those responsible for the food, prepared*

*the food quickly, so that the PLAN fighters can disappear, because the danger was that, if you were found (by the Koevoet) preparing food for the PLAN fighters, then your life was in danger.*⁴⁴

Analysing the narrative given by Ihemba and Siyere, one can conclude that it was usually women who prepared the food that was given by civilians in the Kavango to the PLAN fighters.

Ihemba indicated that women also used to provide the fighters with basic resources such as soap, lotion and medicine. Waging an armed liberation war, is not any easy task. The life of a guerrilla in any liberation struggle depends on the assistance rendered by the local civilians. Civilians mobilise resources together or use their own money to buy basic humanitarian needs like toothpaste, tins of fish, corned beef or even Bibles for the Namibians fighting to liberate their country. Other assistance provided by civilians such as hiding guerillas in the small mahangu grain storage baskets saved the life of many PLAN fighters.

Food Poisoning

Providing basic needs to SWAPO fighters was considered by the South African forces as an act of supporting terrorism. One incident that particularly disturbed Ihemba was a request by a Koevoet fighter. He asked her to put poison into the food that she was going to give the PLAN fighters. This order by a member of the South African forces to poison the PLAN fighters disturbed her. Ihemba believes that she was not the only person given the poison, because she was aware that her neighbour,

⁴⁴ Interview by Aaron Nambadi and Herbert Karapo with Mr Alfons Siyere, Tutungeni, Rundu, 15 May 2003

Paulus, was also given such poison. The Koevoet members gave clear instructions as to how the poison was to be used, especially how it should be put in the food that was to be given to the PLAN fighters. A few days after being given the poison, the PLAN fighters again visited her homestead. Ihemba sent her children, Rebecca and Ramu, to collect the bottle of poison from her room, which she then handed to Hamutumwa, one of the PLAN fighters. She also cautioned the fighters to be vigilant and on the lookout for poison. Ihemba suggested that should anyone in the area offer food to Hamutumwa's men, then that person should first taste or eat the food, just in case it was poisoned.

After a long conversation, the PLAN fighters thanked her and left the homestead. Whilst the unit had left her homestead, she was still worried because she did not know what she should say if the Koevoet troops came back and ask her how she had used the poison. Ihemba decided to make up a story and asked her two grandchildren to fake being sick. When, the Koevoet forces arrived at the homestead, Mbatenga and Ramu were found lying in bed, seriously sick.⁴⁵ Upon the arrival of the Koevoet forces she told them, that she had left the container of poison on the table. She complained that her children had drunk it, thinking that it was their medication from the clinic. Ihemba said that she cried out loud and shouted that she was taking her children to the hospital.

She told the South African soldiers that she was leaving to go to Ncuse to get help to transport her children to the clinic. Ihemba told them that she was not sure whether they would survive. The platoon commander then told her not to worry and gave her a bottle of medicine. He told her to give the medicine to the children, so they would vomit and get better, but she refused as she did not trust the man. By that time the

45 Interview by Aaron Nambadi with Sirka Ihemba, Vhungu-Vhungu, Sambyu district, 13 May 2003

two children were rolling on the ground pretending to be sick having consumed the poisonous substance. When Ihemba reached Ncuse she met another old man who told her that he too had been given the same poisonous substance, which he had buried in the soil.⁴⁶

Ihemba indicated that the success of PLAN fighters in the Kavango during the armed struggle was mainly made possible by the determination and bravery of women who rendered enormous support in terms of provision of shelter, food, information and medicines.⁴⁷ The humanitarian assistance provided by the civilians gave the PLAN fighters the opportunity to execute their guerrilla operations effectively. The mutual respect and cooperation which developed between the PLAN fighters and the civilians, was good and this enabled the fighters to get support in Kavango. Ihemba, who was born in Angola and relocated to Namibia in 1966, devoted her life to assisting the PLAN fighters who operated in her village by rendering support during the armed liberation struggle. She claims that prominent PLAN fighters, such as Hamutumwa, who operated in her village acknowledged her support and even referred to her as the 'Mother of SWAPO'.⁴⁸

The Role of Women in Supporting the Operations of Commander Kalomoh

Waging a guerilla war in the Kavango was complex. The area was vast and arid and the people needed a lot of mobilization as many villages were isolated. The role of Commander Kalomoh, the first PLAN commander designated to the Kavango to open a new war front during the late

46 Ibid

47 Ibid

48 Ibid

seventies and eighties was critical due to the challenges he had to overcome in the region. The success of operations would depend on winning the trust and confidence of local residents.

Ndeulitufa Kalomoh (who was known by the combat name, *Hakushinda*) explained that the armed struggle in Kavango started when the late Peter Nanyemba changed the military strategy of PLAN⁴⁹. Up until that time all PLAN's fighters were still based in southern Angola and Owamboland. The establishment of another war front in the Kavango, was aimed to create a new zone through which the PLAN fighters could infiltrate and operate. The aim was to try and reach the interior of Namibia through areas such as Mangetti, Otavi and Otjiwarongo with the hope that units might even reach as far as Windhoek.⁵⁰

The new front was also meant to enable the PLAN fighters to operate easily in the interior of the Kavango. Operations from bases in southern Angola was perceived to be difficult. It was not easy for fighters to travel with all their war materials from Angola into Namibia and retreat to Angola. It was against this background that Peter Nanyemba ordered Kalomoh to open up a new war front in Kavango.⁵¹ The PLAN commander explained that soldiers, sometimes used to walk from Luanda in Angola to Owambo. He said that this route was difficult as the journey was long and the packs were heavy as soldiers had to carry all their food and equipment. The journey was also dangerous because the fighters sometimes did not have enough information about the route and this could expose the fighters to the threat of attack by the enemy or animal predators.

As it was not possible for combat units to carry all the food that they

49 Nanyemba was the Secretary of Defence of the People Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN) and he was instrumental in developing a new war front in the Kavango area

50 Interview by Aaron Nambadi with Kalomoh Ndeulitufa, the former PLAN commander designated to operate in Kavango, Rundu, Tutungeni, 13 May 2005.

51 Ibid

would require during an operation, assistance from local population was crucial for their survival. Soldiers needed food, but also information about the strength and location of the enemy. In some cases when PLAN fighters were wounded or sick, there would be a need for access to medication, medical assistance and temporary shelter. In extreme cases, fighters were hidden for weeks. For example, the case of a fighter who was wounded at Mpungu and hidden.⁵²

When the first new group of PLAN fighters came to the Kavango in 1978 it was a reconnaissance mission. The unit came to scout out where people were settled and assess their attitude towards SWAPO. The power of South Africa's propaganda machine meant that the people of Kavango were, initially, afraid of the fighters. Kalomoh recalls:

... some people even deserted their homesteads, claiming that the unknown soldiers came to kill them and to confiscate their goods. This fear by the locals made the work of the first fighters difficult⁵³

Commander Kalomoh indicated that, being a fighter in a guerrilla war one had to be prepared to talk with communities and face many problems and challenges in executing ones military activities. One major problem highlighted by Commander Kalomoh was ensuring the safety of his fighters who visited the villagers' homestead during the night:

.....the major problem was that we could never for certain know who was observing our movements during day or night.⁵⁴

He further stated that:

52 Ibid

53 Ibid

54 Ibid

*Sometimes the enemy could get a tip off of our presence in the area and as such could stage an ambush, in the various homesteads you are intending to visit for humanitarian help. This was very dangerous because many innocent lives of the civilians and the fighters were at stake. These were some of the problems the fighters were exposed to operating in the Kavango*⁵⁵

This clearly indicates that operating in Kavango required a lot of local knowledge and diplomacy to enable the PLAN fighters to operate effectively. The women, who were mostly in the homesteads, needed to feel comfortable with the fighters before they would offer humanitarian and logistical support. It was frightening to have armed men entering a homestead, especially when it was often unclear which side they represented.

Kalomoh was ordered to open the new front from 1978 and to then operate permanently in the Kavango. One of his main duties was, therefore, to explain to the people of Kavango, the main aims and objectives of SWAPO and its military wing, PLAN. The plan was to inform and educate the people about the benefits of assisting the fighters which would lead to independence. Kalomoh encouraged and motivated the people to collaborate, cooperate and work together with PLAN fighters to fight the colonial military regime. This, he argued, was the only way to enable the local people to understand the role of the PLAN fighters in liberating the land and its people and to overcome the fear of the guerillas that was planted by South African propaganda.⁵⁶

The pervasiveness of South African propaganda led Kalomoh to make contact with certain influential individuals who he groomed using his

55 Ibid

56 Ibid

liberation struggle ideology. Kalomoh, for example, convened a brief meeting with the *Hompa's* Senior Headman Alex Muranda Hamunyera, and *Hompa* Sientu Mpasi of Ukwangali at Gava. He asked the two senior leaders to tell the inhabitants of Ukwangali that they must not live in fear and should return to their villages and told them that PLAN fighters did not come to kill them. The outcome of the meeting, which was fruitful, enabled the *Hompa* to convince his people to go back to their respective villages. As from that time one might argue that Ukwangali became a liberated area and people started to co-operate with SWAPO.

Hompa Sientu Mpasi of Ukwangali really encouraged the people under his traditional authority to support PLAN fighters with food, water and information, instead of reporting them to the South African security forces. The meeting, therefore, played an important role in gaining the support and understanding of the villages in this part of Namibia and reassuring women that the guerillas could be trusted and would treat them with respect:

A lady called NyaKanuni provided the PLAN fighters with food and from there he was taken to one man called Sinoka who lived on the Western part of Mpungu. Medical assistance was given by nurses who worked at Mpungu hospital, especially by sister Rosalia Nghidinwa, the current [now former] Minister of Home Affairs and Immigration.⁵⁷

It should be understood that during this period if one was caught rendering this service it was a serious crime. Rosalia Nghidinwa used to take medicine secretly from Mpungu hospital and give it to PLAN fighters so that they could use it to treat all their fellow PLAN fighters who had been injured in combat. This means that the assistance Kalomoh and his

⁵⁷ Ibid. Note: The position was correct at the time that the interview was corrected, but Hon. Ngidinwa has since retired.

men got from the Kavango people included medicine, information and accommodation.

There was one incident where a soldier got sick with an illness called *Nkombyalya* (a skin rash which looks a bit like chicken pox).⁵⁸ The PLAN fighters walked from Gciriku with this injured fighter up to the village at Hamweyi. Mr. Olavi Makuti then provided them with a horse to help them transport the injured man from Hamweyi another 30 miles to another village. The man was taken to the homestead of Mr. Haizani Hamutenya, the late councillor of Kapako constituency. Haizani organised a hiding place for this PLAN fighter while medical supplies and a nurse were organised to treat him.⁵⁹

Conclusion

Whilst many people provided assistance to SWAPO's guerilla forces, there were also local people who were employed by the South Africa regime as informants. Villagers would provide information about the movements and plans of PLAN combatants. Whilst payment was a factor, families were also often divided. Families might have some members who had left the country to join PLAN, whilst others were recruited into the 202 Battalion of the SWATF. Brothers might find themselves on opposite sides in a contact.

Women, as mothers, wives and daughters had (like men) to negotiate the complex family politics of the struggle where political views and personal relationships might not always coincide. The nature of the warfare also meant that military targets and civilians were not always distinct. For example, when a camp of 'special constables' was attacked with rifle

58 Nkombyalya is a typical local illness who looks like a typical skin disease on a human body by that time the said soldier was in Gciriku area in the western part of Kavango

59 Interview by Aaron Nambadi with Kalomoh Ndeulitufa, the former PLAN commander designated to operate in Kavango, Rundu, Tutungeni, 13 May 2005.

grenades and automatic weapons at Katwitwi in Western Kavango in March, 1983 it was three women and three children (who were family members of the special constables) who were killed.⁶⁰ The point is that the war in the region involved women on both sides and that no account of the conflict would be complete without including women's perspectives. The absence of the voices of women from the Kavango region is a loud silence! I hope that this brief chapter will provoke more women from the region to record their own memories of the conflict.

60 'The Latest massacre in the Frontier Zones', Windhoek Observer, 5th March, 1983; 'Camp of Special Constables Attacked', Windhoek Observer, 25th June, 1983

6. The Role of the Church during the Liberation Struggle in the Kavango

– Aaron Nambadi

Introduction

German activities in the Kavango were limited in the early colonial period by the fact that they only managed to establish one police post at Nkurenkuru in the early 1900s. Colonial administrative structures were minimal and this contrasted with the more substantial police and military presence in other parts of Namibia. One might speculate that this was due to the lack of interest of the German administration, a way of avoiding tension with the Portuguese colonial administration (who were on the northern side of the Kavango River), bad weather, the lack of easy travel routes to the region or the fact that the region had a low population and seemed to offer little economic potential.

Whatever the explanation, the German colonial administration did not continuously interfere with the Kavango traditional authorities which allowed the old 'traditional authorities' to continue to control their territories during the German colonial period. However, it also meant that it was Christian missionaries who, often, provided the first contact between local residents and Europeans. The church would provide, initially, a new influence which was seen to challenge the spiritual and political authority of local leaders. Yet once the number of Christian converts increased, the church provided a network of regional and international communication.

The church might be used to challenge the morality of the violence that was associated with the struggle. Alternatively, as increasing numbers of church leaders were drawn from local communities, the church might also use its voice to criticize South Africa's militarization of Namibia and to advocate for human rights and justice.

The Christianisation of the Kavango

Andreas Eckl has provided a useful description of the environmental factors that helped to isolate the north-east of Namibia from the rest of the country:

*Kavango region was quite a remote area. A journey to Kavango was difficult and dangerous (at that time). A particular problem was the crossing of the Durststreke (literary, the stretch of thirst), a section about 160 kilometres of mostly deep sand with no permanent water-holes. During the rainy season the sodden terrain became impassable and the depredations of the malaria carrying anopheles mosquitos were an additional risk. The dry season confronted the travellers with an even greater problem, the absence of water. Second, there were relatively few natives living along the Kavango banks.*⁶¹

The isolation of the region from early colonial settlements was one factor that led Christianity to be introduced relatively late to the Kavango. The arrival of Christian missionaries in the Kavango area was also treated with initial skepticism by local people. The missionaries sought to introduce a

⁶¹ A.Eckl, 'Confrontation and co-operation in the Kavango region from 1891 and 1921' (PhD Thesis, Institut for Afrikanistik, KOLN) p.15

new religion to the people and, initially, the local people were unconvinced and continued to follow their own religion. In the Gciriku area for example, there is a belief that *Hompa* Nyangana was feared because he had instructed his warriors to kill the first white people, including the missionaries, who arrived in his territory. Nine, unsuccessful, expeditions were undertaken by Catholic missionaries in the period 1899-1910. Five missionaries died, but they failed to establish a single station and Nils Ole Oermann argues that the missionaries concluded that *Hompa* Nyangana of the Gciriku and *Fumu* Diyeve of the Mbukushu were "... more interested in guns and ammunition than in their theological services" (Oermann, 1999:135-136)

The first Roman Catholic Mission Station was only established at 'Nyangana' in 1910 and the next, at Andara in 1913.⁶² The Nkurenkuru Station of the Finnish Mission at Ukwangali was not established until 1929. The local builders involved in the construction of the first church at Nkurenkuru included Veja Hamwere⁶³. Early Christian converts included Mathews Shininge and 'Kapita'. Shininge was a teacher and health worker who helped with the church in the morning and taught in the afternoons. In 1931 and 1932 respectively, the Rupara and Mupini Mission Stations of the Finnish Mission were established. The construction of churches was also linked to the development of a network of mission clinics, schools and hospitals as the church played a significant role in the establishment of new systems for providing health and education services (Buysa & Nambala, 2003: 94-97)

Many writers have argued that the establishment of the church in the

62 Beris, A. 1996., From mission to local church: one hundred years of mission by the Catholic Church in Namibia

63 Veja Hamwere was the grandfather of Isaac Veja Hamwere who was a builder or a contractor, who arrived with his brother and started constructing a church building at Nkurenkuru, and they used a building close to the church at their house.

Kavango was finally successful because of the conversion to Christianity of contract workers from the region whilst they were in southern Namibia on contract. For example, a group of returning contract workers are believed to have established the first Christian mission in Nkurenkuru (Buys & Nambala; 2003: 197). Finnish Missionaries first entered Kavango from Ovamboland by travelling through the Mpungu area. Some of the early converts who became famous for spreading the word of God in the early days in the western part of Kavango, especially in the Ukwangali area were Kasita and Nehemia Hendrik from the Nkurenkuru area who both studied theology in Ovamboland and then returned to Kavango.⁶⁴ The church was growing and after receiving an invitation, the Ukwangali chief also sent some boys from his palace to attend school as the missionaries argued that all boys should attend school.

Introduction of a New Education System

The objectives of the church at that time was ambivalent as some oral sources argue that the agenda of the church was not just conversion, but also to facilitate colonialism. The missionaries certainly came with 'cultural baggage' and a lot of western values that were, sometimes, difficult to untangle from Christian values. However, Nghilundilwa argued that the missionaries mainly sought to provide spiritual knowledge and to preach:

*ya ngereka ngazi kondjo nokuvafatwilira asi uzuni ngapi
wakara, ngapi wa fira kukara, menho ngapi za fana-ntani
hena asi ngapi ava paruka vantu ngo vana vakarunga
ngano kuhamena kwayooyo ngoso...*

[Yes the church tried to inform the people on religion and how the world works. How it is meant to be, and how the future should be. It also taught us about living as God's people and how it should be]⁶⁵

Some elders were uneasy with the new forms of social mobilisation and the curriculum content of the education offered by the church. Elders gathered and investigated and debated the impact of the new religion, as Haupindi indicates:

Eyi kwareteresepe dogoro tava kaponga nova kurona vakwawo ngwendi Sikwaya, Muporwa, Mundjandjaro, Muhola, Kayambu, omuvaliyongere asi ngapi omu vana hara vana vawo navavarongo

This investigation resulted with my father having an audience with his fellow elders, men like Sikwaya, Muporwa, Mundjandjaro, Muhoba, Kayambu in which they were asked in which way they wanted their children to be taught.⁶⁶

After some explanation from the church and, particularly, observing the benefits of literacy, the community responded positively and children were encouraged to attend school and to learn how to read and write. After this a school was established at Siurungu in the Ukwangali area, and later others at places such as Kahenge, Sambyu, Bunya and Mayara. The learners that completed their studies at these mission schools in Kahenge, Sambyu and Bunya went for further education outside the region. Some of the prominent people who completed their mission education were Mathias Sikondomboro, Josef Kapouse and Elia Neromba (who became a pastor). Early learners who sought to extend their education to higher

65 Ibid.

66 Interview by author with Lourenz Haupindi, Safari, Rundu, 4 April 2007

grades often had to travel to other parts of the country, such as Döbra. *Hompa waVagciriku* Sebastian Kamwanga, for example, completed his studies at Nyanganya Catholic School in 1943 and his Teacher's Training at Döbra in 1951 (Pütz, von Egidy & Caplan, 1990: 164).

Attendance at schools outside Kavango was an eye opener for a lot of the learners from Kavango as they met young people from other parts of the country at places such as Döbra, Oshigambo and Otjimbingwe. However, it should be noted that the opportunity provided by the gathering of young people at the educational institutes was not always progressive. For example, in 1966 a group of male students studying at the Döbra to become teachers formed the 'Okavango National Organisation' (ONO). The ONO circulated a letter to every mission station in Kavango objecting to the education of girls. However, the letter also complained about the low wages of black workers and racism and showed awareness of contemporary politics in Africa. The letter warned that unless action was taken there was a danger that missionaries might be killed, as had recently happened in the 'Belgium Congo' (now 'Democratic Republic of the Congo') (Beris, 1996: 640).

Church Involvement in the Kavango Legislative Assembly

On 14th August, 1970, the Kavango Legislative Council Proclamation was announced as part of the larger plan of the Odendaal Commission to establish political structures for the ethnic 'Homelands' that had been created. Two senior church leaders were appointed to lead the Legislative Council. Father Romanus Kampungu was appointed the Chairman with Father Bonifatius Haushiku as the Vice-Chairperson (Beris, 1996: 641).

When the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the Austrian, Kurt Waldheim, made a short 'fact-finding' meeting to Namibia in March, 1972. Waldheim met a five man delegation of the Kavango Legislative Council in Grootfontein on 8th March, 1972. The delegation included Father Kampungu and Father Haushiku as well as the Reverend Elia Neromba (who was responsible for Education).⁶⁷ It was reported that Father Kampungu argued that *"if the United Nations would enforce a central government on the tribes, this would mean political suicide."* On 4th May, 1973 Proclamation R115 declared that the Kavango was a self-governing territory. Proclamation R127 of 30th May, 1973 further indicated that an election would take place on 29th-30th August, 1973.

The role of the educated and church elite in the Council is very important in understanding the question of power and the functioning of the Kavango Legislative Council especially in the second Kavango Legislative Council. What is notable is the election of the following people in the chamber: Dr Romanus Kampungu (chairman 1970-1975), Rev Bonifatius Haushiku (Vice-Chairman 1972-73) and Rev Nathanael Sirongo (1973-) to the position of Chairman and Vice-Chairman. People in the Council had hope and faith in the people that were educated and were church leaders to lead them and therefore occupy prominent seats in the Kavango Legislative Council.⁶⁸

On 9th May, 1973 Kavango was declared a self-governing area under Proclamation No.R.115 of 1973 and an election was held on the 29th-30th of August 1973⁶⁹. The first Kavango Legislative Council was dissolved and

67 UN Archive. S-0902-0003 Peacekeeping – Africa (1963-1981). 'Secretary-General's Visit of 7th-9th March, 1972', Security Resolution 309 – Notes from Mr Chacko (Department of Political and Security Council Affairs), 24th April, 1972.

68 Bishop Hausiku initially refused the position, but then served as Vice-Chairman until 1973 when Lorenz Haupindi took over.

69 Elections for the fifteen members to the second Kavango Legislative Council were held in Mbukushu, Sambyu and Mbunza tribal areas. The electoral constituencies of Kwangali and

after elections in the five electoral areas, a second Kavango Legislative Council was proclaimed, which consisted of the following members: The five Chiefs, two members designated by each of the five tribal authorities and three members in respect of each electoral division, elected by the members of the Kavango nation entitled to vote.⁷⁰ The second Kavango Legislative Council was therefore composed of thirty members. The Kavango Legislative Council's executive authority rested in the Kavango Legislative Council's Cabinet, which was comprised of five councillors elected by the tribal representatives from their own ranks.⁷¹ The five then elected a Chief Councillor amongst themselves.

SWAPO and various churches such as the Ovambo-Kavango Evangelical Lutheran Church boycotted and condemned both the Bantustan elections in Ovamboland and Kavango.⁷²

The Church as a Link to the World

The church sent many local people to further their studies overseas. For example, Reverend Johannes Sindano was sent to Finland, Canada and South Africa to study.⁷³ In these countries local church leaders, like

Gciriku each nominated exactly five members, who were therefore automatically elected to the new Legislative Council. Hence no elections were necessary in those tribal areas.

70 The Tribal Authorities for each of the five Tribal Authorities were also Electoral divisions and these were used in the elections of the four members to the Legislative Council. In order to vote, persons were required to be 18 years or over, in possession of a registration card and were only entitled to vote in his or her electoral division.

71 The First Kavango Legislative Council were: Works (Councillor Alex Kudumo, Kwangali), Justice and Community (Councillor Anton Mushambe Kathumbi, Mbukushu), Authority Affairs and Finance (Chief Councillor Linus Shashipapo, Gciriku), Agriculture (Councillor Romanus Kamunoko, Shambyu) and Education and Culture (Councillor Elia Neromba, Mbunza) (Nambadi, 2007: 61)

72 Nambadi, A, *The Kavango Legislative Council 1970-1979: A Critical Analysis*, (Cape Town, South Africa, 2007.), pp. 75

73 Bishop Sindano for example, was sent in 1976, to go and study in South Africa in Mapumulo, see interview by author with Reverend Johannes Sindano

Sindano, met other people such as the revolutionary Steve Biko in South Africa and Maarti Arthisari in Finland. These meetings led to exposure to the international communities' perception of the activities of the colonial regime in Namibia, and human rights. Bishop Sindano stated:

KoCanada, ame kwa ka tulire membo limwe lyonkwa Luther, ame kwaka sikire mo Mapeu kongurova. Sondaha tatu zi kongereka. Mongereka omo tava kapuragera nge vanambudi. Makura tani zi nye nani mompepo siruwo. CCN to organise ko sigongi naMinisteli gweyi yoponze awo hena tava zigada Ministera John Clark go Foreign Affairs gwa Canada asi awize koNamibia, makura Suid Africa tamu nyokesa visa. Makura tava ninki nye asi ngano tu ze nye ose koCanada, morwa epangero lya Canada kapi lya divire nawa ukaro wo moNamibia. Sinene niyiligazara naina ntani nina kuyidumburura asi ezo lyetu koCanada kwaka tanterere vaCanada yihorokwa yomoNamibia eyi yatwaredere koyirongo yitano yitulisepo veta ntokorwa 435, yirongo kwakere: Britain, America, Canada, West German na France.

In Canada, I was accommodated in a house of a Lutheran family, I arrived in the evening on a Saturday. The next Sunday, I attended a church service, after which I was interviewed by reporters. The interview was broadcasted on television and Radio. The CCN even went so far as facilitating a meeting with the Foreign Minister of Canada and also sent out an invitation on our behalf to then Foreign Minister, Mr. John Clark to Namibia, but his visa application was declined by the then South Africa

government. Come to think of it today, one of the reasons why we were sent to Canada was to inform the Canadians on the actual situation in Namibia. Due to this, the five countries (Great Britain, American, Canada, West German and France) established resolution 435 [and the aim of the mission was to lobby Canada, as part of the 'Western Contact Group' to push for its implementation] ⁷⁴

All schools in the Kavango region were run by the church until 1955 (when the South African Ministry of Bantu Affairs took over). The mission schools produced a layer in society of trained teachers who also worked in their communities as health workers as they also received basic skills training in health and nutrition, as indicated by Nghilundilua:

*My father underwent training in Education and Basic Health, he then served the community twice a day, teaching during the morning, he would then assist with health related services in the afternoon. He would then work during the Sunday morning church service.*⁷⁵

One of the consequences of the Christianisation of society was, therefore, the creation of an educated elite that could provide new services to the community, such as teaching and assisting the sick. It might be argued that literacy and the ability to understand foreign languages that was developed from this education system also provided access to news about the gradual decolonization of Africa. People became aware of 'the wind of change' and the spirit of independence started rising as people became involved in politics. One might argue that the impact of the Church on Namibia's liberation struggle should, therefore, be understood in a far

74 Interview with Bishop Sindano

75 Interview by author with Jakko Nghilundilua.

broader sense than an analysis that simply focuses on the statements and actions of individual church leaders.

Apart from attending church and studying, local students and church activists such as Rev Asser Lihongo, Bishop Johannes Sindano, Amos Kanime and Rebeus Siyamba sacrificed a lot to provide assistance to SWAPO and its combatants. In 1986 a group led by Rev Ephraim Angula that included Bishop Johannes Sindano and other prominent Namibian businessmen travelled to Finland and met the Finnish President, H.E. Martti Ahtisaari who had been the United Nations Commissioner for Namibia (1977-1981) and who would be sent to Namibia in April, 1989 to lead UNTAG, the force that would facilitate the 1989 election that would lead to Namibian independence.⁷⁶

Bishop Sindano remembers that during the meeting with Ahtisaari, a journalist from the Finnish missionary newspaper, *Kotima*, asked him for his views, as a businessman, about the campaign to impose economic sanctions on South Africa as part of the campaign for Namibian independence. Rev Sindano explained that he used a metaphor to explain his support for sanctions:

*When a patient visits a medical doctor a doctor sometimes finds out that a patient needs an operation to remove an illness in him or her. If the patient refuses, the illness will grow and will kill the patient, but if he/she agrees to the operation, the illness will be removed and they will recover.*⁷⁷

76 Personnal communication, Bishop Johannes Sindano, 19th January, 2016. Other members of the delegation included the late Eliakim Namudjebo, late Jakop Nangolo, Tatekulu Frans Indongo and Tatekulu Prince Eliakim Shiimi.

77 Personnal communication, Bishop Johannes Sindano, 19th January, 2016.

As a result of his comments, Bishop Sindano found his photograph on the front page of the newspaper with the statement that he had argued that sanctions would only cause 'temporary pain' for Namibian business people.

Asser Lihongo and Johannes Sindano also travelled abroad to other countries such as Botswana, Canada, Zambia and the United States of America. Whilst there they informed people what was happening in Namibia and also brought back news from SWAPO. The local people also provided various assistance to the SWAPO fighter as Commander Kalomoh explains:

*Amos Kanime and Rebeus Siyamba were among those who assisted us, for example they made sure to acquire SWA citizenship for some of our PLAN fighters who used to operate in the Kavango area, with these documents our fellow combatants could then operate freely inside. It was not an easy task as it required bravery and loyalty to SWAPO.*⁷⁸

These people also acted as a means of communication between SWAPO, the local people and the outside world, as Comander Kalomho continued:

Rev. Asser Lihongo was fortunate to travel as far as Europe, Botswana, Zambia, Tanzania and New York, during his visits to these countries, he met and inform the SWAPO President, Dr. Sam Nujoma about the political developments in Namibia. Face to Face meetings, was one of the means of communication and information sharing. It was also important that upon his return to Namibia, Rev.

⁷⁸ Interview by author Commander Mr Kalomoh Ndeulitufa, a former PLAN Commander designated to operate in the Kavango, Tutungeni, 13 May 2005

Lihongo would arrange meetings with me and preferable at Mpuku (in the inland) at late Hamutenya's homestead where he would brief me on his visit.

The fact that the church sent various people to study theology and other related studies in foreign countries also led to greater international awareness of the situation inside Namibia and SWAPO's campaign for independence, as Bishop Sindano indicates:

Mongereka yipo nye natanterere vantu ava vakere mongereka yokuhamena Namibia, Makura mo Mandaha apa twa kuza komberewo zava vatuzigidire wo "Church Foundation" makura tava ka tokora asi ame tava tumunge kadoropa Ottawa. Makura konyima tava tugaununa tuli hanene nye mosirongo saCanada mokuzuvisa kovaCanada ukaro owu wakere moNamibia. Kwatu tanterere asi konyima zokwedi kumwe ngatu kagwanekere hena ko mberewo zaMinistera gweyi yoponze, John Clark, moOttawa. Ame makura tani ninki nokopi do kambo aka na simbire. Tani vape va li resere vene, vantu womoCanada.

In the church I informed my interviewers on the Namibian situation. The following day, Monday, we went to those who invited us at the Church Foundation. A decision was taken to send me to Ottawa. Later we were divided into groups and sent to tour the whole country to inform the Canadians on the Namibian situation. We toured the country for a month and later we met the Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr. John Clark in Ottawa. Apart from the tour, I made copies of the booklet that I had carried with me [a publication called 'Namibia Peace

Plan 435]. *I was given it at the CNN office and distributed these copies to various and interested people in Canada to read.*⁷⁹

Whilst in Canada Rev Sinano recalls that he had the opportunity to deliver a sermon in which he encouraged the Anglican congregation in Ottawa to pray for Namibian independence. Bishop Sindano spoke of a passage from the Bible (Exodus 17:12-13) which states:

*When Moses' hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up—one on one side, one on the other—so that his hands remained steady till sunset. 13 So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword.*⁸⁰

The sermon presented the argument of 'liberation theology' that, sometimes, Christians could justify supporting an armed struggle in the pursuit of justice. The people that were sent by (or through) the church to study outside the country, mobilized support for an independent Namibia from the international community. The church became a means to convey news or as a means of communication between people and countries.

Church Leaders as Political Mobilisers

The churches in Kavango also assisted young people to go into exile and

⁷⁹ Interview with Bishp Sindano. The other members of the delegation were the late Comrade Daniel Tjongarero, the late Comrade Hennenock 'Skinny' Hilundwa and the Hon. Wilhelm Konjore.

⁸⁰ Personnal Communication, Bishop Johannes Sindano, 16th January, 2016. Bible quote from New International Version. www.Biblestudytools.com/exodus 17. Accessed on 16th January, 2016.

to further their studies. Bishop Sindano stated that once the church in Kavango realised that the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa was supporting the National Party, which was a white only party, it started to take a more oppositional position. It was felt that ELCIN should support the SWAPO party which was a black dominated party and which was assisting the local community:

Kombinga zetu nye zongereka, ose ngatu pitisa vantu va ze, morwa tuna diva asi eli epangero lyoNational Party kwa li kwatesere ko wo Dutch Reform Church. Makura tuna mono asi uwa una kara mo National Party wovazera velike. Makura yipo nye asi SWAPO nazo party ngwendi moomu zakere National Party, nye uwa una kara nye mwaSWAPO wovasovagani kapisi woyirumbu morwa ose woNgereka zetu unene ELCIN kwa kwateresere ko unene SWAPO. Awo hena vaSWAPO navenye owo va zire ponze zoSirongo sinzi sawo kwakere sinzi va ELCIN. Na morwa ose ngatu kara nosinka unene nampili moomu va zire ponze ngoso kwa zire novasita vamwe vaELCIN, ngwendi Musita Sihuya ogu nga ruganene moKavango mono 1990s. Vamwe vasita kwa vatumine vaka lirongere koyirongo ngwendi Tanzania yipo vava vhure ku kwafa SWAPO.

From our part as church leaders, we were instrumental in convincing the young people to go into exile, because we realised that our colleagues from the Dutch Reform Church were supporting the National Party. We realised that the National Party was there only for the interest of the white people. We convinced our people to believe that SWAPO was a liberation movement, which was fighting

*for the interest of all Namibians, particulars to liberate blacks from oppression. That is why our church, ELCIN, supported SWAPO in the struggle for independence. Many people who went into exile, we pastors amongst them. We sent some pastors to study in Tanzania in of support the SWAPO Liberation movement. Even though there was propaganda spread about SWAPO and that it was is a Communist Party, we sent pastors to support this movement such as Pastor Shihuya, a well-known pastor that worked here in Kavango in the 1990's. Some of the Pastors were sent to study in countries such as Tanzania, so that they could assist SWAPO.*⁸¹

It became difficult for the South African colonial administration to isolate or separate the church from the people, and the Liberation Movement, SWAPO. Church leaders were also able to access international Christian-based solidarity movements. For example, the Anglican Church in the United States launched an organization in 1956 that became known as the Episcopal Church people for a Free Southern Africa (ECSA). When a church organization, such as the ECSA, drew attention to human rights abuses, it was more difficult for hostile world leaders to dismiss the claims as 'SWAPO Propaganda'. For example, in June, 1983, ECSA published and circulated a story about the 'roasting' of a 63 year-old Kavango resident, Mr Ndara Kapitango by members of SWATF.⁸²

Facilitating Meetings and Legal Aid

The church facilitated or hosted meetings for the SWAPO cadres, on behalf

81 Interview with Bishop Sindano.

82 "Ordeal By Fire," Episcopal Church people for a Free Southern Africa, August 8, 1986

of SWAPO and its supporters inside Namibia. During these meetings, many issues were discussed and one of the prominent issues was how the church and its members could assist SWAPO and its PLAN fighters. SWAPO requested the church to encourage its members to provide food and support.

*This happened when we came out of prison, the congregation organised themselves to go to church pretending to go for singing, but instead they went there to get information from us, this led to singing of liberation songs and discussions.*⁸³

However these meetings were not always hidden from the police, they had informers at the meetings, as Bishop Sindano elaborates:

*When we convened meetings, it seemed that there were informants amongst the attendants, because when one was later arrested by the police, the police clearly knew what was discussed at a specific meeting and could tell you what happened at that meeting.*⁸⁴

The church was also a site of theological debate about the approach that Christians should take on issues such as challenging the authority of the state, taking a stand on human rights and the question of whether there can ever be a morally legitimate use of violence. Rev. Sindano and Jako Kangayi of ELCIN, are remembered as two of the young church activists who promoted the struggle. Mattia Fumanti quotes a description provided by an anonymous informant.

83 Interview by Alina Mutero and Bishop Nathanael Sirongo, Mpungu, Kavango West,
84 Interview with Bishop Sindano

At the time I was a church youth leader and we used the Bible and the church sermons to carry certain political messages. Personally I used the Bible a lot. That is how we made use of the church to strengthen our struggle. The Bible was the only book, there were not many books to read. The Bible was the famous one. Everybody knew the Bible, you could not quote any other book. We made use of the book that was available to us. People believed in Christianity, they believed in Christian authority, so they could not resist our message. We would use examples of Moses in Egypt, or Saint Paul's captivity in Pathmos to make people reflect and think (Fumanti, 2007: 476)

The church also approached different lawyers to assist and defend the various people especially the ones that were unlawfully imprisoned. Church leaders appointed lawyers who negotiated for the release of detainees, Sindano elaborates:

Makura pontambo zomahepeko apa gana nyanyene unene koutokero waKavango ose ngatu ka hundire vantu vatu kwase noyimaliwa yongaro yipo tuvatere owo ngava hepeke ngwendi owo vazire monodorongo. Ano ngereka ngazi papara nye noLawyer, moomu tupu vaLorentz and Bone, Hartmut Ruppel kwa mu zigidire rorunzi to mudiworoka ngwendi koMpungu vantu vamwe kwava tulire komundiro gwa kasipembe vava hiwike. Ya...makura ngava papara nye nolawyer odo yipo vavhure kukwafa vantu, morwa twa divire asi kupi oku nату kugwana ezwi

*lyokuvhura kuuyunga. Yiyo ya tu twaresera unene nose
ngo ngereka omu moKavango nonongereka dimwe hena
omu mo Namibia ditulise po egwanekero lyonongereka
morwa kupapara asi nampili ose twa hetekere ko tu kare
nezwi, kapi talivhuru ku gwanena*

*. . . When the suffering of the people intensified, especially
at the western part of Kavango, during the church
offerings, the church leaders requested people to offer
money to assist those affected, especially those that were
arrested. The church leaders were trying their level best
to find lawyers to defend its members . Law firms such
as Lorentz and Bone were requested. Hartmut Ruppel was
requested on various occasions to travel to Kavango and
represent people. You remember the incident at Mpungu
where were people burned. Yes...we looked for lawyers to
assist the people. The lawyers were the only people who
could protect our people because there were no other
alternative. That is why church leaders in Namibia decided
to establish one body so that we could have a strong voice,
a united voice was better than one voice.⁸⁵*

When the need arose, the church appointed lawyers, to represent the suspects in the courts or those that were in trouble with the law. Bishop Sindano relates to a specific instance, where he lost a lot of cattle, due to relocation from Mbambi village (in the eastern part of Kavango) to Kasote (west of Rundu):

*I was detained in October 1983 b the police of the
apartheid regime under Article AG9 and sent to Osire with*

many others. We did not know each other because we were blinded.

During my detention some of the Koevoet told my wife and relatives many bad stories, because they wanted money from them. When my Dean (that time, Dean Asser K. Lihongo) told our bishop (at that time Bishop Dumeni) he contacted the leaders of the apartheid regime in Windhoek. He asked them how long they will keep me in detention ?

On that request from our bishop they sent one police man to take me from Osire and [he] brought me to Rundu. At that same day, when I arrive home in Rundu, I was told that Akim Moes, my shop keeper at Mbambi shop in Gcirkiku, some kilometres east of Nyangana mission station was fatally stabbed by the Koevoet members of the apartheid regime and was in a critical condition in Nyangana Hospital. The following day I sent people with trucks and the traditional leader at that time, Hompa Linus Shashipapo, sent his traditional police to assist my people.

Trucks transported Akim's family and goods to Kasote and some people took the remnants of my cattle to Nyangana to another shop there. From there the cattle were transported to Kasote, [but], in that process I lost many cattle. For fear of the political situation I left that shop building and sold it later.

Bishop Dumeni sent Mr Hartmut Ruppel, a lawyer from Lourentz and Bone firm. The law firm represented our

church that time. Our churches wanted to know the condition and treatment of the detainees at Osire detention camp. I told the lawyer of the inhumane treatment at Osire.

Later I was told that the detainees at Osire, including the late Jakko Kangayi, were moved from Osire to Bethanie.⁸⁶

The work of the lawyers was instrumental in assisting the people to get justice and legal representation. People believe that the actions of the lawyers employed by the church led to improvements in the way Koevoet for instance, treated people. After Reverend Sindano spoke to Ruppel about his incarceration and the inhuman treatment at Osire, these conditions were widely publicized in the media and this led to improvement in the way detainees were treated at Osire. The other assistance was to provide medicine. Staff at clinics at Mpungu, Nkurenkuru, Rupara and Mupini, provided medical assistance to the PLAN fighters, such as , attending to the wounded ones and giving them medicine to other who could not make it to clinic or the nurses.

Working Towards Reconciliation

On 27th January, 1979 Bonifatius Haushiku,⁸⁷ who was born in the Shambyu Mission Station in the Kavango became the first black Roman Catholic Bishop in Namibia. He had withdrawn from his position on the Kavango Legislative Council. As the Bishop responsible for all the Catholics living in the war zone in northern Namibia he adopted the slogan 'Justice and Peace' and sought to raise awareness of cases of injustice. In 1983 one

86 Ibid.

87 Sometime spelled Bonifacius Haushiku

case that caused concern was the detention of Reverend Heikki Ausiku, Gideon Nestor and Severinus Siteketa. Rev. Ausiku was the Director of the Nkurenkuru Bible School and Vice-Dean of ELOK's Kavango circuit and was detained under Proclamation AG9 (Amnesty, 1983: 79).

In 1987 Bishop Haushiku and Bishop Kauluma submitted an application to the Supreme Court to have Proclamation AG9 of 1977 and Proclamation AG 50 of 1979 that had imposed a curfew on Kavango repealed. The court case failed, but obtained a great deal of international publicity exposing the dusk to dawn curfew that was leading to the loss of many civilians lives. At the same time, the churches were actively involved in distributing materials such as those produced by 'Namibia Peace Plan 435' and also actively campaigning through church publications such as Omukuni, Omukwetu and Immanuel.⁸⁸

Conclusion

The church in Kavango (like many other parts of the Country) was placed in a very difficult position during the war of the Liberation Struggle in Namibia. The fact that the Kavango area, was along the banks of the river, meant that the area was one of the routes for the exodus of people fleeing the country into exile as well as a springboard for South African incursions into southern Angola. Church leaders in the region could not avoid taking a position on the military and political struggle for the region.

This chapter indicates how clergymen and the church played various roles during the struggle. It also demonstrates how difficult it was for

⁸⁸ Markus Kampungu, Commissioner, Public Service Commission of Namibia, paper entitled "The role of the Church, workers Union, and NGOs in the Liberation Struggle, Presented at the Recording and Restoring our Part in the Past History Conference, Kavango Regional Council Auditorium, 23-24 August 2007 (AACRLS 185, 4).

the church to disassociate itself from the war and the people of Kavango. Church leaders were, initially, influenced by South African propaganda that SWAPO was a communist organization that would suppress Christianity if it took power with many opposed to the use of violence to obtain change. However, church leaders, embedded in the community, became increasingly critical, and played a significant role in challenging the violence of the South African security forces and, later, in trying to negotiate reconciliation between former enemies at the local level.

7. A Brief History of Forced Relocations from Sarusungu and Magarangandja in Rundu, 1971-1972

- Kletus Muhena Likuwa &
Mandhavela Khasera⁸⁹

Introduction

In 1936 an office was established at Rundu (previously written as 'Runtu') for a 'Native Affairs Commissioner' who was a colonial representative for the Kavango Settlement along the banks of the Kavango River in north-east Namibia. Before the establishment of the Commissioner's office, there were already settlements in the surrounding area of Rundu. From west to east were Ruhurumwe, Sikondo, Rundu, Nkunki, Ncwa, Sarusungu, Nkondo, Rupoworo, Mutwarantja etc. However, the establishment of an administrative centre, which would grow into a town, required new forms of colonial intervention and spatial organization, especially after South Africa exported its apartheid philosophy epitomized by the Group Areas Act to Namibia in the 1950s.

⁸⁹ Kletus Muhena Likuwa is a researcher at the Multidisciplinary Research Centre, University of Namibia. He holds a PhD in History from the University of the Western Cape. The late Mandhavela Khasera was a promising academic who graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Education with English and History as major school teaching subjects. He worked as a teacher and later as an Archivist at the National Archives of Namibia before his passing. Since Mandhavela initially collected data on the removals from Rundu during the colonial period with Kletus Likuwa in 2002 and compiled a small report in 2003, he is included, posthumously, as one of the authors of this chapter in memory of his passion to research and write on Rundu removal the story of the removals.

While there is extensive literature on forced removals in South Africa, in contrast, the historiography of forced removals in Namibia is limited, especially regarding urban areas. The literature that exists, has focused on the forced relocations in Windhoek (from 1959) in which Africans were removed from the centre of the city to a new black township called Katutura (Pendleton, 1974). This chapter aims to explain the experiences of residents of Rundu and developed from initial research carried out by myself and the late Khasera Mandhavela in 2003. I conducted further interviews and research over the next couple of years for my MA Thesis (2005) at the University of the Western Cape and this chapter summarizes the arguments of my thesis (Likuwa, 2005).

Since the histories of the forced relocation of the Nkondo community to Nkarapamwe Township has been written and published elsewhere⁹⁰ this chapter limits its focus to the history of the relocations from the Sarusungu and Mangarangandja areas of Rundu in the early 1970s. The first colonial forced relocation in Rundu (of the Nkondo community in the 1950s) was presented by colonial authorities as an act of benevolence aimed at preventing further suffering of the people from flooding, but the forced relocations of the 1960s and 1970s should be seen in the political context of the time. Mangarangandja and Sarusungu relocations contain some inextricable links. Both communities consisted of members of all the five tribes of Kavango and the Angolan group called Vanyemba and, therefore, had great similarities in customs and traditions. Secondly, both the relocations occurred after the establishment of the Kavango Legislative Council in 1970 and were both based on the goal of asserting the political authority of the apartheid colonial administration.

90 See, Likuwa KM, 'Colonial relocations in northern Namibia: from the river side village to Nkarapamwe Black Township in Rundu', *European Scientific Journal*, August 2014 /SPECIAL/ edition ISSN: 1857 – 7881 (Print) e- ISSN 1857- 7431. Also forthcoming: Likuwa KM, Flooding and its impacts on Nkondo community in Rundu, Kavango east region of Namibia, 1950s, *Journal of Disaster Risk Studies*, ISSN: 1996-1421 (print) | ISSN: 2072-845X (online).

The research is based mainly on interviews with fourteen people who were involved in the removals and archive documents. The most significant archival sources were the NAR 1/1/55 files of the 'Native Commissioner' in the National Archives of Namibia which dealt with 'Political Unrest' in the region in the 1960s and 1970s.

Life in Sarusungu and Mangarangandja

The name of the village Sarusungu is derived from a Rusambyu language sentence "Sidiva sarusungu" which is literary translated as "the stream of poison". "Rusungu" was a type of poison which was made by local women and thrown into the stream so that the next day they would find dead fish floating. The village in turn got its name from the stream and was called Sarusungu which is directly translated as 'of poison' (Kaundu, 2004). People of Sarusungu made a living from the stream and the river.

People of Sarusungu were a subsistence-farming community who owned mainly cattle. They hunted animals in the forest. They had assigned duties for men, women and children. Traditional dances of *shiwingi* and *shiperu* were performed on weekends at night when everybody could attend, but at which only men were allowed by tradition to consume alcohol. Children would be the first to take the floor and when it was getting very late, they would go back home and only elders would continue the dances. The system of "ndjambi" was practiced in the community. In this system, one sought the assistance of other people at work and invited them afterwards to a drinking feast as a way to thank them for services rendered. A Roman Catholic Church and school existed in Sarusungu village, which worked to educate children but at the same time Christianize the community (Kanunga, 2004.)

When the 'Native Affairs Commissioner', Harold Eedes, known as "Nakare" by the local people, moved from his previous settlement at Nkurenkuru in western Kavango to establish offices at Rundu in 1936, all his black policemen settled at Sarusungu village from which they would walk some few kilometers to Rundu for work. Sarusungu, which was sparsely populated by 1936, consisted mainly of the homesteads of these policemen.

Another riverside settlement which would also be forced to relocate by 1972 was Mangarangandja. This was a settlement that was situated in the area of Ncwa in Rundu. It was explained by an interviewee that 'Mangarangandja' means 'people of senseless loud noise' and that it is a derogatory reference to the Ngondjero (Nyemba) people who lived there and who had a different language and customs to the other local residents (Kaundu, 2004). However, another interviewee argued that the name Mangarangandja was derived from the small trees that grew in an area known in the Nyemba language as *Mungalangandja* (Kanunga, 2004.) Whichever interpretation is used, it is clear that the location was associated or predominantly settled by people from an Angolan ethnic group. As the location was near the compound that was used by all contract workers from both Kavango, former Ovamboland and Angola who were hoping to work in South Africa and it was also the case that, sometimes, workers would marry and settle in that location. Mangarangandja acquired a reputation as a rough location:

In the beginning Mangarangandja was peaceful. There were only activities and peace. But where it ended, it was very rough because there were many people and single women. So, when Magayisa (returning contract labourers) returned from the mines and dropped off in the

compound, they would go into Mangarandja and enjoy themselves. Most of the boys there were unemployed but needed money; those who were employed needed women, well now, stealing activities started. Life became a life that you would no longer call as a good life because by then, everybody who had 'a broken mind' and was rude came to Mangarandja (Shikerete, 2004).

The people sold what became known as “kaffir beer” at their homesteads for income generating purposes and women became objects of sexual molestations from white male soldiers who usually visited the drinking places (Kampungu, 18 February 1969).

Reasons for the Forced Relocations

In 1971, the people of Sarusungu were forced to relocate and by 1972 the settlement of Mangarandja had also been dismantled by the colonial authorities and the residents relocated further inland. The Commissioner, Van Niekerk, had stated earlier in 1970 that the relocation of people from the riverside was planned by the authorities to create room for agricultural schemes.⁹¹ Despite the benevolence assertion for agricultural development however, the relocations of the 1960s and 1970s were a pretext to clear the population off the riverside so as to control the penetration of SWAPO forces which threatened the relationship between the state and the people (NAC, 29 September 1972). By the early 1970s an Angolan liberation movement, UNITA, had established a military stronghold in southeast Angola, across the Kavango River, and there was fierce fighting with the Portuguese. The colonial authorities in

91 NAN. NAR 9, vol. 13. NAC, 'Behuising: Hantoeorp Nkarapamwe: Kavango Gebied, U geheime aansbrief nr. T. 60/2/1482/1 van 12de Oktober 1970.

Kavango were worried that with the intensification of war in Angola, many Angolans might cross into Namibia and that this might include SWAPO guerillas. The cross-border kinship created a natural network that might be deployed for communication, supply and the movement of guerillas (NAC, 20 May 1969). The fear of the authorities was clearly articulated by Commissioner Mare in 1969:

In case we provide settlement to the refugees, it is definitely sure that opponents and terrorists would infiltrate among them and in doing so gain a standing ground in Kavango and, individual inhabitants of Kavango can, out of the sense of being their parents, children, brothers and sisters, hide them in their homesteads just as it has already occurred in Gciriku and Mbukushu areas (NAC, 20 May 1969).

The solution for the colonial authorities was to remove all the homesteads and villages along the Kavango River, included Sarusungu village, and to establish a camp for Angolan refugees where new arrivals could be processed and monitored. The new Bantu Affairs Commissioner, D.E. Jacobus, gave the people of Sarusungu an argument that the river was unhealthy and infected with bacteria which could cause diseases. The people were told that when they relocated to the new area they would be provided with clean water free from all germs from boreholes and pumps. However, the Commissioner also informed the people that the war was coming and that the SWAPO fighters were coming to kill them and take away all their land and property. People should be resettled together in one place where it would be easy for the South African soldiers to protect them (NAC, 02 February 1967). The colonial authorities embarked on the relocation of these two areas only after the Kavango Legislative Council was established on 21 October 1970. This created an impression that the

removal was the work of the Kavango administration with the support of the Kavango Legislative Council rather than that of South Africa.

Reverend Bonifatius Haushiku, a member of the Kavango Legislative Assembly argued against the removals:

I have heard further that they are erecting a fence from east to west alongside the river, which means that the people will now move inland and this river subsequently become a wilderness and people born inland will know nothing about the river and of hunting along the riverside. Hence when I sit on my easy chair I want to be able to see the Kavango flowing. I don't want them to take me to a wild environment because then they won't call me a muKavango anymore. I will be something else (KLC, February to March 1972)

Rev. Haushiku complained further:

There is yet another reason they advance why people must move and, namely that the river water they drink is unhealthy. It is infected with various diseases. If it is that the river is full of germs, which cause people disease, why do they arrange that we move? Why can't they give us fresh water alongside the river?⁹²

Rev. Haushiku was a member of the Kavango Legislative Assembly which was meant to be the Government of the Kavango and his argument that 'they' were treating 'us' unfairly clearly indicates his awareness that real decision-making power lay elsewhere. Another member of the Assembly complained that the removals exposed the powerlessness of

92 NAN, KLC. 7/3/1/1 'Statement by Bonifatius Haushiku, Kavango Legislative Proceeding, 3, February to March, 1972.

the Assembly:

*The people heard that there are no more removals and later they saw it carried out. Therefore I say, what is decided here should have force. If it is of no force, the people will say to us that we are liars and when the world laughs at us, we shall have nothing to say in answer.*⁹³

It might be argued that, ironically, the imposed decision to remove the residents of the location in order to assert the power of the state and increase security actually undermined the political institution that had been introduced as an alternative to SWAPO's vision of a unitary state. Rev. Haushiku was blunt in his assessment of the damage that the forced removals had done to the reputation and credibility of the Legislative Assembly:

*Honourable chairman, this matter has truly been refused by the Legislative Council that it [forced removals] should not happen. With great confidence, people left the Legislative Council and went to tell their people thereof, that there were no more removals. The people were very pleased to hear that. In the course of the time they noticed fences being erected, after which people were compelled to move. The people were not willing but were compelled to move. The people were difficult and refused. They were then told that soldiers would be fetched to force them out. Hence this rumour went right through the Kavango and the people asked themselves whether they got self-government or have been hoaxed.*⁹⁴

93 NAN, KLC. 7/3/1/1 Kavango Legislative Proceeding, 3, February to March, 1972.

94 NAN, KLC. 7/3/1/1 `Statement by Bonifatius Haushiku, Kavango Legislative Proceeding, 3, February to March, 1972.

Responses to the Relocations

People opposed the relocation to the new areas for various reasons. They argued that if the river water was indeed infected with bacteria that brought sickness, the government could still provide clean water to them while they remained in their areas. They reasoned that the new camps were simply too small and that people would go thirsty in the new areas just as the people of Nkarapamwe Black Township were already experiencing thirst as was explained to the Commissioner in a letter (BDK, 17 June 1970) People also did not believe that the Kavango administration's plan to bring development to them in the planned resettlement areas was really for free. It seemed to them that they would be required to pay for that development later.

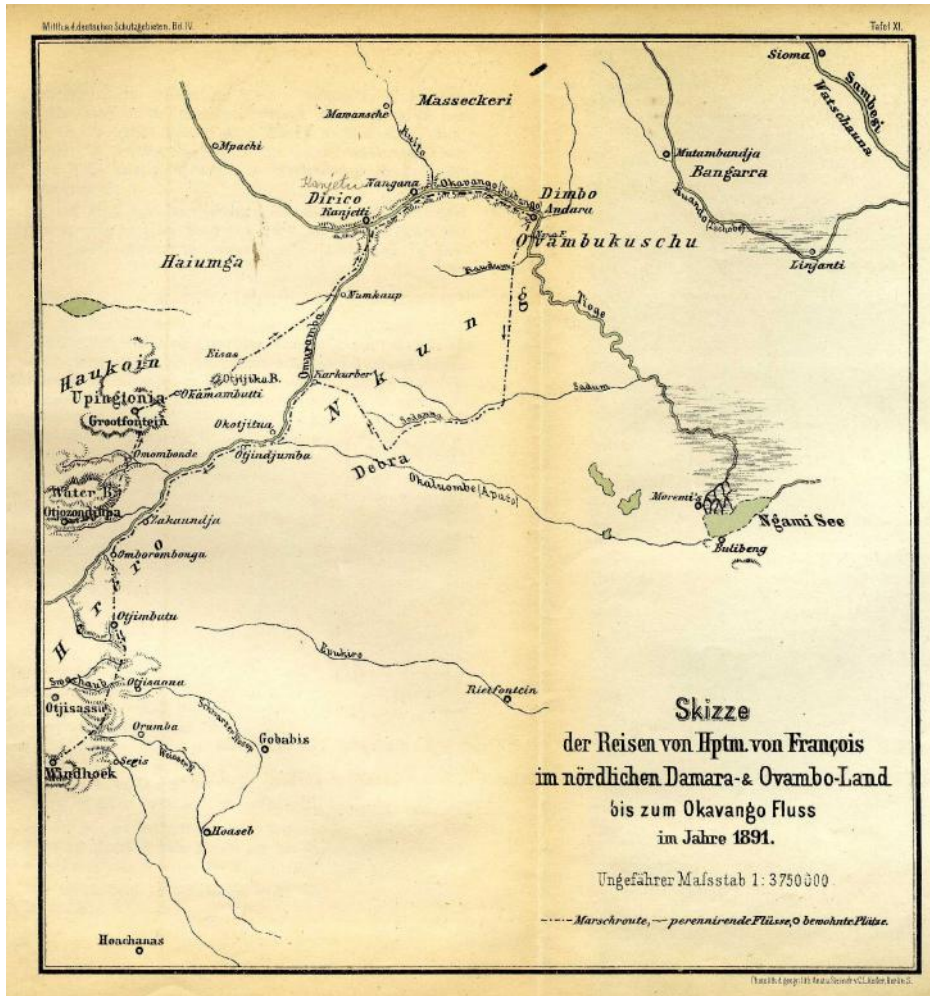
SWAPO supporters secretly campaigned against the relocation under the leadership of David (alias 'Davy/Liasanga/Lyangurungunda') Ausiku.⁹⁵ David Ausiku lived in Sauyemwa. Simson Haingura initially worked as his secretary. Later, the Rev. Johannes Sindano took over this role. In a secret anonymous letter which was discovered by the police, SWAPO encouraged people to oppose the relocations away from the riverside villages. The letter that circulated in Rundu stated:

Do you want to live in the camps that the Boers are making for you? Do you want to lose your properties such as cattle? They are making camps for your cattle too. How do we call it when they put you in a place that you do not want and he who gives it to you is not his? If you look at

95 Personal Communication, Rev. Johannes Sindano, 19th January 2016. David Ausiku was an S.W.A.P.O activist and leader in Kavango who organized people against the establishment of the Kavango Homeland. He went into exile in Angola in the late 1970s and worked with SWAPO's broadcasting service. In the 1980s he escaped into exile in Canada due to fears that he would be detained. He continues to live in Canada, but, unfortunately, was unwilling to be interviewed about his past activities in the region.

Introduction: Creating Kavango

This book compliments a photographic exhibition on display in Rundu. This section contains some of the visual images from the exhibition.

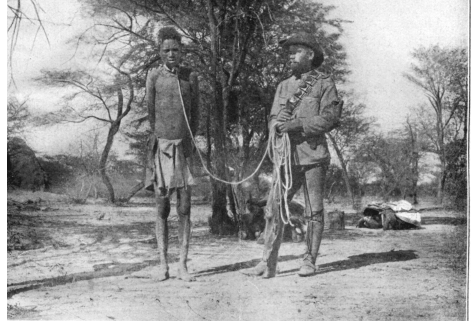


A German map showing the route taken by Major Curt von François, the first German official to travel to Kavango and meet local leaders (in 1891). The map illustrates the lack of detailed knowledge of the area in the early colonial period (NAN Map 05908)

Pre-colonial Resistance



Hompa Kandjimi Harwanga of Ukwangali meeting the German District Commander from Namutoni, Lt Zawada, in 1909. Zawada wrote that “Kandjimi is a spotlessly clean, intelligent man of around 30 years of age, who knows exactly what he wants. He is the absolute ruler and proprietor of the entire land”. The quote and the seating arrangements indicate that German colonial rule in Kavango was still limited.



A German expedition was sent to Kavango to rescue, Mr Paasch's 8 year old daughter, who had been captured during the June, 1903 battle. The German expedition captured two Vashambyu princes, Shipapo and Ndango (sons of Mbambangandu I). However, they were freed by a Herero soldier who was with them, Omuhona Kanjemi. It is believed that Kanjemi took part in the 1903-1908 war against the Germans, and was eventually captured and hung in 1911. (Rafalski, 1930:395)

Contract Labour



The working conditions for migrant workers were often harsh. One of the worst mining accidents in Namibian history led to the death of six migrant workers from Kavango on 8th November, 1988. A memorial made from rock from the mine bearing their names can be found at Kapako near the offices of the Mbonza Traditional Authority (Photo, J. Silvester, 2007)



It is believed that the first brick house in Rundu was built in 1936 as an office for the Native Affairs Commissioner. It is here that the recruitment of contract workers started in Rundu (Photo: K. Mandhavela, 2002).

Students



Rudolf Ngondo (pictured here at his farm at Katji-nakatji) was a former Minister of Education in Kavango at the time of the 1988 student boycott. He was asked to speak to students at Rundu Junior Secondary School (now Dr Romanus Kampungu), to warn them against participating in political activities, but many left whilst he was speaking. Some say this incident helped spread the schools boycott in Kavango (Photo: Khasera Mandhavela, 2002, NAN RR14)

The threat of mortar bombardment and cross-fire due to the proximity of military bases to schools is shown by the presence of reinforced bunkers for shelter during firefights. One example are the two large bunkers that were built at Rundu Senior Secondary School (Photo: Jeremy Silvester, 2007)



Trade Unions



Mr S.H. Kantema (left) attending a regional union conference in Kabe, Zambia in September, 1989.



NANTU Regional Committee for Kavango members: Secretary (left) – Mr S.H. Kantema; Vice-Chairperson (right) – Hon. J. Mutorwa.



Mr S.H. Kantema with another delegate in Kabe, Zambia



The NANTU delegation from Kavango attending the NANTU Conference in Windhoek in 1989.

Women



Girls learners were politicised by the student protests in the period leading up to the 1989 election and took an active role in campaigning for a SWAPO victory, even though they were too young to vote ! (Photo: Lilia Shaningwa)

Women were active in the 1989 election campaign. Hon Faustina Caley can be seen here on the left of the photograph singing liberation songs during the 1989 election campaign (Photo: Lilia Shaningwa)



Church



Rev. Bonifatius Haushiku from Shambyu was the first Vice-Chairperson of the Kavango Legislative Assembly, but resigned his position, after opposing forced removals in Rundu. On 27th January, 1979 Rev Haushiku became the first indigenous Roman Catholic Bishop in Namibia. In 1987 Bishop Haushiku and Bishop James Kauluma of the Anglican Church took legal action to try to have the curfew removed in Kavango.

The first Protestant baptisms by ELCN in Ukwangali only took place in 1926 (Monument in Nkurenkuru. Photo: J. Silvester, 2007). The Finnish Mission Station at Nkurenkuru was shown in the Administration's Annual Report for 1932 (NAN 11321).



Forced Removals



A homestead in Kehemu. Former residents of Mangarangandja were forced to move to Kehemu. The community's view of the move is evident from the name of the new location which translates as 'Whatever!' (Photo: Khasera Mandhavela, 2002. NAN RR41).

A road sign indicating the direction of Kaisosi in Rundu. The former residents of Sarusungu were re-located here. (Photo: Khasera Mandhavela, 2002. NAN RR37)



Remains of the Roman Catholic Church in Sarusungu (Photo: Khasera Mandhavela, 2002, NAN RR70).

Johannes Lumbala showing where he used to live in Sarusungu, near the stream, before the forced relocation (Photo: Khasera Mandhavela, 2002, NAN RR68)



Traditional Leaders



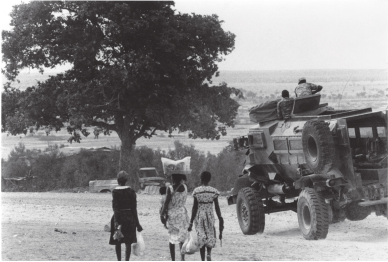
In 1970 the first Executive Council of the Kavango Administration had five members, one from each recognised traditional authority including two traditional leaders (left to right): Fumu A. Mayavero, Councillor for Justice and Community Affairs; R. Kamunoko (Councillor for Agriculture) Hompa L. Shashipapo (Authority Affairs and Finance), Alex Kudumo (Works) and Elia Neromba (Education and Culture) (Photo: NAN 4668)

Mr J.M. De Wet, 'Commissioner-General of Indigenous People of SWA' with Hompa Alfons Majavero at the opening of the 2nd Session of the Kavango Legislative Assembly on 8th November, 1973(NAN 5114)



In February, 1982 Hompa Sitendu Mpasi of Ukwangali spoke at a press conference with the international media in Rundu organised by Mr Hans Rohr of the NCDP. Hompa Mpasi complained about the violence of Koevoet and other units operating in his area. In 1983 Commander Kalomoh of PLAN met with Hompa Mpasi at Gava and remembers him as a strong SWAPO supporter.

Armed Struggle

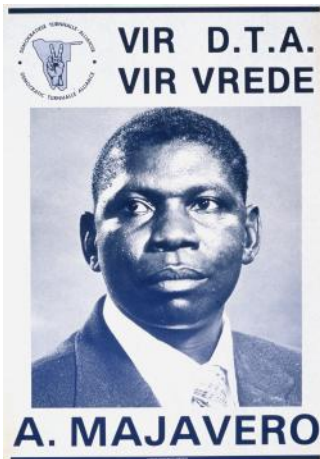


Koevoet ('Crowbar') units were established in Kavango from 1981 with the main base, Arendsnes (Eagle's Nest) being situated about 30km outside Rundu. Koevoet were feared. One, typical, incident that received publicity was the death of a teach from Kavango West, Jonas Hamukwaya, whilst being interrogated by Koevoet members (NAN 12755)

After the collapse of the FNLA (one of the three main parties competing for power in Angola) many of their fighters were recruited by the South Africans. A secret base was established at Bagani (Buffalo Base) in the Kavango and the force became known as '32 Battalion'. The Battalion was used extensively by South Africa, from 1975, for operations inside Angola. The base's graveyard is overgrown with bush today. (Photos: J. Silvester & Windhoek Observer)



Elections



Hompa Alfons Majavero of Mbukushu became the Chief Councillor of the Kavango Legislative Council in 1973, replacing Hompa Linus Shashipapo of the Vagciriku. He was a member of the DTA which won 87% of the vote in Kavango in the 1978 election – which was boycotted by SWAPO (BAB 810)

President Sam Nujoma, the SWAPO leader, arrives in Rundu to address the Star Rally during the 1989 election campaign (Photo: Lilia Shaningwa)



the BANTUSTAN, what do you think? They are camps and this is slavery, brothers, men and women, come; the voice is calling you (SWAPO, 01 January 1970).

The above indicates that SWAPO was opposed to the Bantustans and, therefore, encouraged all the people to oppose it. Despite the opposition of SWAPO to the relocations, its message did not fully reach the masses under threat of removal in Sarusungu because SWAPO was operating secretly at that time and people could lose their lives for being SWAPO supporters. Commissioner Jacobus, acting as Director General of the Kavango Legislative Council blamed David Ausiku for all the unrest in the Kavango. He stated that the Department of Safety and Security was busy investigating his case and he felt that they were dealing with a hardcore, committed SWAPO leader. However, they had determined that Ausiku had been born in Angola, since his father was still living there, and that it might be possible to deport him and hand him over to the Portuguese security police (Jacobus, 15 December 1971). A letter of complaint was written to Commissioner Van Niekerk in the middle of 1970 explaining the fear that prevented them from resisting the removals:

*The people have great uneasiness that they would be shot if they will not be willing to move into the planned camps but to stay where they are.*⁹⁶

Rev. Sindano states that only Mr Ausiku's homestead remained at Sanyema and only his own at Kasote.

96 NAN NAR 9 1/1/55, NAR9, Vol:13 BDK 17th June, 1970. "Die Batoesakekommissaris, Rundu, Geagte Heer,

The Impact of Forced Relocations

During the relocation process, people lost their goods like cups, plates which dropped off along the way and some of which were forgotten behind. The people's containers of beers spilled out to the ground, some people's huts got broken down during the transportation process and those who had built brick houses had to dismantle them. People were never compensated for anything. In some cases, men were still at work as the relocation took place during working hours and women had to carry out the whole responsibilities of packing goods.

The relocations had various consequences. When the secondary school hostel children returned home, they found that their homesteads were no longer there and they had to search for their parents in the new, relocated area. The forced relocation also led local people to question the value of the self-government which was given to them by the South African government. In the case of the Mangarangandja relocation, the colonial authorities had an extreme plan to not only relocate the people but also to put people in trucks. The plan was to 'deport' them back to their respective tribal areas in Kavango. Only those who were born in Rundu and were subjects of *Hompa* Maria Mwengere of the Vashambyu tribe were to be permitted to settle in the new resettlement site. Rebbekka Kambundu⁹⁷ explained:

*My mother [Aunty] too, my late mother [Aunty] the Chief,
insisted too that who-ever came from Mbukushu, from*

⁹⁷ Rebbekka Kambundu belongs to the vaShambyu royal family. In 1969 Chief Maria Mwengere appointed her as the chairperson of Nkarapamwe Township Committee. Since then, she was known as the forewoman of Rundu. She is a 'niece' of Chief Maria Mwengere whom she would usually call as her mother, rather than as her aunty, in line with Kavango tradition. This is so because she is born of Maria Mwengeres'sister called Mukwahepo. Traditionally, she would only have been called Maria Mwengere's niece if she were a child of Maria Mwengere's brother.

Ukwangali, from Mbunza must return. Yes, that was when she asked for the lorries so that those people could be deported (Kambundu., 2004).

The idea of deporting people out of Rundu to their different tribal areas failed and so the administration sent in the bulldozers to enforce the movement out of Mangarangandja area. According to Gorretti Nakadiru Kaundu, the Department of Agriculture provided trucks that loaded the people (Kaundu, 2004). Sarusungu community members got relocated to an area they eventually named “Kaisosi” (which means, ‘looking for a reason to start a fight’). They believed the colonial authorities were certainly looking for a good reason or excuse to start a fight with the local people.

Meanwhile, the residents of Mangarangandja were also forced to relocate and they got settled in an area they named as “Kehemu” which is literary translated as “Whatever”. Mandhavela Khasera explains that the name ‘Kehemu’ was intended to show the regime that residents were tired and helpless and so the regime could do whatever it felt like doing (Mandhavela, 2003, p. 4). According to Kanunga Nyamonde, life in the new areas was not good compared to the previous ones because they came to suffer water shortages. She said that many people in the relocated areas, mainly women, would line up for water behind the water point and soon began to argue with each other and would go as far as labelling each other as witches. People could no longer bath with as much water as they did at the riverside villages because water became scarce and they soon started to pay for water as Ginter Hairwa explains,

The result of the trouble of having come to settle here is that we have come to live in drought, we thought e were coming to drink water. Right now as we speak, we did not

even wash ourselves, we did not bath. But then, when we lived that side you would just go and swim. Is this the good life now? No, this is not good. It seems today that those people only encouraged us to come so that they would come and take away our money in a clever way that we had to buy water. We are currently buying it. Some of us do not work; we will not find money to buy water (Hairwa, 2004).

The practice of “Shinyanga”, which was an evening gathering around the fire of families for traditional educational purposes, common in for example Sarusungu began to disappear because children started moving around at night at shebeens that mushroomed. People became more dependent on money than on farming for survival because they settled in what were formerly their ploughing fields and therefore space for larger, more productive, fields became very limited.

The Odendaal Commission’s proposal of encouraging livestock farming among the black people in the new relocation sites with the aim of finding an economic market for the Kavango subsistence farmer’s meat in the southern part of Namibia never materialized in Kaisosi camp or elsewhere in Kavango. Beatha Kambwali argued that the removals were: *“So that the whites could construct their buildings there!”* (Kambwali, 2004). Indeed a youth camp was constructed on the site which was initially known as *Ekongoro*⁹⁸ camp and, later, as the Maria Mwengere Youth Camp after the Sambyu Queen of that time. People were never compensated for anything. In some cases, men were still at work as the

98 The word *Ekongoro* contains two meanings among the Kavango ethnic groups. The first one is rainbow. It is also a name for a large river snake believed among the Vakavango people to be the strongest living creature in the Kavango River. It is believed that the youth camp was constructed near the river bank where this snake resided and the camp was, therefore, named after it.

relocation took place during working hours and women had to carry out the whole work of packing their furniture and household goods.

It has been argued that Vanyemba inhabitants were relocated in Kaisosi, while the Hambukushu were settled in Kehemu closer to Rundu (Theart, 2001). The apartheid idea of ethnic segregation was implemented. It can be argued, however, that despite this attempt to segregate Kavango groups from the 'Angolan' Vanyemba group, this did not materialize. There were no measures to make the proposed segregation effective, and eventually the Nyemba became mixed up among the Kavango in both the Kehemu and Kaisosi relocation areas. The authorities fenced off the new relocation camps and the army had night patrols on the outskirts of the surroundings of the camp. Kaisosi and Kehemu became a place of fear for outsiders who saw it as a place of disorder marked by violence, rape, robberies and death. The people of Kehemu also had to pass through an army checkpoint before they were allowed to visit the town of Rundu for their daily activities

Conclusion

The series of forced relocation of people living around Rundu can be analysed from two perspectives, a narrative of urbanization and a narrative of increasing efforts to control the movement of people as part of an agenda to respond to growing security concerns. Firstly, the removals signaled a shift in the institutions of governance and authority in the region. Whilst the initial structure of the Council for Kavango suggested that the power of the traditional authorities was entrenched, the removals contradicted this claim. The removals made black people realise that their traditional Chiefs no longer had the right of land

ownership and authority and that the land had been alienated and was now controlled by the central state.

Secondly, the removals can be viewed as stages in a coordinated effort to control the border with Angola and to impose controls over the movement of people. It was part of the complex history of the struggle for land security in urban areas and as such should be viewed as part of the history of the liberation struggle.

8. Traditional Leaders and the Liberation Struggle in Kavango, 1970-1989

– Mr Karapo Herbert Kandjimi

Introduction

Geographically the Kavango regions are located in the north-east of Namibia and the region shares a regional boundary with the four Ovambo regions and a national boundary with Angola. The fact that the Kavango River became a national border had a profound impact on the history of the region. Historically the area under research had inadequate coverage in the existing literature on the roles and contributions of traditional leaders during the Namibian armed liberation struggle. This chapter aims to document the involvement and contributions of the traditional leaders of the Kavango regions. The main source of evidence is oral history data collected during a series of interviews conducted in 2004 and 2007 as part of the Archive for Anti-Colonial Resistance and the Liberation Struggle (AACRLS) project. The oral narratives in this paper serve as the basis of my attempt to unpack the complex role of the traditional leaders in the two Kavango regions at large.

The chapter will focus mainly on the contributions of the traditional leaders of the five main ethnic groups that were recognized in Kavango by the South African authorities in 1970 (South Africa, 1964:35).⁹⁹

⁹⁹ The abolishment of the Homeland authorities at independence was followed by the delimitation of regional boundaries. The boundaries of the Kavango Region were revised in 2013 with the creation of Kavango West and Kavango East increasing the regions of Namibia from thirteen to fourteen. The five traditional authorities are located in these two regions, although

Traditional leaders were the chiefs, headmen, and individuals who were the political leaders of their communities on the basis of genealogies dating back to pre-colonial times. Attempts were made to co-opt them on ethnic principles between 1966-1989 to promote and serve the interests of the government in South Africa in the northern declared homeland of Ovamboland, Kavangoland and Caprivi.¹⁰⁰ The chapter will, due to restraints on the research resources available, focus on some traditional authorities more than others. and this will shape the evidence presented. It should be noted that further research is needed on the role of the traditional authorities such as the Mbunza and Gciriku, and it is hoped that this contribution will encourage other young historians to address these gaps.

The chapter elaborate on the role of traditional leaders during the Namibia armed struggle.. However a more detailed analysis will be given to the traditional leaders of Ukwangali, especially the *Hompa* of Ukwangali, the late Sientu Mpasi, and Alex Muranda, the senior headman then and some individual SWAPO activists interviewed during the data collection process. The chapter will also shed lights on the social and political implications of the Odendaal plan, through which the traditional leaders were co-opted into the Kavango Legislative Council and used to implement laws and policies set by South Africa.

This chapter will provide an in-depth analysis of the Kavango Legislative Assembly structures where Traditional Authorities were caught in between the South African military regime and nationalist pressure spearheaded by SWAPO both inside and outside Kavango. The analysis

pre-colonial boundaries of loyalty also straddled the Kavango River with subjects (and royal graves) of all five communities also found in what is now southern Angola.

¹⁰⁰ H.A. Nambadi, *The Kavango Legislative Council 1970-1979: A critical analysis* (MA thesis, University of the Western Cape, 2007), p.32. The three northern homelands were Ovamboland, Kavangoland and Eastern Caprivi.

of this interaction will enable readers and fellow researchers to draw some conclusions concerning the political position and involvement of traditional leaders of Kavango region in general and that of Ukwangali area in particular.

The Traditional Leaders of Kavango during the Armed Struggle

Traditionally, the Traditional Authority (TA) is a social and political institution entrusted in an individual within the royal family who is bestowed with the chieftainship and the power to administer the social welfare and political organisation of a given community. In Kavango these leaders were known as the *Hompa* in four (Ukwangali, Sambyu, Mbunza and Gciriku) of the five communities and the *Fumu* in the Mbukushu and these traditional titles will be used henceforth in this chapter. They are the main custodians of their respective subjects under designated tribal jurisdiction. Henceforth the leaders were expected to fully implement and practice the customary laws of each ethnic group.

Before 1970, Traditional Authority in Kavango mainly rested with the five hereditary leaders (*Hompa* and *Fumu*) of the five ethnic units. Informants gave different accounts of the relationship which prevailed between the Traditional Authorities (TA) and the South African (SA) regime. Gabriel Munguya, a resident at Nepara village in Kavango west, argued that some traditional leaders who did not have any political knowledge of South African ideology tended to passively implement the South African colonial rule.¹⁰¹ In addition and because they were co-opted by the *Development of Self-Government for Native Nations in South West Africa Act* (No.54 of

101 Interview with Gabriel Munguya, Nepara village, Ukwangali district, 27 July 2007.

1968) to serve in the different ethnic Legislative Councils, some individual members of the community claimed that it was the economic motivation (a means of making a living) that motivated them to serve in the Council (Nathanael Sirongo, 2007).

The position or reaction of the traditional leaders towards the South African regime has to be understood in context. Firstly, Act 54 of 1968 clearly stipulated that the 'Chiefs' of the different tribes were to be members of the Legislative Councils in every declared homeland.¹⁰² The Odendaal Plan was to emphasise ethnic identity and a federal system as an alternative to the unitary nation state proposed by SWAPO. The emphasis on ethnicity was apparent in a statement allegedly made by the Kavango Chief Minister, Alfons Majavero, shortly after his appointment in which he reportedly stated: "If the United Nations decides that Ovambos must run the country we will be like the slaves in Egypt".¹⁰³ The Homelands strategy sought to use the appeal of traditional authorities and the strengthening (or even creation) of ethnic identities to 'divide and rule'.

The fact that most of the traditional leaders were members of the council had a direct impact on their legitimacy and self-governance. Members of the Legislative Council were not allowed to discuss issues related to SWAPO as indicated by Kalipa: "That issue related to SWAPO activities were not allowed to be discussed during our proceedings. Though some individuals had knowledge about nationalist movements, there was not any forum where it can be discussed. Moreover, it was not part of the council's task to discuss political matters. The task of the members of the

102 Development of Self-Government for Native Nations in South West Africa Act No.54 of 1968. The act was based on the recommendation of the Odendaal Plan.

103 'Hearings before the Sub-committee on International Organisations of the Committee on International Relations', House of Representatives, 94th Congress, 3rd Session, 24th & 27th August, 1976, p237.

Councils was that of setting new laws and plans as how Kavango should be governed and developed. This included the construction of schools, hospitals and nature conservation".¹⁰⁴

The quote by Kalipa is a clear indication that the Acts that were implemented did not allow them (the co-opted traditional leaders) to discuss any politically related issues, especially regarding SWAPO. Nathanael Sirongo, a retired church leader of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN) and a member of the Council in 1973 explained that: "The political doctrine in the council was that of creating a complex division among ethnic groups. No political agenda/motions were allowed in all their proceedings" (2007).

Though members of the council were aware of the impact of the system of administration in the Legislative Council which was in line with the South African policy of apartheid, they did not have any forum to raise these issues.¹⁰⁵ The above quotations explain why members of the Council did not criticise the South African colonial administration in the Legislative Council. The restrictions on freedom of speech and the nature of the proceedings forced Nathanael Sirongo to quit the council and concentrate on his calling as a Church leader until his retirement as a pastor. It can be argued that the framework provided prohibited any politically related matters being discussed during the proceedings.¹⁰⁶

Those who attempted to raise political issues were expelled from the Legislative Councils. A practical example of South African control over the Legislative Council was in 1973 when Chief Alfons Majavero of the Hambukushu was expelled from the Legislative Council after being

104 Interview with Lorenz Kalipa Haupindi, a former member of the Kavango Legislative Council Rundu, Safari Location, 27 December 2007.

105 Interview with Nathanael Sirongo, Mpungu village, Ukwangali district, 29 July 2007

106 Interview with Nathanael Sirongo, Mpungu village, Ukwangali district, 29 July 2007.

suspected of having connections with SWAPO. Though he was suspended Majavero was later reinstated again in November 1973 (the same year). This one can argue that it was just a strategy to manipulate the Legislative Council that the traditional leaders were in charge of their own affairs, which was not the case.

In addition all the proceedings of the legislative Councils were attended by a South African representative who used to fly from South Africa (Pretoria) to attend and monitor the proceedings. However, this did not stop certain individual members interacting and assisting SWAPO cadres who operated on the Kavango war front. Though the traditional leaders in Kavango did not take a collective decision or pass any motion against the South African regime, actions were carried out on an individual basis. The expulsion of *Fumu* Alfons Majavero of the Hambukushu from the council in 1973, a meeting that took place between Kalomoh (a senior PLAN commander) and the two traditional leaders of Ukwangali, (*Hompa* Sientu Mpasi and Alex Muranda the senior headman then), the visit of the chief of Ukwangali abroad to meet the President of SWAPO, Sam Nujoma, and the resignation of Nathanael Sironko from the Legislative Council are practical examples of actions taken by traditional leaders beyond the Council chamber.

The decision of the chief of Ukwangali to visit the former Head of State clearly indicates that he was prepared to disobey an Act that was in place prohibiting traditional leaders or chiefs from participating in SWAPO political activities. Kasoma Paulus, a well known former Koevoet member in Ukwangali, indicated that although the traditional leaders in Kavango were co-opted to serve in the Legislative Council it was difficult for one to tell their political affiliation. *Koevoet* ("crowbar"), was a special unit officially operating as part of the South African Police, engaged in

counter-insurgency operations and acting as an assassination squad against suspected SWAPO supporters.¹⁰⁷ In Ukwangali, Kasoma noted that if one analyzed the position of the *Hompa*, one could accuse him of becoming a collaborator with SWAPO. This was in contrast to the *Hompa* of the Sambyu, the late Maria Mwengere, who used to pronounce herself on the local Kavango radio urging her people not to support SWAPO's freedom fighters and to report their movements in her area to the South African Defence Force (SADF) and Koevoet, the counter-insurgency unit.¹⁰⁸

The remarks by the *Hompa* of Sambyu prompted Kalomoh, the PLAN commander designated in Kavango, with some PLAN cadres to visit her at her palace at Sambyu where she was warned to stop destroying the image of SWAPO.¹⁰⁹ The accounts by the former Koevoet member and a PLAN cadre commander suggest that the *Hompa* of Ukwangali was a SWAPO supporter.

Kasoma further asserted that considering the political situation which prevailed in Ukwangali which was a concentrated war zone, it was difficult for the *Hompa* of Ukwangali to publicly show his political affiliation. This can be attributed to the fact that as the chief of an ethnic group in a designated homeland, he was expected by the South African colonial administration to enforce South African apartheid policy and rules as required by the law. Thus to avoid political instability in his area, the *Hompa* conducted himself in his capacity as the *Hompa* with the power vested in him to ensure the safety and security of the inhabitants of his

107 IDAF, *Apartheids Army in Namibia: South Africa illegal military occupation* (London: IDAF, 1982), p.24.

108 Archive for Anti-Colonial Resistance and Liberations Struggle (AACRLS) Interview by Aaron Nambadi with Kalomoh Ndeulitufa, the former PLAN commander designated to operate in Kavango, Tutungeni, Rundu, and 13 May 2005.

109 Interview with Karora Erastus former PLAN combatants born in Ukwangali, Tutungeni, Rundu, 28 October 2007.

territory.¹¹⁰

If the *Hompa* had dedicated himself to the South African authorities, a negative relationship could have developed between the *Hompa* and the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN). This, according to Kasoma, made him to act neutral. As the leader of a designated group, he was not expected by the South African regime to become involved in any political matters, but entrusted to lead his people to exercise moral and social political authority and maintain civic and social order.

The Political Interaction between SWAPO, Traditional Leaders and Civilians

As the struggle for independence gained momentum in the early 1980s, the Ukwangali district became one of the most heavily contested areas by the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN) and the South African military forces in South West Africa. This resulted in South African Defence Forces (SADF) armoured vehicles and personnel presence in Ukwangali increasing tremendously in search of PLAN combatants, a situation which created insecurity for the inhabitants of Ukwangali.

The presence of these two military forces created a situation in which the inhabitants of the district lived in fear every day and night. Individual families in Ukwangali had to work out ways to deal with these forces which operated in the same district. The relationship between PLAN, traditional leaders and the inhabitants in Ukwangali were complicated by the presence of an espionage unit called the Reconnaissance unit ('Recce'), which was trained by the South African regime as an intelligence

¹¹⁰ Interview with Kasoma Paulus, a former Koevoet member, Donkerhoek Location, Rundu, 24 July 2007.

service, which operated as and pretended to be PLAN cadres. This unit used AK-47 rifles and dressed in uniforms similar to that of SWAPO's PLAN.¹¹¹ The members of this unit spoke Oshiwambo languages including Oshikwanyama, which was a language mostly spoken by the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN).

The operation of this unit implicated the inhabitants in Ukwangali, because people were frequently unable to differentiate between the South African forces and PLAN cadres. Through this unit, the South African army used to disguise themselves as PLAN cadres in order to deceive the local people in Namibia.¹¹² Although the strategy created confusion among the people, it was addressed by PLAN cadres who changed their strategy of operation and used combat names which were not known by the South African forces in most cases. This made it easier for the villagers to distinguish between the real PLAN fighters and South African reconnaissance units (Recce).

It was in this context that *Hompa* Mpasi took the decision to speak at a meeting attended by journalists from the international media in February, 1982. The press conference was organised by Mr Hans Rohr, the leader of the Namibia Christian Democratic Party (NCDP) and its sole representative in the National Assembly that had been elected in 1978. The election, seen as part of the South African strategy to present an 'internal settlement' had been boycotted by SWAPO and seen the DTA win 41 of the 50 seats. At the meeting *Hompa* Mpasi was already complaining that he was being accused of being a SWAPO supporter. He reported that shots had been fired near his house and the entrance of his home had been set on fire and suggested that these were examples

111 SWAPO Information Bulletin of December 1987, SWAPO Department of Information and publicity (Luanda: Angola), p.18.

112 SWAPO Information Bulletin of December 1987, SWAPO Department of Information and publicity (Luanda: Angola), p.19.

of attempts to intimidate him. The Windhoek Observer of 27th February, 1982 gave an account of *Hompa Mpasi's* contribution:

“The Kwangali tribal chief (or Hompa as he is known) Chief Daniel Sientu Mpasi, expressed very strong feelings about the activities of the Army in his region. He said that the people feared the Army and the secret police more than they feared SWAPO.

Sitting in the reception chamber of his kraal with Mr Rohr and the other journalists, the Chief spoke out bitterly against the attacks at night on his kraal, as well as having rifle barrels pushed into his stomach by soldiers, who demanded that his wife have intercourse with them. He also spoke with pain and sorrow of two of his children, who had been blown to smithereens by a landmine planted near his farm. He said that SWAPO would never have done this.

The land mine was planted in the main road near Nepara village. According to Hausiku Munguya, a retired nurse at Nepara Clinic, the road was the only road the Chief use whenever he went to his palace at Gava. The land mine was planted by the South Africans and was targeting Chief Sientu Mpasi but unfortunately, two of his brothers children were the victims of the landmine. Despite his repeated appeals for the authorities to put a stop to the activities of the Army and Secret Police, assaults and killings still took place.

This made it hard for him, as a Chief, to look after his

*people. Under the circumstances, he explained, he could not support the DTA. The DTA has shown itself to be incapable of doing anything to prevent the army from abusing and terrorising his people. That was why there had been a decision to support the NCDP”.*¹¹³

During this period it was rare that villagers in Ukwangali could spend a day or two without being visited by PLAN, SADF or the Koevoet units. This was simply because these homesteads were considered to be the only places where PLAN combatants were assisted with food and other logistical needs. Apart from the presence of the South African military forces in the district in search of their enemies the PLAN fighters, the relationship which existed between SWAPO, the traditional leaders and the civilians of the Ukwangali district at large was good, although it was characterized by a number of factors.

Kalomoh Ndeulitufa the PLAN combatant who was designated with his men to operate in Kavango region and in Ukwangali area explains that the first time they entered Ukwangali area was in 1980 via Wiwi, a village in Mpungu. The inhabitants perceived them with a sense of fear. Kalomoh further asserts that from Wiwi, they preceded to Katope Komugoro, a village in Ukwangali in Mpungu constituency, where the men under his command split up into smaller units of four to five each. A sense of fear could be detected within each homestead that they visited on their way. The people in the Kavango region had been told by the South Africa forces that PLAN cadres were terrorists who came to kill them and loot all their belongings. The consequence was many peasants in Kavango deserting their villages and fields of mahangu (millet) to settle along the riverside, while some relocated to live in smaller towns like Rundu and some men

deserted their family to become migrant workers to avoid the conflict.¹¹⁴

Kalomoh organised a meeting with the senior headman Muranda and *Hompa* Sientu Mipasi in 1983 at Namungundo or (Gava). At this meeting Kalomoh told the two traditional leaders to tell the people that they must not live in fear and to return to their fields and livestock. He emphasized that they did not come to kill innocent civilians but rather they had come to fight the oppressors (whites).¹¹⁵ The fact that the former members of the Legislative Council agreed to attend the meeting is a clear indication that though Muranda was a member of the Legislative Council he was willing to negotiate with SWAPO.

Among the issues discussed with the two 'traditional leaders' was that of urging the inhabitants not to live in fear, but to return to their villages and homesteads as PLAN cadres did not come with the intention of killing innocent civilians. An early statement by SWAPO that was captured by the South Africans and signed by the 'Chief in Commander, Namibia Liberation Army, Dar-es-Salaam' gave an early indication of the code of conduct that guerrillas were meant to follow. The guidelines stated that: 'Freedom Fighters must not attack missionaries or burn churches in particularly given areas unless they act in self-defence. Freedom fighters are strictly forbidden to attack women, children and elderly people and civilians, unless the situation constitutes danger and the freedom fighters have to act in self- defence.'¹¹⁶

The outcome of the meeting saw the people of Ukwangali returning to their villages and starting to co-operate with PLAN cadres. Support in

114 Interview by Aaron Nambadi with Kalomoh Ndeulitufa, the former PLAN commander designated to operate in Kavango, Tutungeni, Rundu, and 13 May 2005.

115 Interview by Aaron Nambadi with Kalomoh Ndeulitufa, the former PLAN commander designated to operate in Kavango, Tutungeni, Rundu, 13 May 2005

116 P. Stiff, *The Covert War, Koevoet Operations Namibia 1979-1989* (South Africa: Galago, 1991), p.21.

terms of food and logistical support was needed for the PLAN cadres to wage their guerrilla warfare. The input by the two traditional leaders of Ukwangali to motivate the civilians clearly suggests that though some of them served in the council, the relationship which developed between PLAN and the traditional leaders of Ukwangali was positive.

According to Kalomoh, the traditional leaders of Ukwangali were helpful and they had sacrificed their lives for the cause of Namibian independence. He further explained that one has to understand that the political situation during this period was strictly dominated by the South African authorities and anyone who was considered to be collaborating with SWAPO was arrested and subjected to detention and torture. Despite all the political threats to which the civilians and some leaders of Ukwangali were exposed, he (Kalomoh) claimed that the *Hompa* Daniel Sientu Mpasi urged the local people to give logistical support.

The PLAN commander also noted that if the *Hompa* of Ukwangali had not encouraged his people to provide support, it would have been difficult for the PLAN cadres to execute their guerilla warfare activities in Ukwangali.¹¹⁷ It should be understood that in waging guerilla warfare, guerilla fighters depend on the local population for food and supplies. He noted that if the *Hompa* of Ukwangali had been collaborating with the security forces it would have been impossible for the civilians of his district to render support and this would have made it difficult for the guerilla warfare to be effective in the Kavango regions.

Kalomoh reiterated that his men did not experience any problems with the civilians in Ukwangali and, most importantly, were provided with food.¹¹⁸ Kalomoh (known by the combat names *Hakushinda*, and

117 Interview by Aaron Nambadi with Kalomoh Ndeulitufa, the former PLAN commander designated to operate in Kavango, Tutungeni, Rundu, 13 May 2005

118 Interview by Aaron Nambadi with Kalomoh Ndeulitufa, the former PLAN commander

Kambarekanazengeke) explains that the people of Ukwangali maintained a good relationship with PLAN cadres who operated in the district. Though some misunderstanding prevailed between certain individuals and PLAN cadres, this was addressed in good faith. The relationship which developed with the civilians helps him (Kalomoh) during his operation in Ukwangali area to execute his plans as a commander accordingly. It also helped him as a commander to deploy and redeploy his guerilla fighters in and out of Ukwangali and to execute their combat activities.

While Kalomoh acknowledged the support and contributions of the traditional leaders of Ukwangali, Hilka Leevi a survivor of Cassinga massacre, argued that throughout the liberation struggle most of the *Hompas* in Kavango did not associate themselves with political activities. She noted that only certain individual or leaders with political knowledge about the armed struggle were able to carry out political activities in secrecy. Hilka Leevi recalls that the prominent SWAPO activists in the region in the sixties were Markus Ihemba and David Ausiku, known as *Lyangurungunda*.¹¹⁹ She argued that it was not easy for the traditional leaders in particular the *Hompas* to be involved in political affairs because they were used by the South African colonial administration to serve as councillors. This made it difficult for them to collaborate with the PLAN cadres.

The *Hompa* of Ukwangali, Daniel Sientu Mpasi, left Namibia to visit the SWAPO leader, Sam Nujoma, in London in 1986, whilst travelling to Finland.¹²⁰ Later he held a second meeting with Sam Nujoma in Zambia in April, 1989.¹²¹ The *Hompa* of Ukwangali was the only one in the Kavango

designated to operate in Kavango, Tutungeni, Rundu, 13 May 2005.

119 Interview with Hilka Leevi, a survivor of Cassinga massacre, Tutungeni, Rundu, 16 December 2007.

120 Namibia Support Committee, International News briefing on Namibia, No 41-73, 1986.

121 Paulus, Omufyoona Mbangu, 'Hypocrisy of Heroism and State Funerals', New Era, 5th

who refused to accept a position in the Legislative Council. He claimed that he did not have the ability to read and write, but instead, delegated Rudolf Ngondo to represent him in the Council. However, this was just a strategy to cover his defiance of the South African policy of co-opting all the traditional leaders to serve in the interest of their regime. After his death, it was claimed that *Hompa* Sientu was actually one of the first members of the Ovamboland Peoples Organisation (formed in 1957 as a predecessor to SWAPO). It was reported that he had travelled regularly to Walvis Bay with Petrus Kashuku to provide funds to the branch there led by Nathanael Maxulili and, thus, was one of the first to develop a broader nationalist, anti-colonial vision.¹²²

The political order of the day during this era also influenced the relationship of the traditional leadership towards SWAPO as a movement and, especially, its military wing PLAN. A core and, perhaps, the most successful strategy of the South African military was to spread suspicion amongst and between civilians and against the PLAN combatants. For example, local inhabitants in the region were bribed with money, and recruited into the Army and the Koevoet units to serve as soldiers. The recruitment of local civilians created distrust and suspicion within families and communities and was an effective way to undermine the relationship between community members and PLAN combatants.¹²³

The South African security forces, especially the Koevoet members, recruited individual informers in the villages who provided them with information about PLAN combatants' operations and movements in the district, and provided the names of individuals who collaborated with

January, 1915.

122 Paulus, Omufyoona Mbangu, 'Hypocrisy of Heroism and State Funerals', *New Era*, 5th January, 1915.

123 Interview with Kasoma Paulus, a former Koevoet member, Rundu, Donkerhoek Location, 24 July 2007.

PLAN cadres. According to Kasoma, the South African military strategy of using secret informants who were known as 'spies' or 'informers' who received allowances from their employers created tension, mistrust and misunderstanding between PLAN cadres, the civilians and the traditional leaders. Those identified as spies were discouraged by the PLAN cadres from engaging in such practices and those who did not co-operate were assassinated by the PLAN cadres. This led, for example, to the assassination of Olavi Munango in 1984 at Mpungu village. Munango worked for the Kavango Radio which broadcast anti-SWAPO propaganda and was, therefore, seen as a legitimate target.¹²⁴

As with the spies, individuals who got involved in this practice did not always anticipate the impact their work might have on their lives or those of their family. Some informers acted in a dual role, whenever the PLAN cadres were within the village they connived with PLAN cadres accusing other people of collaborating with South African forces. If the SADF forces were in the villages, the same individuals would give the names of neighbours who, they claimed, had assisted PLAN's guerrilla forces. The conflict created a climate of distrust and fear among the tribal *Hompas*, civilians and SWAPO activists.

In some instances these individuals were apprehended for a day or two to give a certain impression to the villagers, while they were in fact informers (spies). The implication of being a spy was that once the PLAN cadres learned that one is involved in these activities, the possibility of assassination was high. This created fear among individuals and pressure to refrain from this practice. With children, the Koevoet were also reported to often offer chocolates and biscuits to children as a means to obtain information. I experienced this practice myself.

124 hnmilk "Kavango during the Namibian war of liberation, "<http://kavango.info/Voito.htm>. accessed on 2008/03/09.

Children who did not provide information would not receive any sweets. This practice is something I experienced and those who did not provide information were not given anything. One could argue that the soldiers used traditional cultural norms, such as our respect for elders, to try and obtain information. The army tried to conscript culture to support their ideological interpretation. The creation of *Ezuva* as a 'cultural organisation' aimed at the youth in Kavango was the most blatant example of this strategy¹²⁵

This strategy used by the South African security forces encouraged the PLAN combatants to assassinate those caught collaborating with the South African forces. Paulus Kasoma, a Koevoet member known as "*Njege*", argues that during the whole period that he served with his Koevoet unit in Kavango most of the contacts with PLAN fighters took place in Ukwangali. The intensity of the war in Ukwangali is one reason Ukwangali seems to dominate the content of this chapter. . He recalls that the *Hompa* of Ukwangali would also confront the Koevoet units if he believed that they had been responsible for beating somebody in the community or destroying their crops by driving their casspirs across the fields before the harvest.

Kasoma claims that the influence of the traditional leaders of Ukwangali over the civilians enabled the PLAN cadres' to operate in the area until the late eighties. For the fifteen years Kasoma served in Koevoet most of their military contacts were carried out in Ukwangali. On this basis the former Koevoet man argues that though some individuals connived with South African forces as spies, the majority of the civilians in Ukwangali and their leaders provided support to PLAN.

125 Interview with Kasoma Paulus, a former Koevoet member, Donkerhoek Location, Rundu, 24 July 2007.

In addition Kasoma noted that although the *Hompa* of Ukwangali acted neutrally, one could tell that the *Hompa* and his followers in Ukwangali were pro-SWAPO. For example, if a person was beaten or his/her crops were destroyed by the Koevoet forces, he was not afraid to confront the Koevoet forces and tell them to refrain from abusing and mistreating the ordinary civilians.¹²⁶ The *Hompa* used to convene meetings at the tribal office at Kahenge with senior officers from the South African military telling them to stop harassing and intimidating civilians. Though the traditional leaders in Kavango region fell directly under the Bantu administration in South Africa, the *Hompa* of Ukwangali district demonstrated his political leaning towards SWAPO during this period of the armed struggle.

Gabriel Munguya, a nurse at Nepara, noted the relationship which developed between the traditional leaders of Ukwangali and PLAN cadres. Munguya argued that it was this that motivated the *Hompa* of Ukwangali to visit Sam Nujoma, to brief him about the political developments in Ukwangali and the problems his people were experiencing from the South African military and Koevoet.¹²⁷ The decision of the *Hompa* to leave the country during the period of the armed struggle for Namibia independence demonstrated his political will and loyalty towards SWAPO as a political movement.¹²⁸ The resignation of Reverend Nathanael Sirongo from the Legislative Council when he was the vice chairperson of the proceedings, in 1973 suggests that though the position of the members of the Council was complicated, some traditional leaders felt uncomfortable about the compromises that they had to make to serve in the Council.

126 Interview with Kasoma Paulus, a former Koevoet member, Rundu, Donkerhoek Location, 24 July 2007.

127 Interview with Gabriel Munguya, Nepara village, Ukwangali district, 27 July 2007.

128 Interview with Gabriel Munguya, Nepara village, Ukwangali district, 27 July 2007

Conclusion

Traditional leaders were caught between the two military forces which operated in the Kavango region. The Odendaal Commission was one of the colonial strategies used to control the traditional leaders in Kavango by creating 'Kavangoland' and then co-opting traditional leaders to serve in the new structures that were created to govern the 'Homeland'. The Commission thus created 'Kavangos', an identity which consisted of five officially recognised communities.

The Kavango legislative structure established under the apartheid regime in accordance with the Native Act No 54 of 1968 of South Africa had a political impact where the local people were used to serve the interest of South Africa. Perhaps it should also be recognised that within traditional authorities there were also political debates and differences. For example, before the 1989 election, it was reported that a number of traditional leaders from Kavango visited Jonas Savimbi's base at Jamba where they were encouraged to campaign for the DTA. A newspaper report claimed that representatives from all five traditional authorities in the Kavango participated in the meeting. The group were listed in the newspaper as Chief Alfons Mayavero of the Mbukushu, plus one of his headmen; two headmen of the Gciriku; two headmen from the Sambyu area; two headmen of the Mbunza and one headman from the Ukwangali area named Asser Nainkavara".¹²⁹

The reactions of the traditional leaders and the civilians of Ukwangali towards the PLAN cadres in Kavango region were positive because it enables the PLAN commander designated in Kavango to deploy and redeploy his man to carry out their guerrilla warfare accordingly to their

129 'UNITA backs DTA: Savimbi reportedly seen near border urging a DTA vote', The Namibian, 4th September, 1989.

military codes. The role of *Hompa* Mpasi in the liberation struggle in Kavango is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that when the SWAPO President, Sam Nujoma, was the keynote speaker at SWAPO's Star Rally in Rundu just before the 1989 election, *Hompa* Mpasi was seated next to him. .¹³⁰

130 'Unexpected turn-out at SWAPO's Rundu Star Rally', *The Namibian*, 24th October, 1989, p6.

9. The Armed Struggle in the Kavango Region

**- Karangane Karapo and Jeremy
Silvester.¹³¹**

Introduction

Accounts of the armed struggle for Namibian independence have tended not to focus on a single geographical region. Perhaps it is because one of the ironies of the Namibian War of Independence is that many of the Namibian combatants who died were killed fighting in Angola. The military struggle for liberation in Southern Africa was a regional one that crossed borders. However, this chapter will focus on the impact of the armed struggle on an area that, during the period of South African rule, was constructed as the 'Kavango' homeland. However, in terms of oral informants and due to time constraints it will focus mainly on the traditional territory of Ukwangali, situated in the western part of the Kavango Region, an area that today mainly falls within the Mpungu and Kahenge constituencies.

The chapter will argue that, whilst the level of violence in the Kavango Region fluctuated over time, it was an important area of conflict. A detailed understanding of the impact of the armed struggle in the region can assist to change public perceptions of the theatre of war and locate the region into the narrative of the liberation struggle. Documenting and collecting the living memories of the inhabitants of the Kavango Region

¹³¹ An earlier version of this chapter can be found in Silvester, Jeremy (Ed), (2015) *Re-viewing Resistance in Namibian History*, UNAM Press: Windhoek.

will fill a gap in the national historiography of Namibia. Of course, this chapter will not be comprehensive. A guerilla war takes place, by nature, undercover. However, we hope that it will encourage more residents of the region to share their memories and stories and help us to build a better picture of the war in the Kavango. We believe that, in the spirit of national reconciliation, it is also important that people from the region who fought in SWATF and Koevoet also share their accounts. Indeed it is interesting that the only account of the war to date written by a black member of Koevoet is that of Sisingi Kamongo, who grew up in the current Ncuncuni constituency well known as *Momuramba gwamavanze* in Omuramba in the Kavango (Kamongo, 2011:37)

The military archives of both sides that might document the conflict in the region are inaccessible. This paper will draw heavily on oral history provided by informants who live in the region. The oral histories of those who personally remember the war will be supplemented by information from contemporary newspaper sources. The newspapers consulted were the *Windhoek Observer* for the early 1980s when the most fighting took place in the region and, from 1985, *The Namibian*, which was launched in that year. The chapter will examine the impact of the struggle on the region in two ways. The first was the military action of those individuals who left the country for exile and later came back as guerilla fighters. The second is to describe and consider the ongoing conflict within communities where there were complex patterns of intimidation, passive resistance and divided loyalties.

The account of the conflict will thus inform discussion about the challenges faced in building a nationalist movement in the context of the efforts of the South African state to encourage a separate 'Kavango' identity. The dynamics of this conflict would eventually manifest itself

in the hotly contested election campaigns of SWAPO and the DTA in the region in the months leading to the 1989 election.

The Kavango as a route to exile

The SWAPO President, Sam Nujoma, left Namibia in 1960 and established an external base for the party in Tanzania (Tanganyika at that time). It was challenging for party members seeking education or military training to escape from Namibia and make their way across the continent. However, the migrant labour recruiting organisation had a camp at Nkurenkuru in West Kavango. Men who wanted to be recruited as mineworkers could make their way from there. If they were considered fit, they would then be taken by truck to Rundu and then on to Shakawe in Botswana (Bechuanaland at that time) and then flown to Francistown. It was in Francistown that men could try to escape from the compound and locate the SWAPO office in the town. The Kavango route was particularly important for the first groups of SWAPO activists to travel into exile. Men returning, through Francistown, from the mines were also able to break their contract in Francistown and go into exile. Men who did this include H.E. Hifikepunye Pohamba (Second President of Namibia) and early guerrilla leaders, John Otto Nankhudu and Lazarus Sankala (Müller, 2012: 152-153).

In the years before the end of Portuguese colonial rule in Angola in 1975, the 'migrant labour' path through Kavango was, probably, the most common route to exile for men from 'Ovamboland' and 'Kavango'¹³² For example, Rosalia Nghidinwa (former Minister of Home Affairs and

132 *ibid.* For more on the contract labour system in Kavango see K. Likuwa, K 'Voices from the Kavango: A study of the contract labour system in Namibia, 1925-1972' (Ph.D. thesis, University of the Western Cape, 2012) and his chapter in this book.

Immigration) remembers a group that had travelled all the way from their school at Oshigambo. The group consisted of Nahas Angula (the former Prime Minister), Nangolo Mbumba, Niilo Taapopi and the late Dr Alpo Mbamba staying at her home in Mpungu for four days in 1966 on their way into exile.¹³³ Many of the people who left the country to join the armed liberation struggle travelled on foot from Ovamboland to exile via Kavango.¹³⁴ This route was long and dangerous. Local homesteads provided vital help with food and water and temporary accommodation. When Portuguese rule collapsed in Angola in 1974, Cuangar, the Portuguese town opposite Nkurenkuru was occupied by UNITA who were co-operating with SWAPO at the time. So, for example, when Voitto Jasson, known by his combat name *Kondjereni* ('You have to fight for your rights'), went into exile on 26 December 1974, the UNITA commander at Cuangar helped him to reach a SWAPO camp.¹³⁵ This was a route which most of those leaving for exile used. In some instances it used to take a month before they passed through the Nkurenkuru recruitment centre.

Early military operations in the Kavango in the 1960s

Three small groups of guerrillas from the South West African Liberation Army (renamed the Peoples' Liberation Army of Namibia in 1970) left from their bases in Tanzania in 1966. The first group, led by Comrade John Otto Nankudhu left Tanzania for Namibia on 4th March, 1965. The group evaded capture and, eventually, set up a military training camp

133 Nghidinwa, Rosalia (2007) 'Colonial resistance and liberation struggle in Namibia with specific reference to Kavango', Paper presented at the 'Recording and Restoring our Part in the Past' Conference, Rundu.

134 Interview by author with Nestor Mufenda,, Rundu, Kavango Regional Council, 28 December 2007.

135 Milk, H. 'Kavango during the Namibia war of liberation'. <http://www.kavango.info/Voito.htm>. Accessed on 26 April, 2013.

inside Namibia at Ongulugwoombashe (Ekandjo, 2014: 19). However, Helao Shityuwete's autobiography (Never Follow the Wolf, 1990) reveals that the first SWAPO guerrillas were actually captured in the Kavango several months before the battle at Omugulugwombashe on 26th August 1966.

The second group of ten guerrillas, led by Lazarus 'Chinaman' Sakaria with Helao Shityuwete as his Deputy-Commander, crossed the Kavango River into Namibia on 23rd March 1966. Three of the group were arrested by the traditional authorities in Mbunza and handed over to the security forces on 27th March 1966 and, eventually, nine of the ten members were captured (Namakalu, 2004, p.12). Cde Julius Shilongo was the only guerrilla who was able to escape as he was fluent in Rukwangali, which was the language spoken in the area (Ekandjo, 2014:22). It seems that the lack of political awareness of SWAPO activities among civilians and traditional headmen in Kavango had led to the arrest of the group. The men were all sentenced to lengthy prison sentences on Robben Island - with the exception of 'Castro' who was recruited by the South Africans to work as a spy within SWAPO (Shityuwete, 1990, pp. 119-127).

Many years passed before another guerilla operation could take place in the region. However, in the late sixties a local business man, David Ausiku, nicknamed *Lyangurungunda*, started a political party called *Muzogumwe* meaning 'One Way Forward', and started mobilising SWAPO in the Kavango Region,¹³⁶ but nationalist political mobilisation was difficult in the Kavango region during this period. The pass laws and the development of ethnic 'Homelands' after the publication of the Odendaal Commission's report of 1964 meant that it was difficult to travel and to connect with people in other regions of Namibia. South African propaganda about the

136 J. B. Diescho, 'A critical Evaluation of the Odendaal Commission of Enquiry into South West African Affairs' 1962-1963', M.A. dissertation, University of Fort Hare, Eastern Cape, 1983, p.48.

social consequences of communism also contributed to the community's mistrust of SWAPO.

One important dynamic of the politics of Kavango was the influence of the struggle for independence from Portuguese colonial rule in Angola. For example, in November, 1968 UNITA forces attacked Portuguese bases at Macusso and Mbambi in the Mbukushu area of southern Angola. As a result the local head of PIDE (the Portuguese Secret Police), 'Baptista' was accused of committing a massacre at Macusso. The *Fumu* Max Makushe provided a list of Mbukushu handed the South African authorities a list of seven names of Mbukushu who had been executed and it was clear that the number killed was greater.¹³⁷

The nickname given by the Mbukushu to Baptista was *Shamumoko* ('The father of the knife') which epitomized his violent reputation. The South Africans feared that such brutality was increasing the support for anti-colonial resistance which, in that area of southern Angola, was led by the local UNITA leader, Fransisco Kalunga. As a result an estimated 4,000 refugees had fled into Namibia and Botswana whose experience made them sympathetic to the anti-colonial struggle. By August, 1969, for example, there were reported to be 243 refugees at Mbukushu on the southern banks of the Kavango River.¹³⁸ The Assistance Commissioner (BAC) in Kavango reported that the scarred backs of the refugees provided physical proof of brutal floggings by Portuguese security forces.¹³⁹ Attempts by PIDE to suppress the rebellion against Portuguese rule in southern Angola were bound to impact on northern Namibia. One observer commented "Our Mbukushu people are under severe stress

137 NAN NAR 9 (3- Unrest) 'Anon. to 'Pop', 1st April, 1969).

138 NAN NAR 9 (3 – Unrest) 'Minutes of a meeting of Mbukushu at Mukwe, 19th August, 1969.

139 NAN NAR 9 (3 – Unrest) 'Assistant Commissioner, BAC to Bantu Affairs Commissioner, Runtu [sic], 1st May, 1969.

as a result of tribal affinities and ties of blood with the Angola people and their sympathies are once again fully committed to the support of their tribesmen in Angola as a result of recent events at Macusso". The example suggests the complicated ways in which the liberation struggles of Angola and Namibia were entangled in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

In 1969 the fifth unit of Namibian guerrillas to be sent from Tanzania were specifically tasked to establish a military base in the Kavango region, like that which had previously been established at Ongulugwoombashe in Ovamboland. The group were led by Alfred Veshitile with six other men. It crossed from Botswana into the Mukwe area of the Kavango on 24th December, 1969. The commander, Veshitile, and four of his men, the Deputy-Commander, Fredrick Buiswalelo, the Political Commissar Martin Lukube, Ndopu and Jonas Siandja were killed in a battle the next day, whilst the rest of the group were able to escape across the border to Botswana (Namakalu, 2004: 19)

The National Archives of Namibia contain a document that seems to be a translation into Afrikaans of a document that had been carried by one of the guerrillas (originally written in Rukwangali). The document is important since it is the earliest evidence we have, to date, of SWAPO's efforts to mobilise support in Kavango. South African propaganda against SWAPO argued that it was an ethnic, rather than a national, organisation and that it was anti-Christian. The leaflet directly confronts both arguments. Firstly it argues "SWAPO is a community of all the inhabitants of NAMIBIA where we KAVANGOS can join so that our land can be freed of enemies so that we can govern ourselves". The document also deploys the Bible arguing that "The Boers are famous for preaching that they are Christians, but who is a Christian who does not obey the words 'Love thy neighbour as you love yourself'. What effort did the Boers make, or do

still, to live together with the Bantu . . . They look down at us as if we are not human". The leaflet urges local residents to provide 'food and water' to guerrillas and not to fear them, although they are 'thin and dirty'. It explains that the SWAPO combatants are "... the people who returned to their land like the ISRAELITES. They bring FREEDOM".¹⁴⁰ On Heroes Day in 2013, a commemorative gathering was held at the grave of the four ex-combatants, near the deserted military base at Bagani. Dr Ngarikutuke Tjiriange argued that a memorial should be placed at the site.¹⁴¹

The Challenge of Guerilla Operations in the Kavango in the 1970s

SWAPO faced major logistical challenges in transporting men and weapons from its bases in Tanzania. In 1973, SWAPO obtained land to build a camp in Zambia that became known as the 'Old Farm' and this reduced the distance for refugees leaving and combatants entering Namibia. However, it was the collapse of Portuguese colonial rule in Angola in 1975 that created the potential for SWAPO to revive its military operations in the Kavango Region. The challenge was that the territory north of the Kavango River was contested by the competing parties in the Angolan Civil War. SWAPO's access to the Kavango through south-east Angola would only be possible if the guerrillas co-operated or fought with the UNITA forces that controlled or contested the territory they had to cross. In June, 1975, Philipus Nghishiningwa Hainana (better known by his combat name 'Shikoka nge Itoshidulu ') and his deputy Mwetufa

140 NAN NAR 9 – 3 (Unrest). The translation is from an untitled document written in Afrikaans, whilst the handwriting on the top of the typed document is difficult to decipher it seems to suggest that the text is translated from a leaflet that was found on the body of a dead guerilla fighter and that the translation was completed on 31st January, 1970.

Mupopiwa Ndindi set up a base at Serpa Pinto (Menongue) in south-east Angola to help people trying to cross into exile from Kavango, although Operation Savannah, the South African invasion of Angola in August, 1975 caused a major disruption of the route (Shalli, 2014)

Selima Kadiva, a teacher at Gava, explains that, initially, people thought that, when PLAN cadres appeared in the village, they were FNLA forces from Southern Angola who had infiltrated into Namibia because of the civil war in Angola which broke out in 1975.¹⁴² When the Portuguese government was toppled by a coup in Lisbon, Portugal, the Portuguese deserted Fort Cuangar in southern Angola, opposite Nkurenkuru in Ukwangali, Shortly afterwards FNLA forces arrived on the northern banks of the Kavango River, (IDAF, 1982, p. 64). PLAN combatants entered the Ukwangali district in 1978 on a reconnaissance mission. A second group came to provide political education for civilians.¹⁴³ SWAPO was regarded as a communist movement and some local people were influenced by the South African propaganda about the negative impact of communism as an 'anti-Christian' ideology. Robert Karapo, who has lived at Muparara village since 1973, explained:

The first PLAN cadres who came in Ukwangali arrived in February 1978. When they arrived, he (Karapo) was in his field with his family and community members who came to help him cultivate his crops. Upon hearing from Leena Katumbu Mpasi (who deserted her house because of fear of the unknown soldiers). Karapo, with one Bushman called Kahenge, left all the people at the field and went back to his homestead to see who the soldiers were.¹⁴⁴ Upon arriving

142 Interview with Selima WayeraKadiva, Gava village, Ukwangali district, 24 July 2007.

143 Interview by Nambadi, A. with Kalomoh Ndeulitufa, the former PLAN commander designated to operate in Kavango, Tutungeni, Rundu, 13 May 2005.

144 Interview by Nambadi, A. with Robert Karapo, Muparara village, Ukwangali district,

at his homestead, they found a group of 80 unknown armed men who were scattered around the water point near his homestead. The armed man welcomed him with a question, asking him whether he knew them. Karapo told them that he thought they were SWAPO's armed forces. One of them asked him whether people believed that they had tails, and asked "Can you see it?" Out of fear he did not respond to the question. After talking, they asked him to give them something to eat; he gave them sikundu (a traditional soft drink). Among them was a tall man who claimed that when they used to come to the village with the church youth activities, the structure of the dam was still incomplete. While they were busy chatting, they heard a SADF soldier coming on a motorbike, and the PLAN cadres hid in the nearby bushes. When the PLAN cadres left the scene, Karapo also left to inform the people whom he had left at the field to come back home. When they arrived, the whole area near his homestead was occupied by the SADF armed forces and this left him with no choice but to present himself for identification. This saved their lives, otherwise the soldiers would have shot them all.¹⁴⁵

The account by Karapo indicates that the arrival of PLAN cadres in Ukwangali started as early as 1978 and this marked the beginning of PLAN's new infiltration.

However, Oswin Namakalu relates that there were other, earlier, efforts to infiltrate the Kavango Region which was designated the 'Eastern Front'. Namakalu argues that in May 1973, a platoon led by Commander

21 May 2003.

145 *ibid.*

Mandume 'Kayala' Iyambo and Commissar Hanganee Kavezeri Katjipuka penetrated into the Mbukushu area of the region. Katjipuka subsequently became the Field Commander for the 'Kavango Front' in September 1975, a position he held until his death in Zambia on 22 February 1977 (Namakalu, 2004, pp. 36-37, 57-58; SWAPO, 1996, p. 105). Ndeulitufa Kalomoh, a PLAN commander who operated in the Kavango region, explained that the inhabitants of Ukwangali district showed a positive attitude towards SWAPO as a movement and contributed to the struggle for independence in many ways.¹⁴⁶ The political education which they conducted amongst the local people helped them to get support from members of the communities, as well as church leaders, especially from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN) which had three main centres in Ukwangali (at Rupara, Nkurenkuru and Mpungu).

The Militarisation of the Kavango

The South Africans responded to the increasing threat of guerrilla operations inside Namibia by recruiting men within the Homelands and providing them with military training. The process would culminate in the establishment of the South West Africa Territorial Force in 1980 that consisted of a number of Battalions recruited in the different 'Homelands'. The 1 Battalion Kavango was recruited in 'Kavangoland' with 82 recruits in 1975 and was initially deployed to guard the 'border' posts for the Homeland (Grundy, 2012: 257). A former operations officer with 202 Battalion, Captain Alois Gende, noted that there was a conscious effort to recruit from all five recognised ethnic groups in the region.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ Interview by Nambadi, A. with Kalomoh Ndeulitufa, the former PLAN commander designated to operate in Kavango, Rundu, Tutungeni, 13 May 2005.

¹⁴⁷ Interview by author with Alloys Gende, Sambyu district, Kayengona, 27 December 2007.

In 1978 the unit was remodelled as 34 Battalion within the South African Defence Force (SADF). However when the South African Territorial Force was established in 1980, it became '202 Battalion'. At the time that it was disbanded in 1989 it was reported to have a strengths of around 1,500 men. The unit operated from its main base in Rundu and a secondary base at Mashare, about 60km east of Rundu. The unit was particularly deployed in combat operations within the Kavango and this created increased tension as families often had members who had joined 202 Battalion and others who had joined SWAPO in exile (Heitman, 2012: 19). It was believed that other military bases were established in western Kavango at Musese, Nepara, Nkurenkuru, Mpungu and Mauni the regional border between Kavango and the former Ovambo regions on the western side of the current Kavango west region.

The collapse of Portuguese rule in Angola in 1974 led to a massive militarisation of northern Namibia with major bases being quickly constructed to provide support to 'Operation Savannah', the South African operation to try and prevent the establishment of an MPLA Government in Angola. Ovamboland, Kavango and Caprivi became "security districts" under the control of the SADF with Kavango and Western Caprivi as Sector 20. (IDAF, 1982, pp.5, 30). The operational area was divided into three military sectors namely, Sector 10 (Kaokoland and Ovamboland), Sector 20 (Kavangoland, West Caprivi, and Bushmanland) and Sector 70 (East Caprivi).

The military headquarters of the three sectors were at Oshakati in Ovamboland, Rundu in Kavangoland and Katima Mulilo in Caprivi (IDAF, 1982, p.14). On the eastern side of the Kavango region, two military bases were located at Mashare and Bagani, 60 km and 200 km respectively along the Kavango River east of Rundu. In February 1983, Musese military

base, 90 km west of Rundu in Ukwangali was established.¹⁴⁸ The base had a checkpoint, a fuel filling station, and a military watch tower which was occupied by soldiers with binoculars all the time to regularly monitor the movement of people coming to the base from Angola and Namibia.

Alois Gende, a former Captain in the SADF from Kavango, remembered that the first military bases in Ukwangali were at Nkurenkuru, Simanya, Mpungu, Nepara and Musese.¹⁴⁹ He acknowledged that although there were two military bases in Rundu, the biggest base in Kavango was at Nepara in Ukwangali district because of its strategic location, as the base had a borehole for water, a filling station supplying diesel fuel for helicopters and armoured military vehicles, e.g. Casspirs and Buffels. Nepara base also had an airfield strip and a radio which facilitated communications for SADF military operations. Rundu, the administrative capital of Kavango, was gradually transformed into one of the most heavily militarised towns in Namibia.

In 1986, extensive reconstruction to extend the runways at Rundu airfield increased the logistical capacity to allow larger helicopters, which carried up to 20 soldiers, to land and take off. The helicopters flew from Rundu to conduct military operations within the region and in Angola. Whenever the Koevoet forces were tracking a PLAN guerilla fighters in the region, a South African Air Force (SAAF) Alouette helicopter gunship and a spotter plane provided support. Mirage jets were also stationed at Rundu airfield on standby, awaiting orders. By mid-1986, the SADF had installed huge radar controlled and anti-aircraft guns around the whole perimeter of the Rundu military airfield

148 Interview by Karapo Herbert with Alois Gende, Sambyu district, Kayengona 27 December 2007.

149 interview by Karapo Herbert with Alois Gende , Sambyu district , kayengona 27 december 2007..

To prevent PLAN infiltration, Musese base operated a road block where every vehicle and passenger was searched. The identification demanded at the checkpoint was an identity card, and those who were not in a position to produce identity cards were suspected of being PLAN combatants. The checkpoint at Musese base was also used to screen SWAPO supporters buying fuel and agricultural products like maize meal. For intelligence purposes, SADF informers (spies) used to report PLAN combatants' related activities and operations at Musese military base. Informers would also come to the base with the ostensible purpose of buying agricultural products and fuel but actually to provide information.¹⁵⁰

The increasing presence of the PLAN cadres in Ukwangali also led to the establishment of temporary military bases and military personnel at South African administrative institutions such as schools, tribal offices and agriculture extension offices. Allegedly, this was a measure taken to protect state property and the white staff members who worked at these institutions.¹⁵¹ Thus, temporary military bases and personnel were established at Kandjimi Murangi Secondary School and the Kahenge tribal office in Ukwangali district west of Kavango.¹⁵² Militarily the eastern part of the Kavango region was not as heavily infiltrated by PLAN combatants as the western part of the region, especially during the 1980s. Hilka Leevi argues that this was because of military developments in Angola with the eastern part of Angola being occupied by UNITA with its military headquarters at Jamba and Kakuchi, while the Western part of Angola was occupied by the MPLA, SWAPO's allies.¹⁵³

150 Interview by Karapo Herbert with Kasoma Paulus, a former Koevoet member, Rundu, Donkerhoek Location, 24 July 2007.

151 Interview by Karapo Herbert with Alois Gende, Sambyu district, Kayengona village, 27 December 2007.

152 Interview by Karapo Herbert with Kasoma Paulus, a former Koevoet member, Rundu, Donkerhoek Location, 24 July 2007.

153 *ibid.*

‘Typhoon’ Hits Kavango

When John Hooper attended a SADF briefing in Oshakati in 1986, he reported that the officer claimed that infiltration of the Kavango by PLAN fighters only began in 1980 and ‘peaked in 1983’ (Hooper, 1990: 35). Whilst it is clear that PLAN operations took place in the region before and after this period, the evidence does suggest that the early 1980s were the period when PLAN operations in the Kavango were at their height. The ‘Roll of Honour’ listing the names of members of 202 Battalion killed in operations and the date of their death provides one indication of the changing intensity of the conflict in the region. A total of 25 members of the unit are listed as having been killed in action: 2 in 1977, none in 1978 and 1979, two in 1980 and 1981, five in 1982 and 14 in 1983. The casualty figures do not include the members of other units, such as Koevoet, but do suggest that 1983 was the most intense year of fighting inside the Kavango.¹⁵⁴ It is clear that PLAN combatants continued to operate in Kavango after this date. For example, in October, 1986 the head of South African forces in Namibia, General George Meiring, admitted that they estimated there were about 50 PLAN guerrillas operating inside Kavango (and claimed that they had captured the commander, ‘Akushinda’).¹⁵⁵

The early 1980s also saw an increase in the recruitment of local people in Kavango to the security forces. Captain Willem Fouche and Warrant Officer Johan Nortje were sent to Rundu in April, 1981 to train ‘special constables’ to serve as bodyguards to traditional leaders and members of the Kavango Legislative Assembly. An initial force of 135 were recruited, but in May, 1981 seventy-five of these men were selected to start the first Koevoet units in Kavango with their base at *Arendsnes*- ‘the Eagle’s Nest’

154 http://www.justdone.co.za/roh/main.php?page=List_People&UnitAbv=SWA202. Accessed on 7th November, 2015.

155 African Contemporary Record, 1986, vol. 17, p B702.

(Stiff, 2004: 147-148).

Ekandjo provides an overview of the commanding officers in the Kavango. The full names of the commanding officer on the Kavango war front was Ndeulikufa Naeman Kalomoh Akushinda. However he used the combat names Kambare kanazendeke, Rum Zomungaragara and Odjasihako. Odjasihako can be translated as 'The man operating in the bush'. The other combat name Kambare kanazendeke describes the military cap worn with one side folded down. Combat names were intended to confuse the South African security forces.

Commander Kalomoh recalled that 'Kandjafa ka Leena' served as the Political Commissar, Comrade German Itana as 'Communication and Underground Operations Officer', Comrade Mbwangela was the Medical Officer, Comrade Shaende the Sabotage Commander and Comrade Amukwa the Anti-air Defence Commander. Commander Kalomoh noted that after crossing into Kavango they divided into small groups. One unit was led by Comrade Festus Nujoma (Combat Name Omuthemba Gwoko Nayena) was well known in ukwangali and operated around Nkurenkuru, Katwitwi and Mpungu. A second unit commanded by Comrade Musanda from Sandi operated near Tondoro, whilst Haindongo Kashuku operated in the Rupara district area up to the tarred road heading towards Grootfontein.

The commander of engineers was Etanga Iya Kandove and the first intelligence officer, was Amon Haikonga well known as Haikota who was deputised by Oli Kalyata (known by the combat name Oli). Commander Kalomoh appointed Oli as his intelligence officer for the eastern front. Amutumwa took over from Oli and after the death of Amutumwa, Kudumo and John took over the intelligence role in the region. The political commissar on the eastern front was Jackson Nzamene. A third

unit was commanded by Comrade Julius Amutumwa who operated in the eastern front in the Gciriku area. A fourth unit was commanded by Comrade Katengela as the Platoon Commander for Amutumwa and operated in the Mbukushu area.

The compilation of a full and detailed chronology of military conflicts in the Kavango region will require more extensive research and access to the SWAPO and SADF archives. However, a few actions did feature in contemporary newspapers. For example on 11th May, 1982 there was a co-ordinated attack on a school where military person were teaching in Rundu and the military base at Nkurenkuru that killed Rifleman Jacques du Preez and Special Constable Asser Kamwanga.¹⁵⁶ Another incident took place on 13th February, 1983, when an attack was launched on a camp of 'Special Constables' at Katwitwi which resulted in the death of seven people. In April, 1983, eight soldiers from 202 Battalion were killed by PLAN in the west of Kavango near the small settlement of Puza.¹⁵⁷ On 28th May, 1983, PLAN attacked the army base at Musese, about 90km west of Rundu which caused considerable damage to equipment at an irrigation project being developed by the First National Development Corporation (FNDC) near the base.¹⁵⁸ An inquest in August, 1984 described the death of a Rifleman, Augustinus Mbambo in a rocket attack on a 202 Battalion patrol.¹⁵⁹

156 'Suddenly All Hell Was Triggered: Midnight Attack', Windhoek Observer, 15th May, 1982, 'Police Outpost Attacked', Windhoek Observer 22nd January, 1983.

157 '8 Soldiers Massacred', Windhoek Observer, 3rd September, 1983.

158 'Trapped in Bomb Attack', Windhoek Observer, 4th June, 1983.

159 'Rocket Fire Used in Ambush', Windhoek Observer, 8th August, 1984.

Traumatic Civilian Memories of the Liberation Struggle in the Kavango

The strong relationship which developed between SWAPO cadres and the inhabitants of the Ukwangali area during the eighties led the South African security forces to introduce a curfew as a measure to control people's movements. The curfew restricted people from moving about in public and required them to remain indoors between specific hours, usually at night. A curfew is a regulation restricting or forbidding the public circulation of the people and requiring people to remain indoors between specific hours- usually at night (Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1990, p.284).

The curfew system had serious social and political implications because everyone who was caught travelling after six o'clock could be shot. If a car was caught travelling after this time, everybody in the vehicle would be searched and would not be allowed to travel until the next day. Even when someone was sick, people were not allowed to travel after six o'clock. People who owned vehicles, which were scarce at that time, were suspected of transporting and supplying the needs of PLAN combatants. Teachers who lived in the interior of Ukwangali and owned vehicles were accused of supplying PLAN combatants with batteries to enable them to communicate with their military bases in southern Angola. People living on the banks of the Kavango River were ordered to remove their canoes from the river which marked the border with Angola.¹⁶⁰ This action was enforced because local civilians were accused of providing their canoes as a mode of transport to PLAN cadres to cross the Kavango river into Namibia and back into Angola.

160 Interview by author with Kandjimi Willem, Gava village, Ukwangali district, 26 December 2007.

Proclamation R89 of 1976 created the power of detention without trial for the South African security forces operating in the Kavango and Caprivi (Amnesty International, 1982, p.3). As the conflict intensified, the legislation became increasingly draconian. In May 1979, martial law under AG 9 was applied to the northern “homelands” of Ovamboland and quickly extended to Kavangoland and Caprivi (IDAF, 1982, p.9).

The most traumatic memories of the struggle for civilians were of the atrocities and brutalities committed by the South Africa Defence Force (SADF) and Koevoet members who operated in the Kavango region. The first Koevoet unit in the Kavango Region was established by Captain Willem Fouche in 1981 with 75 men based at a camp in Rundu that became known as *Arendsnest* (‘The Eagle’s Nest’) 10 to 20km out of Rundu on the Grootfontein road, in reference to the fish eagle emblem of the unit. It was given the call sign ‘Zulu Four’ (Stiff, 2004, pp.147-148). The death of Jonas Hamukwaya, a teacher at Namutuntu in Ukwangali district west of Kavango, who was interrogated by the Koevoet forces unit members for hosting and collaborating with PLAN cadres before he died, was one of the worst incidents that is still remembered locally (Herbstein and Evenson, 1989, p.92). Hamukwaya and Katanga (from Kakoro village) were, allegedly, beaten to death by Koevoet members on 18 November 1982.¹⁶¹

Naingwendje Isack, an 80 year-old man who lives at Simanya in western Kavango, vividly recalled the trauma experienced by civilians:

PLAN combatants used to visit our homestead during the night to avoid being seen by their enemies (the SADF and Koevoet forces). They used to tell us (civilians) that they
had come to liberate the country and we must not tell their

¹⁶¹ ‘Kavango detainees savagely beaten, eye-witnesses relate’, Windhoek Advertiser, 30 November, 1982. p1.

*enemies their whereabouts. This resulted in us having dual ways of dealing with these forces. For example, whoever came, civilians were expected to co-operate, and we always pretended to be non-supporters of either force.*¹⁶²

Individuals in the region still live with their traumatic memories. Civilians who collaborated with SWAPO and provided assistance to PLAN cadres were under strict surveillance and experienced threats and harassment, creating a climate of fear. Individuals caught by PLAN for collaborating with South African forces were assassinated. Whilst the actions of the PLAN cadres can be justified as an act of self-defense, their brutal actions had a profound impact on some families.

Koevoet, too, were feared and were associated with physical abuse as every Koevoet unit which operated in Kavango had a skilled interrogator. People believed Koevoet executed those who refused to reveal the whereabouts of PLAN fighters (Herbstein and Evenson, 1989, p. 73). The reality was that if civilians supported SWAPO against Koevoet, they got into trouble with Koevoet; if they supported Koevoet against SWAPO, they got into trouble with PLAN. Civilians found themselves between a rock and a hard place. The testimonies of the civilians in Ukwangali give us a sense of the micro-politics of the time and add breadth and depth to the broader national narratives of the Namibian armed liberation struggle.

Johanna Hausiku who lived at Zigizi and whose daughter left the country to flee into exile explained that all those suspected of collaborating with SWAPO were arrested, blindfolded and kept in a Casspir. The victim was then driven around and disorientated, beaten with a rifle butt and threatened with death if they did not co-operate. Once the blindfold was removed, they would be roughly interrogated by an unknown officer.

¹⁶² Interview by author with Naingwendje Isack, Simanya, Ukwangali district, 25 June 2007.

She also recalls that one day she was visited by the South African Police (SWAPOL) and told that her daughter had died in a military contact, although this was not true. The Koevoet and army units regularly patrolled villages with their armoured vehicles and conducted searches and raids (Hinz and Gevers, 1989: p. 42). One can describe the military presence in the region as one that 'normalised' everyday violence. "One day I, myself (Karapo Herbert), was slapped by a Koevoet member who looked drunk. On this day, my parents were not around. When Koevoet arrived, I ran to hide at the San huts near our homestead, but I was singled out in the hut by one Koevoet member and taken back home where I was given some slaps before they departed".¹⁶³ Koevoet liked to give 'performances' of their power.

If civilians were taken to detention the treatment that they received during questioning was often humiliating. Mr Johannes Tjapwa described the situation of being arrested and taken to an army base at Musese in 1982 where detainees were held in small cages was a nightmare and he noted that he was 'forced to imitate the different sounds of various animals such as cows, dogs, cats and donkeys'.¹⁶⁴ After Mr Jako Kangayi, a headmaster at Nkurenkuru Primary School then, was arrested in the same year. He described a 'device' that was '... tied to his small fingers or attached to his tongue and to the back of his head – producing shocks which caused dizziness and faintness'.¹⁶⁵

Mr Hans Röhr of the Namibian Christian Democratic Party (NCDP) held a new conference at the Minen Hotel in Tsumeb in August, 1983 in which eight witnesses presented evidence of their experience after they had been detained by the security forces. One, Mr Johannes Kasamba, a

163 Interview by author with Johanna Hausiku, Zigizi village, Ukwangali district, 25 July 2007.

164 –Disturbing Findings', Windhoek Observer, 27th February, 1982.

165 –Disturbing Findings', Windhoek Observer, 27th February, 1982.

nurse from Kakuhu clinic, also described ‘cages’ that prisoners were held in at the army base in Rundu which he described as a ‘sort of shed made of zinc and divided into partitions, properly protected by barbed wire, even on the roof’. Mr Kasamba remembered the camp having eight of these ‘cages’.¹⁶⁶

The most degrading and traumatic form of violence was that of exhibiting dead corpses. Bodies of PLAN insurgents killed during operations were tied to the spare wheels or at the back of a Casspir and people were invited to “see their SWAPOs” (Hinz and Gevers, 1989, pp. 45-46). I, too, experienced the lasting trauma of this brutal display. In 1983, one PLAN fighter was killed at Ngururasi, 10 km east of Muparara village, and when the Koevoet members arrived at Muparara village, everybody in the homestead of the late Robert Karapo was ordered out of their homestead to view the corpse. It was my home village and it was the first time I had seen a dead person. I was only 11 years old by then. The photographs of Koevoet armoured vehicles and the dead corpses of PLAN combatants tied onto a Casspir still revived a sense of fear amongst interviewees many years later (Stiff, 1999, pp. 38, 357). Brison maintains that trauma generates frequent ‘flashbacks’ to events of extreme violence and that we should not underestimate the lasting impact of violent encounters (1999, p. 39). Many Namibians in Kavango and other regions of the country still have traumatic images such as this locked in their memories.

Landmines

One of the most important factors in the Namibian Liberation Struggle was logistics. Both sides had to transport men and supplies over vast distances and through difficult terrain. Roads were the main arteries

¹⁶⁶ ‘Violent Incursion under the Guise of Protection’, Windhoek Observer, 6th August, 1983.

which enabled the South African army to send men and weapons to an operational area. Landmines were, therefore, one of the effective weapons that could be used to disrupt the supply chain. In 1983, the completion of 'a beautiful road, of high standard' linking Grootfontein and Rundu meant that the army could send its materials quicker and more safely. The road became a strategic military target and on 30th August, 1983 a landmine detonated under a Mercedes lorry carrying 27,000 litres of fighter jet fuel with the result that traffic was banned from travelling on the road between 6pm and 7.30am.¹⁶⁷ Ten weeks later, in November, a bus detonated a landmine on the same road¹⁶⁸

The landmine blasts led the authorities to identify a 55.5 kilometre stretch of the road, already nicknamed as *Vrot Kol* (the 'Rotten Spot') as a particular security hazard. In an attempt to increase visibility a major operation was undertaken and 'bush and trees . . . removed for a width of 250 metres on either side of the highway'.¹⁶⁹

Gabriel Munguya, a nurse at Nepara clinic, explains that from 1980 onwards the inland road from Nepara up to Muparara was not safe to travel because of landmines, although the road was used by both civilians and the South African military. Landmines were planted by both PLAN combatants and the SADF, leading to incidents where landmines planted in the road were detonated by civilians.¹⁷⁰ For example, the main road from Nepara village to Muparara village suffered four landmine explosions. Munguya believes that South African forces would plant a landmine in the road deliberately, and once detonated by civilians, the

167 'Shadow of Terro Over New Road – Landmine Blast', Windhoek Observer, 3rd September, 1983.

168 'New Dread: Nocturnal Bombers Stalk New Highway', Windhoek Observer, 12th November, 1983.

169 'Destruction to Leave Bullets Unimpeded Flight', Windhoek Observer, 12th November, 1983.

170 Interview by author with Gabriel Munguya, Nepara village, Ukwangali district, 27 July 2007.

South Africans would accuse PLAN combatants of planting landmines and killing innocent civilians.

Gabriel Munguya argues that a landmine which exploded near Nepara clinic was planted by the SADF in the main road, and was meant for the *Hompa* of Ukwangali who was regarded as an influential SWAPO collaborator. Fortunately on the day of the incident, the *Hompa* did not travel to his village but those who travelled in his car on that day were two of his brother's sons, Moses Kandjimi and Pius Kandjimi. The two men drove over the landmine, detonating it. The explosion seriously injured Pius Kandjimi and led to the amputation of his leg.¹⁷¹ During the 1980s, the Nepara to Muparara road became very unsafe, especially for those whose children were at secondary schools across the region.

Detention and Interrogation

SWAPO activists were subjected to frequent arrest, detention, beating and torture. Section 30 of the 1957 South African Defence Act granted absolute immunity to the members of its security forces to murder, assault and commit other criminal acts for the purposes of the 'prevention and suppression of terrorism' in any operational area (Herbstein and Evenson, 1989, p. 80). This Act had a huge impact on the inhabitants of the Kavango region, and on Ukwangali district in particular. In all the declared war zones, the security forces used the Administrator General's proclamation AG 9 Act of 1977 which allowed detention without trial and for prisoners to be held *incommunicado* for thirty days. (Hinz and Gevers, 1989, p. 52). AG 9 allowed South African officers to arrest people without any warrant and interrogate them without them having committed any offence. The proclamation (Detention for the Prevention of Political

171 Ibid.

Violence and Intimidation) was used by the security police to remove SWAPO activists for an indefinite period (Herbstein and Evenson, 1989, p. 77). These Acts used by the South African forces affected civilians both socially, psychologically and politically.

Paulus 'Njege' Kasoma, a former Koevoet unit member, remembered that the increased infiltration of PLAN combatants into Ukwangali district in the early 1980s resulted in concentrated Koevoet operations in the area. Kasoma recalled that there were only a few individuals who could be bribed with goods to provide them with information. The basic strategy used for interrogations was violence, for example, using radio batteries to give electric shocks to captives. Once the terminals of the battery wires were clipped on to the victim's ears, and the handle turned (as with the telephones at that time) the battery produced an electric current that shocked.¹⁷² Wellem Kandjimi, who was detained at Nepara base, claimed that every detainee arrested was tied and locked up in a room where a generator which provided power (electricity) to the base was kept.¹⁷³

Many prominent figures in the Kavango region were arrested and beaten. Among them were Severinus Siteketa, a prominent businessmen, the late Jako Kangayi, the principal of Nkurenkuru combined school, Jonas Hamukwaya, a teacher at Namutuntu who died after being interrogated and tortured by Koevoet forces, and a number of civilians who owned vehicles.¹⁷⁴ Kangayi, the Principal of Nkurenkuru Combined School described his interrogation in early 1982 to a French journalist:

*I was blindfolded. They started beating me. I fell down.
They sat me in a chair and put electrodes in my ears.*

172 Interview by author with Kasoma Paulus, a former Koevoet member, Rundu, Donkerhoek Location, 24 July 2007.

173 Interview by author with Wellem Kandjimi, Gava, Ukwangali district, 26 December 2007.

174 Interview by author with Nestor Mufenda, Rundu, Tutungeni location, 28 December

Before each discharge, someone asked me a question, but no one was listening to my answer. They seemed to be enjoying themselves. They forced me to open my mouth to put electrodes in it, and the shocks started up again under the tongue, then on the nape of my neck. This lasted three long days. On New Year's Eve, others came to torture me. They were slightly drunk. They spat the scraps from their meals in my face. They laughed like madmen. They then carried me into a cell where I found, lying shoulder to shoulder, four other prisoners who were in bad condition. The cell consisted of a metal structure two metre's long and one metre high. It was impossible to stand up, especially since the ceiling, which had a circular arch, was lined with barbed wire. They allowed us a daily 15-minute "walk" in the courtyard. We had to trot in a circle and, depending on the day and the guard's whim, imitate the cries of pigs, cows or chickens. This was effective; finally, I no longer felt the least bit human.¹⁷⁵

In most cases, suspects were detained and questioned at military bases, with those arrested in Ukwangali normally being detained at Nepara military base. In terms of AG 9, suspects were arrested and detained for 30 days without any trial. An extension of an extra 30 days could be requested after the first 30 days lapsed. The most prominent activists in Ukwangali who were victims of AG 9 Act of 1977 were the late Jako Kangayi, Severinus Siteketa, Remigius Siyave, Nimrod Muremi, Silas and Mufenda Nestor.¹⁷⁶ Mufenda recalled that many of those who were arrested were

175 Claude, P. 1982, 'On the Angolan Border—The South African Army Has Lost the "Battle for Hearts!"' *Le Monde*, 26 March, p.7. Translation in Foreign Broadcasts Information Service, Sub-Saharan Africa Report, No. 2642, 18 June, 1982.

176 Interview by author with Nestor Mufenda, Rundu, Kavango Regional Council, 28 December 2007.

taken to Osire. Inside Namibia, civilians were the only channels through which PLAN combatants could obtain what they needed in terms of food, money, information and clothing, so PLAN combatants frequently went to the homesteads of these prominent activists which placed a strain on the resources of these homesteads and made it difficult to maintain security.

A large number of detentions took place during the period in the early 1980s when PLAN operations in the Kavango Region were at their height. In December 1983, a group of more than 20 detainees were released, including Gideon Nestor, Rev. Heikki Hausiku and Mufenda Nestor from Ukwangali. Three civilians who were detained between July and October, 1983 would later receive an out-of-court settlement following claims that they had been tortured by Koevoet.¹⁷⁷ In June 1984 Severinus Siteketa, a political activist in Ukwangali, was arrested at Mukekete and taken to Mururani control post along the Rundu-Grootfontein tarred road. At Mururani, the Special Forces used the police station with its four cells to keep detainees in solitary confinement, torture them with electric shocks, deny them food or give them bad food. This treatment nearly killed Severinus Siteketa. After six months of such treatment, Siteketa was released with others including, Mpasi Hausiku and his brother.¹⁷⁸

The second arrest of Severinus Siteketa was in terms of the notorious AG 27. Under this proclamation, the Administrator-General, all commissioned and non-commissioned members of the South African security force, the military and the police were empowered to detain any person uncharged and incommunicado for up to thirty days for interrogation and the detainees had no right to know the reason for their arrest. This time Siteketa was arrested while he was shopping at the ENOK shop in Rundu

177 African Contemporary Record, 1986, vol. 17, p. B703.

178 Milk, H. 2003 "Kavango during the Namibian war of liberation," <<http://kavango.info/Voito.htm>> [accessed on ? give correct date_

and was taken to Osire, 600 km away from the Kavango. At Osire, Siteketa was detained for four months before the security forces transferred him to Bethanie in the south of Namibia. During this time he was with 40 other detainees from Kavango, including the late Jako Kangayi, Kaoko Nairenge and Gideon Mpasi.

At Bethanie, Siteketa was kept with 12–15 other political detainees in a cell. Two weeks after his release in January 1986, Koevoet took him to a notorious camp called “Bitter Soet” (now the Elizabeth Nepemba Rehabilitation Centre). This camp was hidden in thick forest about 2 km east of the tarred road to Grootfontein, 30 km south of Rundu. Even the military believed it was a police training camp, sometimes referred to as “Malan’s Camp”. In reality it was a detention camp equipped with torture facilities used by Koevoet, far away from inhabited areas. Kept in extremely harsh conditions, Siteketa suffered the incredible heat of the day and the cold of the night in a small cell made completely of corrugated iron. Every detainee arrested in the region went through Bitter Soet for interrogation and torture and some are likely to have been broken by their treatment. Torture and mistreatment was part of the daily routine of the Koevoet soldiers who kept themselves unidentifiable. When they opened the cell door to push in his food, Siteketa had to turn away and face the corrugated iron sheet wall. After another six months he was set free. After this systematic mistreatment the then 43-year old Siteketa looked like an old, broken man, unrecognisable even to his family.¹⁷⁹

Schools were also affected by the armed struggle. Thadeus Nekaro, a former learner at Kandjimi Murangi Secondary School, explained that the struggle had a tremendous social impact on schools across the region. He recalled that, in 1983, the SADF military base, which was located close to

179 Milk, H. 2003, “Kavango during the Namibian war of liberation,” <<http://kavango.info/Voito.htm>> [accessed on 2 March 2008]

Kandjimi Murangi Secondary School in Ukwangali, was attacked by PLAN and, as a result, the base was moved into the school premises where the soldiers acted as vigilantes to protect the lives of the learners and teachers (which included some white South African soldiers).¹⁸⁰ Josef Kandjimi, the first black principal at the Kandjimi Murangi Secondary School, also remembers that the situation was complicated in the sense that control in the schools was both military and academic.¹⁸¹ During 1983, the secondary school was guarded by South African soldiers who stayed in the school day and night.

The soldiers used to shoot wildly throughout the night.¹⁸² The motive behind the shooting was that South Africans had, allegedly, learned through their informers that PLAN combatants were planning to abduct all the learners from the school and take them to Angola. A truck from the Department of Water Affairs that was on its way to Rundu was attacked by PLAN at Rupara. Two South African soldiers (white teachers) were seriously injured and one girl from Kandjimi Murangi Secondary School, Hermine Sadwere, died in the ambush.¹⁸³

Immanuel Shikukumwa, the first black Inspector of Education in the Kavango region, explained that the presence of the Koevoet units and its operations disrupted school activities in the region because the Koevoet members accused the children of clearing away the footprints of the PLAN combatants in the morning on their way to school. The retired inspector explained that, though he was the Inspector of Education, his power was not respected at all.¹⁸⁴ He vividly recalled how Koevoet disrupted the

180 Interview by author with Thaddeus Nekaro, Tutungeni, Rundu, 10 December 2007.

181 Interview by Karapo Herbert with Josef Kandjimi, Tutungeni, Rundu, 11 December 2007.

182 interview by Karapo Herbert with Josef Kandjimi, Tutungeni , Rundu , 11 Dcemebr 2007.

183 Interview by Karapo Herbert with Thaddeus Nekaro, Tutungeni, Rundu, 10 December 2007.

184 Interview by Karapo Herbert with Immanuel Shikukumwa, retired Inspector of

teaching process, as learners were taken out of classes for questioning and their teachers were accused of teaching their learners communist ideology. Wellem Kandjimi, a retired principal, agreed that teaching was disrupted. Koevoet normally visited schools in the early hours of the day and would spend an hour questioning learners and teachers. During the mid-1980s, some inland schools even closed down, for example the schools at Gava, Sikarosompo, Ncungu, Ncancana and Kamupupu.¹⁸⁵ Learners sometimes deserted their homesteads with their parents to settle along the Kavango River while some crossed into Angola.

The Traditional Authority of Ukwangali and the Struggle

The late *Hompa* of Ukwangali district, Daniel Sientu Mpasi, explained that the struggle had serious social and political impacts on the inhabitants of his territory. Mpasi claimed that the South African regime suspected that the majority of PLAN combatants were originally from Ovamboland but infiltrated through the Ukwangali district. The position of the *Hompas* in Kavango was sensitive; all the *Hompas* were members of the Kavango Legislative Council and received some military protection. The *Hompa* noted that when the civilians in his district were illtreated, he tried to intervene and urged the South African forces to stop mistreating innocent people. The same sentiment was echoed by Kasoma Paulus, a former Koevoet member who stated that the *Hompa* of Ukwangali and his people were affected by the armed liberation struggle.¹⁸⁶

Education, Cassava village, Ukwangali district, 13 December 2006.

185 Interview by author with Wellem Kandjimi, Gava, Ukwangali district, 26 December 2007.

186 Interview by author with Kasoma Paulus, a former Koevoet member, Rundu, Donkerhoek Location, 24 July 2007.

Kasoma reported that on several occasions the *Hompa* convened meetings with the senior South African military personnel in the region at the Kahenge tribal office to complain about assaults and the destruction of mahangu fields and grain stores.¹⁸⁷

Muzimba, a Nyemba who emigrated from Angola to escape war, settled at Ngururasi, a village in Ukwangali in 1983. He and his wife and children were assaulted by Koevoet members who accused them of providing SWAPO cadres with food.¹⁸⁸ His mahangu grain stores were set on fire as he watched. This led Muzimba and his family to return to Angola. The *Hompa* of Ukwangali also pointed out that his palace was attacked several times by the South African forces. In one incident six mortar bombs were fired at his homestead, but fortunately none of the shells hit his palace or injured people in the house. The attack followed his visit to meet SWAPO leaders abroad in the 1980s.

The main reason for the strict control over the *Hompa's* palace, according to Kasoma, was that he was accused of allowing PLAN combatants to infiltrate and operate in his tribal territory.¹⁸⁹ The *Hompa* invited journalists from England, Switzerland and France to come to Mayara village to witness what was taking place in his territory. His actions were not supported by the South African regime and the *Hompa* was accused of exposing internal matters to the international community. The invitation to foreign journalists prompted a South African senior military officer (based in Rundu) also to visit his palace.

The military officer from Rundu, whose task was to investigate, stayed a full week at the *Hompa's* palace to investigate all the accusations made

187 *ibid.*

188 Personal communication. Re: assaults and destruction of people's property conducted by the Koevoet forces on civilians, 1983-1989.

189 Interview by author with Kasoma Paulus, a former Koevoet member, Rundu, Donkerhoek Location, 24 July 2007.

against the SADF.¹⁹⁰ The findings of the military officer were similar to those of the foreign journalists and this saved the *Hompa* from being accused of spreading misinformation. The *Hompa's* life was at risk during this period. Every day at curfew time he had to enter his bedroom and lock himself in, and he always used to sleep with his pistol next to him. The *Hompa's* principal guards were the very fierce dogs he *Hompa* Sientu Mpasi nightmares.¹⁹¹

Ndeulitufa Kalomoh, the PLAN commander who was deployed with his men to operate in the Ukwangali district, explained that his unit entered Ukwangali area for the first time in 1980 via Wiwi, a village in Mpungu constituency. From Wiwi district they proceeded to Katope Komugoro where they split up into smaller units of four to five men. He remembers the fear that made many people flee their homesteads and cluster near the river because they had been told that PLAN cadres were terrorists.

The PLAN combatants responded to the fearful reaction that they initially encountered: Kalomoh scheduled a meeting with the senior headman Muranda and *Hompa* Sientu Mpasi in 1983 at Namungundo. Reportedly, *Hompa* Mpasi had been a DTA supporter up to early 1982, but had been angered by attempted South African intimidation.¹⁹² At the 1983 meeting, Kalomoh told the two traditional leaders to tell the people that they must not live in fear and to return to their fields and livestock. He emphasised that they did not come to kill innocent civilians, but to fight the oppressors (whites).¹⁹³

190 Interview by author with Daniel Sientu Mpasi, the *Hompa* of Ukwangali district, Mayara village, 25 July 2007.

191 *ibid.*

192 Claude, P, 1982, 'On the Angolan Border—The South African Army Has Lost the "Battle for Hearts!" Le Monde, 26 March, p.7. Translation in Foreign Broadcasts Information Service, Sub-Saharan Africa Report, No. 2642, 18 June, 1982.

193 Interview by Nambadi, A. with Ndeulitufa Kalomoh, a former PLAN commander designated to operate in Kavango, Tutungeni, Rundu, 13 May 2005. 1980

The fact that a former member of the Kavango Legislative Council attended the meeting convened by Kalomoh gives a clear indication that, though some traditional leaders were members of the Legislative Council, they also worked with SWAPO. Rudolf Ngondo, a member of the Kavango Legislative Assembly, was allegedly, on the mysterious Koevoet 'death list' that surfaced in early 1980.¹⁹⁴ However, in April 1981 a unit of bodyguards for members of the Kavango Legislative Assembly was established and it was these men who formed the basis for the first Koevoet unit that was established in the Kavango region in 1982 (Stiff, 2004, p.147-148).

The message conveyed at the meeting with the Kwangali Traditional Authority was similar to that which had been found on a captured SWAPO leaflet signed by the 'Chief in Commander, Namibia Liberation Army, Dar-es-Salaam' which read: 'Freedom fighters must not attack missionaries or burn churches in particular given areas unless they act in self-defence. Freedom fighters are strictly forbidden to attack women, children and elderly people and civilians, unless the situation constitutes danger and the freedom fighters have to act in self-defence' (Stiff, 2004, p. 21).

The outcome of the meeting was that the people of Ukwangali returned to their villages and started to co-operate with PLAN cadres and the Ukwangali traditional authority led by *Hompa* Daniel Sientu Mpasu urged the local people to give logistical support to PLAN fighters. The PLAN commander, Kalomoh, known by his combat name '*Hakushida*', acknowledged that if the *Hompa* of Ukwangali had not encouraged his people to provide support, it would have been difficult for PLAN to carry out their activities in Ukwangali. However, Hilka Leevi, a survivor of the Cassinga massacre, argued that from the early sixties to the late eighties

194 'Alarming Whispers about Death Squad Code-Named Koevoet', Windhoek Observer, 7 June, 1980. p20.

most of the *Hompas* in Kavango would not associate themselves with political activities. She noted that it was not easy for the traditional leaders to be involved in political affairs because they were used by the South African colonial administration to serve as councillors. Cecil Thornberry, a senior official in UNTAG (the UN force that monitored the transition to independence in Namibia in 1989-1990) recalled that when they met with traditional leaders in Kavango on 25th June, 1989 they were told: “Until today we saw the exiles as enemies, but now we can accept them as our children” (Thornberry, 2004, p. 256)

Paulus Kasoma maintained that the relationship between the traditional leaders of Ukwangali and PLAN combatants who operated in Ukwangali was good.¹⁹⁵ He claimed that the influence of the traditional leaders of Ukwangali over the civilians enabled PLAN cadres to operate in the area until the late eighties. During the ten years Kasoma served in Koevoet, most of their military contacts took place in Ukwangali. The reported journey of *Hompa* Daniel Sientu Mpasi to visit the President of SWAPO, Sam Nujoma, abroad in 1986 contributed to an increased South African military presence in Ukwangali. The increased infiltration of PLAN combatants in Ukwangali in the early eighties also led to the establishment of more temporary and mobile military bases, apart from the two major bases at Musese and Nepara. The resignation of Reverend Nathanael Sirongo from the Legislative Council (he was the Vice-Chairperson in 1973) gives further evidence that the position of the members of the Council was complicated, as many youths went in exile from the Mpungu, Simanya and Nkurenkuru areas of Ukwangali.

¹⁹⁵ Interview by the author with Kasoma Paulus, a former Koevoet member, Rundu, Donkerhoek Location, , 24 July 2007.

Disappearances, Deaths and Deception

During the 1980s the disappearance of civilians from Ukwangali became common. For example, in December 1987, SWAPO alleged that Jonathan Liu and Jonathan Shushe, both elderly men from Kakuwa village in Ukwangali in the western part of Kavango region, had been abducted by the security forces, and they were never seen again. SWAPO highlighted their concern that “the police were under no obligation to release information on detainees held under AG 9” (SWAPO, 1987: 17). AG 9 was a tool which gave huge powers to the South African security forces.

The South African regime’s strategy of using “Recce” (Reconnaissance) units dressed in the same uniforms as PLAN combatants, walking barefoot, speaking Oshiwambo and carrying AK-47 automatic rifles made matters confusing for local residents (Stiff, 1999, p.219). In June 1982, Gideon Mbanze recognized a man who entered his cuca shop with an AK 47 (the standard weapon used by PLAN fighters). He discovered that he was part of a unit of the ‘security forces’ led by Lukas Mutolwa, based at Leevi Hakusembe Secondary School who claimed that their work was ‘to terrorise people, masquerading as SWAPO insurgents’.¹⁹⁶

Growing up in Ukwangali, my [KK] experience of the “Recce” units was that they used to visit people’s homesteads during the night under the pretext of being PLAN combatants, while they were in fact units of the SADF. Community members provided food and other assistance and then the next morning the same forces would come and harass and assault people in the homestead because they had been hosting ‘PLAN cadres’ and provided them with food. Civilians were filled with doubt and mistrust as to who was really PLAN.¹⁹⁷ The unit used AK-47 rifles and

196 ‘SWAPO or Soldier?’, Windhoek Observer, 19th June, 1982.

197 Interview by author with Gabriel Munguya, Nepara village, Ukwangali district, 27 July 2007.

uniforms similar to that of SWAPO's military wing PLAN (SWAPO, 1987: 18). However, PLAN adapted to the South African strategy of disguising themselves as PLAN fighters by using combat names that made it easier for villagers to distinguish between the real PLAN fighters and fake ones. Selma Kadiva, a resident at Gava, confirmed that civilians lived in an environment of distrust.¹⁹⁸ Marital and family relationships were destroyed simply because those who were labelled as collaborators left their families for the security of towns such as Rundu or farms in the areas of Grootfontein, Otavi and Tsumeb.

Paulus Kasoma (known by his combat name *Njege*) explained the South African military strategy of using secret informants as 'spies' or 'informers' who received allowances from their employers and who created tension, mistrust and misunderstanding between PLAN cadres, the civilians and the traditional leaders. In most cases those identified as spies were discouraged by the PLAN cadres from engaging in such practices and those who did not co-operate were assassinated. For example, Olavi Munango, who worked for the Kavango Radio which used to broadcast anti-SWAPO propaganda, was assassinated by PLAN in 1984 at Mpungu village.¹⁹⁹

The most degrading and traumatic form of violence was that of exhibiting dead corpses. Bodies of PLAN insurgents killed during operations were tied to the spare wheels or at the back of a Casspir and people were invited to "see their SWAPOs" (Hinz and Gevers, 1989, pp. 45-46). I (KK), also experienced the lasting trauma of this brutal display. In 1983, one PLAN fighter was killed at Ngururasi, 10 km east of Muparara village, and when the Koevoet members arrived at Muparara, everybody in the

198 Interview by author with Selma Kadiva, Ukwangali district, Gava village, 25 July 2007.

199 Milk, H. 2003, "Kavango during the Namibian war of liberation," <<http://kavango.info/Voito.htm>> .[accessed 9 March 2008]

homestead of Robert Karapo was ordered out of their huts to view the corpse. It was my home and it was the first time I had seen a dead person. I was only 11 years old. The photographs of Koevoet armoured vehicles and the dead corpses of PLAN combatants tied onto a Casspir still revived a sense of fear amongst interviewees many years later (Stiff, 1999, pp. 38, 357). Susan Brison maintains that trauma generates frequent 'flashbacks' to events of extreme violence and that we should not underestimate the lasting impact of violent encounters (1999, p. 39).

South African propaganda presented SWAPO as an ethnic, 'Ovambo' movement that had no relevance to other ethnic groups. The most effective strategy used by the South African regime to spread their propaganda to the local people was by circulating leaflets and cartoons at schools that claimed that SWAPO was militarily weak (Nujoma, 2001, pp. 301-303). A former SWATF soldier, Karangane Florry, explained that the distribution of anti-SWAPO leaflets was a measure taken by the South African forces and its intelligence services to influence civilians against SWAPO.²⁰⁰

The South African Defence Force used the differences which emerged between the people as a strategy to segregate them politically and militarily in order to detect SWAPO collaborators. On this basis, civilians with personal motives used to report each other. Veronika Shillinge, who has lived at Mukekete village in Mpungu constituency since the 1970s, recalled a case in 1978 when PLAN combatants took a truck from the workers of the Department of Water Affairs who were fixing a water pump at Mukekete. At night the SADF visited the villagers to ask how the truck was stolen and accused them of having knowledge of the incident.

200 Interview by author with Karangane Florry, a former member of the South West Africa Territory Force (SWATF), Force No. 87879900, Otjomuise, Windhoek, 25 January 2008. Florry's military identification number was 8781900.

The theft of the truck led directly to the establishment of an SADF military base at Mpungu. The insecure situation in Mukekete led to some families deserting the village in 1983.

In the same year, Joseph Haindongo and his wife, Hillia Haindongo, were assassinated by an armed man with an AK-47 who, his daughter said, had questioned Haindongo about his possession of a rifle. This incident forced more villagers to desert Mukekete, leaving their livestock and property behind for better security and safety.²⁰¹ Shillinge suspected that these atrocities were committed by SADF members simply because the son of Josef and Hillia Haindongo had left the country to join the liberation struggle in exile. Shillinge also believed that the armed men who killed the couple were SADF members- although they were wearing PLAN uniforms.²⁰² The geographical location of the village, which is close to the former Ovamboland border, made it a strategic place.

Fillip Kanguma, a senior member of the same family, was also killed by an unidentified gunman at Mukekete. Shillinge, the daughter of the late Kanguma, explained that the death of Kanguma had a serious psychological effect on the entire family. The incident took place at night. They just heard dogs barking and later the sound of a gunshot – the shot from an armed man that killed him. The entire family left Mukekete and settled at Mpungu village in November 1983. When Veronika left Mukekete and relocated with her entire family at Mpungu she stopped teaching. The school at Mukekete then closed down as other teachers left the area; people lived in fear. The school at Mpoto, a village near Mukekete, also closed down completely from 1983 for a whole year.²⁰³

201 Interview by author with Veronika Shillinge, Ncancana, Ukwangali district, 14 December 2007. For a contemporary newspaper account of the murders see '13 Spent Cases at Scene of Double Slaying', Windhoek Observer, 15 October, 1983, p30.

202 Interview by author with Veronika Shillinge, Ncancana, Ukwangali district, 14 December 2007.

203 *ibid.* For more details see: 'Man , 83, Shot', Windhoek Observer, 10 December, 1983,

In 1983 a terrible incident took place at Gava when the SADF infantry unit ambushed a house where people were suspected of sheltering PLAN combatants. Heavy gunfire injured most of the people in the house and five died on the spot.²⁰⁴ The presence of heavily armoured South African forces in the district put the lives of civilians at risk. For example, in 1988 an innocent civilian, Ms Sarafine Muyenga, was killed by an army Casspir in Mpungu.²⁰⁵

Cattle herders were also accused of deliberately destroying the footprints of PLAN cadres, and so villagers were not allowed to release their livestock for grazing into the fields before 9 a.m. Mahangu (millet) crops and fences were also destroyed by Koevoet on the pretext that PLAN combatants were hiding in those fields.²⁰⁶ Wellem Kandjimi who lived at Gava in 1983 explained that one day PLAN cadres requested him to charge their battery as usual. When the PLAN cadres came to collect their battery, a “Recce” unit, pretending to be PLAN cadres, arrived at his house at the same time. A serious military contact took place and one boy, ‘David’, who ran out of the house for safety was shot dead.²⁰⁷

The insecurity created by the South African forces resulted in many people leaving their villages to live permanently in Angola. PLAN combatants regarded individuals who deserted their villages as South African collaborators, while the SADF and Koevoet regarded them as SWAPO collaborators. If one person in the family left the village, this created a problem where the entire family or village would be held accountable for the absence.²⁰⁸ The situation was unbearable because people were

p37.

204 *ibid.*

205 ‘Casspir Kills a Kavango Woman’, *Namibian*, 21st-27th October, 1988.

206 *ibid.*

207 Interview by author with Wellem Kandjimi, Gava, Ukwangali district, 26 December 2007.

208 Interview by author with Kasoma Paulus, a former Koevoet member, Rundu, Donkerhoek Location, 24 July 2007.

caught in the middle.

Looting people's goods was a common practice of the South African forces, and when they wanted meat, people's livestock in the field or on the roadside were shot. Sometimes cattle were severely injured which forced the owners to kill them. Haindongo Risto from Mbandja in Southern Angola, who had migrated to Mpungu and lived there since 1959, complained that his goats were killed by the South African forces without his consent. Haindongo complained that the security forces entered the homesteads of villagers at any time they wished, day or night.²⁰⁹ This affected the social economy of the villagers since most depended on subsistence farming where livestock are important assets in terms of family resources.

Conclusion

The Kavango played an early role in the armed struggle as an important route into exile for some of the first SWAPO activists who followed the contract labour transport routes to reach SWAPO's 'safe house' in Francistown, Botswana. However the fact that the majority of the early guerrilla fighters originated from 'Ovamboland' meant that the first efforts to infiltrate Kavango did not have the benefit of the more substantial political and kinship networks (to provide logistical support and intelligence) that existed in 'Ovamboland'. When Angola became independent in 1975, SWAPO was presented with a new opportunity to establish bases in south-east Angola and send PLAN fighters into Kavango. However, the fortunes of the armed struggle in Kavango were always entangled with the fighting between rival parties in Angola. SWAPO

²⁰⁹ Interview by author with Haindongo Risto, Mukekete village, Ukwangali district, 26 June 2007.

fighters were sometimes faced with the challenge of fighting their way through hostile territory in southern Angola in order to reach the border with Namibia.

The defeat of one of the competing Angolan political movements, the FNLA, resulted in a group of their former soldiers being recruited by South Africa to form 32 Battalion which operated from an, initially, secret base at Bagani. UNITA's operations in Angola also resulted in waves of, mainly vanyemba, refugees crossing into Kavango, disrupting the political demographics of a Kavango.²¹⁰ Homeland identity built on the notion of citizenship and representation being dependent upon membership on one of five tribes. South African strategy was always to seek to undermine Namibian nationalism by presenting the guerrillas as foreign forces that threatened traditional authorities.

The timing of the most intense period of military activity inside Kavango was related to the dynamics of the liberation struggle in Angola. In 1980, SWAPO was able to launch its most ambitious operation to infiltrate guerrilla units into Namibia. The 'Typhoon' units crossed the border from Angola in unprecedented numbers. One consequence of this was the establishment of more sustained guerrilla operations in Kavango with the most military casualties being recorded in the region in 1983. This chapter has sought to position the Kavango Regions in the broader context of the Namibian Liberation Struggle and to document some of the local factors which shaped the course of the armed struggle in these regions.

210 Shiremo, Shampapi, 'Putting the Vanyemba recognition issue in context', New Era, 15th May, 2015.

10. Following the Election Trail in Kavango, 1973-1989

– Jeremy Silvester

Introduction

Election victories sometimes seem inevitable with the benefit of hindsight. The 1989 election for the Constituent Assembly that drafted the constitution for the Republic of Namibia the Kavango electoral district was one of the most fiercely contested. With votes in 21 of the 23 electoral districts counted the national vote saw the DTA 8% ahead of SWAPO. In the last election that had been held in Kavango (in 1978) the DTA had won 87.5% of the vote and Dirk Mudge from the DTA leadership had chosen to vote in Rundu in the 1989 election to encourage the DTA vote. However, it became apparent that the DTA did not have a stronghold in the Kavango. SWAPO won a majority of votes in the Kavango electoral district and, with the massive SWAPO majority in the Ovambo electoral district, SWAPO swept to power. However, a review of the history of elections in Kavango will make it clear that the victory was not certain, nor predestined. The chapter will present the election victory as the product of a historical struggle over a period of time.

The aim of this brief chapter is to provide an overview of the introduction and evolution of the electoral process in Kavango. The chapter seeks to show the changing relationship between traditional forms of authority and popular perceptions of the legitimacy of decision-making. The

chapter also explores the tension that was generated in the contest for primacy that took place between notions of local, regional (or one might say 'Odendaal') and national identities. Challenges to the format of the new forms of electoral representation and the growth of nationalism formed central themes to the political struggle which culminated in SWAPO's victory in Kavango in the 1989 election. This chapter concludes the book as SWAPO's election victory might be judged as the final event marking the success of the liberation struggle in Kavango.

Establishing 'Kavangoland'

The 'Odendaal Report' of 1964 was a lengthy document that provided a template for South Africa's strategy for the political and economic development of 'South West Africa'. The plan was essentially that 'a homeland must be created for each population group'. The plan identified the 'Okavango' as a territory consisting of five 'individual peoples' or 'national units', namely the *Kuangari*, *Bunja*, *Sambiu*, *Djiriku* and *Mbukushu* (spellings as in report). The report recommended that 'Okavangoland' should have a Legislative Council that would consist of the five hereditary leaders and five additional members (one appointed by each chief). It also proposed the introduction of a voting system that would enfranchise all adults over the age of 18. However, it recommended that elected members should be kept as a minority (not more than 40%) of the Council (South Africa, 1964: 35, 55, 85).²¹¹

The Kavango Legislative Assembly met for the first time on 17th July, 1970.

The Assembly consisted of 30 members. Each of the five traditional

211 The original spelling used in the Odendaal Report are reproduced here as these spellings were used in colonial documents of the period and thus may help young researchers to locate relevant material in the National Archives of Namibia. The contemporary names for the communities are used throughout the rest of the chapter.

authorities officially recognised as forming the 'Kavango Homeland' nominated six members. The process, it should be noted, was linked to the notion of traditional territories and, thus, by defining the cluster of territories that would constitute 'Kavango' also contributed to the constitution of a Kavango identity. The implication was that the link between land and identity would mean that later immigrants from Angola might be viewed as 'outsiders' with limited rights. South Africa's incidious homeland project sought to create political and economic interests tied to a homeland structure that would undermine the nationalist appeal for 'One Namibia, One Nation'.

Each group in the Assembly then selected one of their members to serve on the Executive Council. The Executive Council was, therefore, formed on the basis of ethnic balance, rather than any consideration of demographics. The first Chief Councillor was *Hompa* Linus Shashipapo (Gciriku), whilst the other members of the council were Anton Mushambe Kathumbi (Mbukushu) as Minister of Justice and Community, Mr Alex Kudumo (Kwangali) as Minister of Works, Romanus Kamunoko (Shambyu) as Minister of Agriculture and Rev. Elia Neromba (Mbunza) as Minister of Education and Culture. *Hompa* Shashipapo would serve as the Chief Councillor from October 1970 until 11th May, 1973. (Nambadi, 2007: 60-61).

The system was not based on the democratic principle of 'majority rule', but strengthened the powers of traditional authorities within the guise of modernism. A respected church leader and academic, Dr Romanus Kampungu, took over as Chief Councillor and led a delegation that met the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Dr Kurt Waldheim, when he made a very swift (two day) fact-finding visit to Namibia in March, 1972. The Kavango Legislative Assembly was one that spoke strongly against the

idea of a unitary state. Dr Romanus Kampungu was quoted in *The Argus* newspaper of 9th March, 1972 as arguing “. . . if the United Nations give us a central government at this stage, embracing all the tribes, it will be suicide” (Du Pisani, 1986: 217). The discourse reflected the assumption that underpinned the Odendaal Plan - that it would be impossible for different language groups to live in political and social harmony within a nation state in Africa.

Deforming Democracy: The 1973 Election

Whilst a Council had been created to build the sense of a shared ‘Kavango’ identity the authority in the Council rested entirely with the traditional leaders and their nominees. Proclamation 115 of 1973 formally provided for ‘self-government’ for Kavango with the introduction of some positions that would be contestable in elections (Du Pisani, 1986: 241). The 1970 census had recorded a population of 53,000 in Kavango (although it recognised that around 4,000 men were contract workers and were, therefore, away from home). The number of absent migrant workers is significant given the fact that a total of only 13,400 adults registered for the 1973 election (of which 57% were women). (Breytenbach, 1973: 304).

The 1973 election was the first election that took place in the region involving a universal franchise. Adults (over the age of 18) were given the possibility to vote. However, the selection of the leadership for the 30 members who would constitute the new Kavango Legislative Assembly was not democratic. The five Traditional Authorities still nominated three of the six representatives for their community (ie. half the seats in the Assembly). The other fifteen seats could be contested in elections, but

the election was not contested in the Gciriku and Kwangali communities. The election that took place on 29th-30th August, 1973 only took place in Mbukushu, Sambyu and Mbunza where more than three candidates were standing.

The results of the election of 29th-30th November, 1973 were carried in the edition of *Kavangudi*, of September 1973 (pp.2-3, as quoted in Nambadi, 2007: 74).²¹² The three candidates receiving the most votes in each electoral district became elected members of the Kavango Legislative Assembly.

212 *Kavangudi* (New for Kavango) was published by the South African Department of Information from 1971 until 1984 (?). www.worldcat.org/title/kavangudi-nuus-van-kavango/oclc/124045178. Accessed on 15th December, 2015.

Mbukushu

Candidate	Votes
Alfons Mayavero	3 060
Anton Mushambe	2 697
Gerhard Shakadja	1 456
Alexander Mukoya	745
Shoro Kapojojo	575

Sambyu

Candidate	Votes
Dr Romanus Kampungu	2 010
Andreas Kandjimi	1 853
George Hashipara	1 051
Josef Katjotjo	905
Valentinus Shipapo	847

Mbunza

Candidate	Votes
Lorenz Haupindi	2 174
Silas Ndango	1 908
Michael Hausiku	1 731
Voitto Lyevera	1 358
Asser Kavara	951

After the election was completed Mr Alfons Shoko Mayevero of the Mbukushu was elected as the new Chief Minister.²¹³ The new Executive Committee consisted of Mr Sebastiaan Ndumu (Interior and Justice), Mr Andreas Kandjimi (Works) Mr Leevi Hakusembe (Education), and Mr Rudolph Ngondo (Agriculture and Forestry).²¹⁴ The *Windhoek Advertiser*

213 'Kavangos New Chief Minister', *Windhoek Advertiser*, 2nd November, 1973

214 'Portfolios of the Kavango Ministers, *Windhoek Advertiser*, 2nd November, 1973

felt that the composition of the new Executive Council indicated a shift in power from the traditional authorities towards a new, educated elite consisting, particularly, of clergy from the Roman Catholic church and teachers. The shift to 'self-government' was linked to a package of investment in major development projects in the Kavango which were intended to encourage support for the new political project. For example, a cattle rearing project was established in the Mangetti which sought to create a 'national' herd of 35,000 cattle of which it would be possible to market at least 1,500 annually. The scheme was to be established by the South African 'Bantu Investment Corporation', but handed over to the Kavango Government after ten years.²¹⁵ Many traditional leaders were, therefore, persuaded that political participation would provide economic patronage that would benefit their impoverished communities.

Detailing Difference: Ovamboland and Kavangoland

At the time the local media saw the contrast between the voter turn-out for the 1973 'Kavangoland' election of 29th-30th August and the 'Ovamboland' election that had taken place a few weeks earlier (on 1st-2nd August) as significant. SWAPO and the Democratic Co-operative Development Party (Demkop) led by Johannes Nagutuuala had both called for a boycott of the election in 'Ovamboland'. A telex from the American Embassy in Pretoria described a 'massive boycott' with only around 1,300 votes being cast in the Homeland election, despite the fact that 42,000 people had registered to vote. The Embassy described it as a 'dismal failure' for the South African Government and a demonstration of the 'remarkable cohesion and discipline' of the opposition. The Embassy

²¹⁵ 'Huge cattle project will be handed to Kavango', Windhoek Advertiser, 8th November, 1973

noted that the Commissioner-General, Jannie de Wet, had claimed that the low turnout reflected the “‘foreignness’ of democratic electoral procedures’, but described this as ‘grasping at straws’ and producing ‘flimsy excuses’.²¹⁶

In contrast to the few numbers voting in ‘Ovamboland’ it was seen as significant that the turn-out in Kavango was measured at 66.5% (Breytenbach, 1973: 304). The success of the election boycott in ‘Ovamboland’ seems to have been largely due to the success of the SWAPO Youth League and the continued legacy of militancy that had been generated by contract workers who had been returned to the north following the 1971/72 contract workers strike. The SWAPO Youth League had no visible presence in Kavango and there were no visible signs of a boycott campaign there. The South African Prime Minister, Balthazar John Vorster, made a point of flying to Rundu to speak at the official opening of the new Kavango Legislative Assembly on 8th November, 1973.²¹⁷ The difference in the election results suggest that the return of striking workers had not resulted in increased mobilisation for SWAPO in the same way in Kavango. The reasons for this difference require further research. One might suggest that workers from Kavango were present in lower numbers in the major strike centres, such as the massive compound in Walvis Bay serving the fish factories and the compound in Windhoek. Alternatively SWAPO activists might have been more effective in recruiting angry strikers in Ovamboland into political structures. Perhaps, this was because, at this time, the SWAPO Youth League had not been able to establish itself effectively in Kavango.

216 Telegram from US Embassy, Pretoria, 3rd August, 1973. [www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/1973 PRETOR0210-b](http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/1973%20PRETOR0210-b). Accessed on 14th December, 2015.

217 ‘Report of the Department of Bantu Administration and Development’, Pretoria, 1973, p20.

Vorster used the platform to attack SWAPO: “Deplorable deeds against innocent people are committed daily. Make no mistake what these terrorists are after is not to liberate you or any other nation. They are out to get your land, and to achieve their aim, they are trying to create disorder and division among the local population”. Vorster also noted the fact that the flag that had been designed to represent the Kavango Homeland incorporated elements of the flag of the Republic of South Africa which, he felt; “. . . symbolises, amongst other things, co-operation between your country and the Republic of South Africa . . .”.²¹⁸ In contrast the *African Communist*, the journal of the South African Communist Party, commented that actually only 40% of the electorate had participated, but also noted that ‘a few democrats’ had taken the opportunity to stand and raise concerns and that this was the reason why more people had participated.²¹⁹

The 1978 election

The establishment of the Homeland Governments was the first stage in a more elaborate South African plan to develop an alternative to SWAPO’s vision of a unitary state epitomised by their slogan ‘One Namibia, One Nation’. No political parties had been registered in Kavango and those elected in the 1973 election had been elected in their personal capacity. However in 1975 the members of the Kavango Council refashioned themselves as the ‘Kavango Alliance’. The creation of this ‘party’ gave them the opportunity to participate in the discussions at the Turnhalle Constitutional Conference that was established that year. In 1977, after the conclusion of the Conference, the Kavango Alliance formally joined

218 ‘Prime Minister Applauds Kavango’s Stand Against Terrorism’, Windhoek Advertiser, 8th November, 1973.

219 ‘Namibia – the reality of Bantustans’, *African Communist*, no. 56, 1974, p9.

the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance that had been launched by Mr Dirk Mudge (Pütz, Von Egidy and Caplan, 1987: 42). The DTA would seek a new, complicated, political infrastructure for Namibia and proposed that Namibia's first 'national' election should take place by the end of 1978.

The United Nations were continuing to play an active role in monitoring political developments in Namibia. The proposal that there would be a national election led the UN to send a delegation to Namibia to monitor whether the proposed election would satisfy their criteria for a 'free and fair' election prior to a meaningful transfer of power that would result in real independence for Namibia. In August, 1978 Mr Martti Ahtisaari of Finland, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, visited Namibia. On 16th August, 1978 he met representatives of the Kavango Council of Ministers: Mr Sebastiaan Kamwanga (Minister of Justice and Health), Mr Andreas Kandjimi (Minister of Department of Works), *Hompa* Leevi Hakusembe (Minister of Education) and Mr Alois Hashipara (Minister of Interior).²²⁰ The Special Representative also met local representatives of the major political parties. Mr Ahtisaari met a DTA delegation in Rundu (Vitus Kasire, Lorenz Haupindi, Gerhard Shakadya, Everastus Muyer, Immanuel Siteketa and Engelmar Kanyanga). Later the same day he also met later with local SWAPO representatives (Remigius Shiyave, Nathaneal Hausiku, Nicodemus Siwombe, Abraham Muye, Johannes Hambyuka, Cosmos Makanga and Klaus Kudumo).²²¹

The 1978 election would, indeed, be the first 'national' election to be held in Namibia meaning that there would be a universal franchise and that the election would take part simultaneously in all part of the country.

220 United Nations Archives S-0529-0009-0005 'Notes on Namibia for the Special Representative of the Secretary-General'. Note that the Chief Minister, Mr Alfons Majavera was sick and Mr Rudolf Ngondo (Minister of Agriculture and Forestry) was in Cape Town.

221 UNS-0529-0009-0005 'Notes on Namibia for the Special Representative of the Secretary-General'.

The election would establish a National Assembly of 60 members. However the seats would still be allocated on the basis of the division of Namibians into eleven ethnic groups. The Kavango, for example, would have 5 seats in the National Assembly, as would 'the' Nama, Caprivians, Herero and Damara. The creation of an ethnically fragmented 'nation' was unacceptable to the liberation movement (Du Pisani, 1986: 415)

Five parties participated in the election, but SWAPO, SWANU and the NNF urged its members to boycott the election. The elections took place over a five day period (4th-8th December, 1978). Prior to registration, it was estimated that there would be 30,000 voters in Kavango, but, in the end, 42,611 registered. A total of 86.7% of registered voters cast their vote in Kavango in comparison to 81% of registered voters nationally). However, observers estimated that 5,000 – 10,000 voters came from Angola, an estimate that would explain the unexpectedly high registration figures (Du Pisani, 1986: p422, 425).

An observers' report from the ECSA team explained: "The Kavango population has almost doubled since 1975. All people who earlier stayed on the northern side of the border river are now on the southern side. Some of these were born on the Namibian side, some had been working here. It was also very common for people in the border area to pay tax on both sides of the border. However there are also refugees from central Angola now on the SWA/Namibia side". The official requirements for someone to be eligible to vote in the election was simply that they should have lived in Namibia for four years.²²² The team of election observers concluded that "... it can be estimated that more than one third of those who registered in Kavango for the election came from Angola".²²³

222 Christian Centre 'Report on the Registration and Election Campaign, Windhoek, 28th November, 1978 (Reproduced by the Episcopal Churchmen for South Africa, New York), p10.

223 Christian Centre 'Report on the Registration and Election Campaign, Windhoek, 28th November, 1978 (Reproduced by the Episcopal Churchmen for South Africa, New York), p12.

The DTA Government, although not recognised by SWAPO or the international community, moved forward with its constitutional plans for a new model of governance. A 'First Tier Government' was established at the national level with plans for eleven so-called 'Second Tier' Governments to deal with the affairs of eleven recognised ethnic communities (not just for the Homelands, as there were also to be separate administrations for 'Whites' and 'Coloureds'). An extremely complicated and expensive system developed with each authority having its own departments for different services. Elections for the so-called 'Kavango Second Tier Representative Authority' took place in November, 1980 with the Kavango Alliance (as the 'Kavango' representative of the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance) obtaining 6,452 votes (87.5%) of the total registered voters. The low number of voters registering for the election perhaps indicates that the electorate were sceptical that the Kavango Legislative Assembly had any meaningful power to bring development to Kavango.²²⁴ In 1983, Rudolf Ngondo broke away from the Kavango Alliance to form the Namibia National Independence Party (NNIP) and the party became the opposition to the Kavango Alliance in the Kavango Legislative Assembly. The Kavango Alliance also changed its name in April, 1984 to become the National Democratic Unity Party (NDUP).

Whilst the holding of elections presented a performance of democracy, it was clear that the template of ethnicity was still the dominant determinant for the allocation of positions. The Executive Committee of the Kavango was still formed on the basis of one representative from each of the five traditional authorities. It, therefore, consisted of *Hompa* Sebastiaan Kamwanga (Chairman) from Gciriku, *Hompa* Leevi Hakusembe (Minister of Agriculture) from Mbunza, Alois Hashipara (Minister of Works) from Sambyu, Mr Rudolf Ngondo (Minister of Education) from Kwangali and

Gerhard Shakadya (Minister of Health) from Mbukushu.

The members of the Kavango Legislative Assembly were also still chosen and elected from the five recognised traditional authorities. The members from the ruling NDUP were listed as: Lorenz Haupindi (Chairman, Mbunza), Theodor Kupembona (Vice-Chairman, Gciriku), Venatius Dikuwa (Mbukushu), *Hompa* Gotthardt Haininga (Sambyu), Frans-Josef Hausiku (Sambyu), Maurus Kamati (Mbunza), Andreas Kandjimi (Sambyu), Agatius Kasire (Mbunza), Josef Katjotjo (Sambyu), Norbert Kutenda (Mbukushu), *Hompa* Alfons Majavero (Mbukushu), Sylvester Masika (Gciriku), Josef Ruyendo (Mbukushu), Henrich Shindimba (Gciriku), Erastus Sigweda (Mbunza) and Michael Thitarara (Mbukushu). The NNIP were also listed, in 1987, as holding six seats in the Kavango Legislative Assembly where they were represented by: Rudolf Ngondo, *Hompa* Sientu Mpasi of Ukwangali, Headman Muranda Hamunyera, Karl Kasiki, Markus Kaundu and Erastus Ruhungo. (Pütz, von Egidy & Caplan, 1987: 42, 160). The political process which led, finally, to the implementation of Resolution 435 and the holding of a national election supervised by the United Nations in 1989 would introduce competition from the liberation movement, SWAPO, for the first time in Kavango.

The fact that the last two elections had taken place within the ethnic framework developed by the DTA meant that the result in Kavango would be uncertain. Would SWAPO be able to attract new voters or lure existing voters away from their previous voting patterns? Would the influence of voters crossing from Angola play a significant role again?

Defining Kavangos: Registration for the 1989 Election

The first challenge in the preparations for the 1989 election in Kavango

was the registration of voters. As in previous elections there was a lack of clarity about who might register to vote with many 'Angolans' having moved into the region due to the ongoing conflict in southern Angola, whilst all the 'Big Five' traditional authorities recognised in Kavango also had historical and kinship ties with people living north of the river in Angola.

The peace process stated that the 'ceasefire', to be monitored by the United Nations Transitional Assistance Group (UNTAG) would start on 1st April, 1989. Unfortunately, due to bureaucratic delays there were only 280 'UN Observers' in place and they were unable to effectively intervene when a short, but deadly, period of fighting broke out for a few days. Fighting did not take place in Kavango and there is no evidence that any large units of PLAN fighters crossed into the Kavango at this time (Hearn, 1999: 96). Despite the conflict, the election was not postponed and UNTAG was deployed to administer and monitor the election. It established 53 permanent registration stations in Kavango, but also operated 18 mobile registration vehicles (M'Passou, 1990: 29). UNTAG Regional Director for Kavango was Linda Cohen from Canada with Mohamed Abdul-Aziz from Libya as her deputy (Thornberry, 2004: 339). Cohen was impressed with the commitment shown by people in Kavango to register as she explained during an interview on UNTAG Radio broadcast on 20th July, 1989: "When we go by the registration points to see how things are going, we are struck by the number of people who seem to be wearing their Sunday best. They know that this is an important exercise – they get dressed up for it, and some take their very young children with them. Obviously the children are too young to be registered to vote, but people say with a great deal of pride that they want their children registered as Namibians" (United Nations, 1990: 57). After almost twenty years of promoting a 'Kavango' identity (with its own 'national anthem' and flag) the challenge

was to encourage 'Kavangos' to re-imagine themselves as 'Namibians'.

However the fluidity of movement across the border between Namibia and Angola meant that an ethnic identity could not be simply translated into a national identity. The challenge were clearly articulated by one Headman, Johannes Muyenda, from the village of Kasoreka in southern Angola who spoke with observers from the Church Monitoring and Information Service (CMIS) in Rundu. Muyenda explained that : "Many of those living in southern Angola are in possession of Namibian identity documents which they have acquired during the many years of war in order to facilitate movement to and from Namibia for the purposes of securing supplies in Namibia". The headman said there were 38 homesteads in his village, but that "Most men have either gone to Namibia in search of work, particularly in the Grootfontein district, or have been taken up as soldiers by Unita". It was significant that, whilst Namibia was moving, optimistically, towards independence the war in southern Angola between UNITA and the MPLA was still very active in 1989. The conflict has particularly implications for the election in Kavango. Muyenda noted that, at the time when people were being registered to vote in the election: "The area adjacent to the Kavango river on the Angolan side is administered by a UNITA military ruler known as Kandjimi."²²⁵

The proximity of a UNITA controlled area meant that the UNITA leadership actively sought to influence the Namibian election results. It was reported that UNITA had a rally at their headquarters, Jamba, on 3rd August 1989 where Angolans were strongly encouraged to register in Namibia for the coming elections. Church election monitors interviewed an Angolan headman who claimed that he and many members of his community: ". . . had been called to a UNITA post and told to register for the Namibian elections. He had refused because he was an Angolan

225 'Headman escapes from UNITA detention', The Namibian, 10th October 1988, p1 & 3.

unless he was given a good reason. The reason he was given by UNITA was: Savimbi was told by the South African government that he should send his people to Namibia to register and vote for DTA because if DTA would lose the elections there would be no support for UNITA anymore". UNTAG said that the registration of Angolans was perfectly legal in terms of the Proclamation on Registration (M'Passou, 1990: 18).

It was in this context that there were repeated allegations that the DTA was actively involved in registering Angolan citizens to vote in the Namibian election. For example, a DTA activist, Korabeam Hamutenya, was reported to have been seen registering people in the Angolan district of Sofwe.²²⁶ Kavango was a region which has seen a lengthy and sustained migration from Angola as, at different historical moments, refugees seeking to evade the brutality of, at first, the colonial state and later, the war in southern Angola, crossed the border. Many of these communities were uncertain about their future. For example, it was reported that when the teams went to 'Delta', a settlement with an estimated 5,000 Angolan refugees in Kavango, nobody wanted to register. Refugees also often lacked paperwork. The lack of documentation meant that, even after DTA activists had persuaded the community at Delta to register for the election, only about 250 were reported to have the necessary paperwork (M'Passou, 1990: 18). However, it is clear that, as with previous elections, the number of cross-border voters would have a significant impact on the election result. The Rev. Sindano indicated that whilst it had been anticipated that 59 000 voters would register in the Kavango, in fact over 65 000 had registered. (M'Passou, 1990: 18)

226 'Namibia's north still plagued by trouble', *The Namibian*, 8th August, 1989, p3.

The Election Campaign of 1989

One of the potentially explosive factors in the election campaign in Kavango was the presence of a large number of Koevoet and SWATF members. Paulus Davids, was a local resident who had left Namibia at the age of 13 to join SWAPO, but was then captured by South African forces and recruited to Koevoet. After leaving Koevoet, before the election, Davids provided information about the ways in which Koevoet had been used to disrupt SWAPO's campaign. "For instance on October 1, 1988, the local branch of the SWAPO branch in Rundu held a meeting at the Rundu Junior School [at the Sports Field – MK]. I was informed by a certain 'Rooi' Strauss of Koevoet, that our instructions were to prevent SWAPO from holding the meeting. It was clear that this was to be done by mere force, and not by law." The statement confirmed allegations that had been made by local SWAPO activists.

Koevoet members who sought to leave the organisation or divulge information about their former operations, particular SWAPO ex-combatants, were also fearful. Davids explained that: "At my base at 'Arendsnes', there were approximately 25 ex-PLAN guerrillas employed by Koevoet. We all feared to leave the base because we were informed by our officers in Koevoet that, should we resign from Koevoet, they would follow us, and murder us" Davids claimed that the threat had been made by the commanding officer himself, Captain Joos Engelbrecht.

Another former PLAN fighter, Joseph Petrus, who had left Koevoet made a statement that clearly articulated the threat that ex-combatants felt: "I was always afraid to leave Koevoet because I had been threatened with death should I do so". Shortly after making this statement, at the beginning of August, 1989, Petrus was shot and killed at his home in Rundu. The local SWAPO branch was clear that this had been an assassination and

claimed that: “. . . Koevoet had decided to eliminate Mr Petrus as they believed he had inside information on Koevoet’s alleged hidden agenda and that such information could be valuable to SWAPO in exposing the unit’s malpractices.”²²⁷

‘Mr Gosdert Kiererte’, another colleague of Mr Joseph Petrus, who had also served in Koevoet and resigned went into hiding after former Koevoet policemen visited his home at Mururani. Rumours of assassination squads and hit lists circulated throughout the Kavango. Mr Marco Hausiku, the SWAPO organiser in the Kavango, stated that “. . . members of 101 Battalion in the Ovambo district are being bused into the Kavango and are camping near Sauyema”. The continuing high levels of militarisation and the uncertainty of those who had fought with the South African forces about their future created a volatile atmosphere. Hausiku said that he had information that “The names of Severenius Nujoma, Isaak Tobias, Paulus Hamunyela, Tuyoleni Haitembu and Sakky Mbangula have been named as being on the ‘hit list’”.²²⁸ Demobilised and disgruntled elements of the security forces had the capacity to significantly disrupt the peace process and the election. It is significant that in August, 1989 SWAPO organised two meetings, on 25th August and 29th August with black Koevoet officers at Arensnes, the Koevoet base situated 10 kilometres south of Rundu. The meetings could be seen as a very concrete example an attempt at reconciliation with the Koevoet members being reassured that they would not be prosecuted or persecuted in an independent Namibia (M’Passou, 1990: 30)

The final demobilisation of Koevoet took place on 29th October, 1989 in Rundu, only a week before the election to the Constituent Assembly. A

²²⁷ It was reported that Petrus served in PLAN but joined Koevoet after being captured at Ongandjera in 1981. He resigned from Koevoet in 1989. Munamava, Rajah ‘Koevoet Kill’, The Namibian, 3rd August, 1989.

²²⁸ Munamava, Rajah ‘SWAPO Activist in Hiding’, The Namibian, 4th August, 1989, p1.

total of 290 ex-Koevoet members “. . . were transported by DTA buses from their base to the local DTA office where they were issued with two sets of T-shirts – some of the DTA, while some read ‘Koevoet Kavango’.²²⁹ The shared experience of military service (and perhaps concern about the personal implications of a SWAPO victory) meant that the men were easy to organise and they actively campaigned and demonstrated in support of the DTA in the days leading up to the election.

Whilst there were allegations that direct threats of violence were used to influence voters intentions in Kavango, it seems likely that the less obvious forms of propaganda were more persuasive. The South African authorities had established a number of ‘cultural organisations’ that sought to promote the ethnic identities that were the basis on which Homeland politics had been constructed. In the Kavango the organisation that was used for this function was known as *Ezuva*.

An insight into the way in which *Ezuva* operated can be obtained from a statement made by Mr Ambrosius Haingura, a former chief clerk at the Kavango Department of Education who then left to work for the Human Rights Trust at Rundu in the months before the 1989 election. In 1984, Haingura reported that he was instructed by Mr Barlett, the Director of Education in the Kavango, to attend a week long course organised by ‘the army’s cultural organisation, *Ezuva*’.

Haingura explained that when he arrived at the camp at a centre on the outskirts of Rundu he found that it was completely run by the military: “A certain Captain Grobler was apparently in charge of the camp. He explained that they were a cultural organisation . . . *Ezuva* is certainly not a cultural organisation, but merely a propaganda wing of the army. The army officers who gave the lectures wore civilian clothes but they

229 Munamava, Rajah ‘Koevoet’s Revenge’, The Namibian, 1st November, 1989, p1.

were armed and called each other by their ranks and also saluted each other. They clearly were not civilians.” The course was an interesting choreography of power with attempts to ideologically co-opt the participants. Whilst the course was meant to promote ‘Kavango culture’ the content of the lectures clearly revealed a blatantly political agenda.

Mr Haingura recalled that: “The lectures took the form of a long speech on the evils of communism. From that followed that SWAPO was ‘communist’ orientated and should it take over, it would do away with the tribal system and nobody would be entitled to own possessions”. When the course ended the participants discovered that they had, automatically, been enrolled as members of Ezuva. Haingura remembers that he received a certificate from Mr Gerhard Shakadya, a member of the Executive Committee of the Kavango Administration at an official ceremony.²³⁰

In September, 1988 the Co-ordinator of Ezuva, Mr Neil Van Heerden announced plans to hold a ‘feast’ at exactly the same time that SWAPO was planning a public rally in Rundu.²³¹ It is clear that the activities of Ezuva were co-ordinated with the army. A newspaper report concuded: “SWAPO won the day in Rundu last week Saturday [1st October], 1988 when attempts by the combined Koevoet, SWATF and Ezuva forces to disrupt a SWAPO rally through acts of intimidation and harassment failed dismally.” The rally gave a good example of the different efforts made by the security forces to disrupt the rally. “At a roadblock at Sauyema near Rundu, motorists were told to remove the front wheels of their vehicles because the police were to conduct searches underneath the vehicles in search of weapons . . . This was apparently calculated as delaying the people in order that they were not on time to attend the meeting”.

230 ‘Security Forces Promise restraint’, *The Namibian*, 17th-23rd March, 1989, pp.1-2.

231 ‘Clash on Rundu menu ?’, *The Namibian*, 30th September, 1988, p4.

SWAPO supporters who succeeded in reaching the rally found themselves surrounded by a heavily armed military presence consisting of: “At least 2 Buffels, 4 Casspirs, 3 Ratels, some of which had mounted machine guns and 2 small Panzer tanks”.²³² The display of heavy weapons was clearly designed to scare potential voters away from the rally. When SWAPO held its Regional Consultative Conference in Rundu in March, 1989 it was also encircled by army Buffels crowded with soldiers.²³³

Ezuva also provided a mechanism through which the traditional authorities could be ‘briefed’ and encouraged to oppose SWAPO. In one, rather bizarre, case it was reported that simple records had been made and were being distributed by free. It was reported that “. . . people . . . can simply play them by inserting a pen or stick into a small hole bored on the outer edge of the record and making the record run with the stick”. Whilst it would be interesting to hear the quality of the sound produced by such records, the intention of the content was clear: “The records are in vernaculars such as Kwangali, Portuguese and others and contain propaganda disguised in church sermons and the like”.²³⁴ The strong influence of the Catholic church in the Kavango meant that strong efforts were made to associate the DTA with Christianity and SWAPO with ‘Communism’ (with the implication that, if elected, they would suppress the church).

In the period running up to the 1989 election the performance of power took other forms.

The security forces were very aware that SWAPO had developed extremely effective means of campaigning through body language, songs

232 ‘SWAPO Wins the Day’, *The Namibian*, 7th October, 1988, p10.

233 Munamava, Rajah ‘SWAPO Kavango Conference Encircled by Buffels’ *The Namibian*, 3rd March, 1989.

234 Munamava, Rajah ‘SA Propaganda stepped up’, *The Namibian*, 24th February, 1989

and the circulation of mobilising materials. Attempts to suppress all visual demonstrations of support for the liberation movement turned election rivals were clearly a part of South Africa's strategy in Kavango. Whilst, SWAPO, was never officially banned in Namibia, many of the marketing materials that it produced were. For example, issue No 1151 of South Africa's Government Gazette of 21st October, 1988 banned a large number of SWAPO materials including the poster 'Victory to SWAPO Women, 1957-1987' and 'Namibia Day, 26 August, 1966-1988' T-shirts.²³⁵ At Shamangorwa on 26th December, 1988 soldiers reportedly opened fired on four men who were singing freedom songs.²³⁶

The military regularly intervened, violently, to challenge those who visually displayed support for SWAPO. For example, it was reported that "... a Rundu resident, Erastus Muronga, had his face badly battered by soldiers for wearing a SWAPO t-shirt". A whole group of SWAPO supporters were arrested on 11th December, 1988 on their way to a SWAPO rally, because they were wearing banned SWAPO t-shirts.²³⁷ Whilst t-shirts were one of the most visible ways of showing party allegiance during the election campaign, slogans and the different hand signs used by the different parties were a no-cost way of demonstrating loyalty or defiance. For example, in another incident in the region it was reported that the family of Mrs Karina Namusinga were beaten by soldiers. When the vehicle carrying the soldiers had passed Ms Namusinga's homestead they had shouted, 'down SWAPO, Viva Botha', but when she had defiantly responded by raising a clenched fist to show her support for SWAPO the soldiers had returned and assaulted the family.²³⁸

235 Lister, Gwen, 'Unprecedented number of banned Namibian publications gazetted', *The Namibian*, 11th November, 1988, p11.

236 'Civilian deaths over Xmas recess in Kavango region', *The Namibian*, 20th January, 1989, p13.

237 'T-shirts', *The Namibian*, 11th April, 1989, p2.

238 'In Kavango 202 Back to Bases', *The Namibian*, 4th April, 1989, p3.

During 1988 negotiations towards a peace agreement and the implementation of Resolution 435 made steady progress. A bilateral agreement was signed on 5th August, 1988 providing for the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola. Whilst on 13th December, 1988 the 'Brazzaville Protocol' set 1st April, 1989 as the target date for the implementation of Resolution 435, the UN plan for the transition to independence in Namibia (Dierks, 2002: 296-297). The militarisation of Kavango meant that leading SWAPO activists in the region were still being detained, without trial, in the months before the election. For example, two prominent SWAPO activists, Nimrod Muremi and Raphael Dinyando, were detained on 9th November, 1988. Mr Muremi recalled that about 30 members of 202 Battalion of SWATF arrived at his house in the early hours of the morning under the command of Captain Viljoen and Lt Gouws. Muremi was accused of having assisted young people wishing to join SWAPO in exile to cross the border to Botswana. After Muremi had been dragged out of his bed it was reported that he was offered an army shirt and boots to wear, but refused. Muremi and Dinyando were detained for two months whilst efforts were made to obtain a confession. A cassette tape was even played to Muremi in which he recognised the voice of Eugene Ngondo who stated that he had worked with Muremi near Bagani on the day that they assisted children to cross into Botswana.

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In another case, Mr Kangungu reported that Corporals Du Preez and Marais with 20 soldiers had arrived at the house of Mr Ambrosius Haingura at 3.30am on 24th November, 1988 to arrest him. Mr Kangungu also identified Captain Viljoen and Lt Gouws as his interrogators "At Sector 20, the army officers produced some SWAPO Namibia Day placards and asked him why he was in possession of banned material". It was also

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'Kavango activists released'

alleged that he had helped a number of school children to leave the country.²⁴⁰ The chapters by Sebastian Kantema in this publication have showed the crucial role that NANSO and the growth of trade unions in the Kavango played in mobilising opposition to the security forces, building a nationalist vision locally and linking the vision to support for SWAPO as a nationalist party that would transcend traditional authorities and regionally based political parties.

The growth of support for SWAPO received an additional boost when Kavango residents who had left for exile started to return. The return of SWAPO members from exile began on 12th June, 1989 (Thornberry, 2004: 174). Perhaps the first returnees to arrive in Kavango were a group of 34 returnees who arrived in Rundu on 22nd June, 1989, although four returned to the reception centre at Nkurenkuru, where those returning to families in the Kavango had been gathered 'citing fear for their safety'.²⁴¹ The leaders of the traditional Authorities requested a special meeting with UNTAG to discuss issue of returnees requesting more information about the number of exiles that would be returning to their areas (Thornberry, 2004: 256).

It is, perhaps, difficult to imagine the challenge that was presented by the requirement, at the local level, for ex-combatants to mingle at weddings, churches, stores and shebeens with members of Koevoet who just a few weeks earlier had been shooting at them. In October, 1989 the local branch of the DTA claimed that SWAPO supporters were intimidating their followers. They told observers that they had reported 24 cases to the police over a two month period leading up to the election. One incident had, allegedly, taken place at the beginning of August in Kasivi village.

240 Munamava, Rajah 'Army taking over police matters', The Namibian, 25th November, 1988, p3.

241 'Still fear in Rundu', The Namibian, 28th June, 1989.

Students supporting SWAPO had, allegedly, built barricades near a DTA rally. DTA members had removed the barricades so that their buses could leave, but as they drove off their buses had been stoned. (M'Passou, 1990: 30). SWAPO made counter allegations that *Hompá* Alfons Majavero and a group of DTA members had assaulted voters at Mukwe, near Bagani. Perhaps the most serious incident took place on 11th October, 1989 when the media reported that: "SWAPO and DTA supporters clashed in bloody battles at the village of Kahenge near Nkurenkuru".²⁴²

However, despite these scattered incidents, one of the most amazing features of the election period in Kavango was the relatively low level of violent confrontation between political rivals. The climax of SWAPO's election campaign in Kavango was a SWAPO 'Star Rally' that was held in Rundu on 21st October, 1989. The rally was addressed by SWAPO's President, Sam Nujoma whilst other participants included Mr Hage Geingob, Richard Kapelwa, Mr Peter Mweshihange, businessman Mr Frans Indongo and the San leader, Tsamkao of Tsumkwe, who 'made a surprise appearance'.²⁴³ . One observer estimated that the rally had attracted a crowd of 20,000²⁴⁴ The DTA organised a rally to coincide and compete with the SWAPO rally. Rajah Munamavo, a journalist with *The Namibian* who was covering the rallies commented: "Two to three kilometres away, the DTA drew around 4-5,000 people, some to listen to DTA leaders and other to take advantage of the free food and beer the DTA dished out".²⁴⁵ The dichotomy between the attendance figures at the two rallies provided an early indication that the DTA's political grip on Kavango was going to be challenged.

242 Munamava, Rajah 'SWAPO/DTA clashes', *The Namibian*, 13th October, 1989.

243 Munamava, Rajah 'No One Can Stop Us', *The Namibian*, 23rd October, 1989, p.1.

244 'Unexpected turn-out at SWAPO's Rundu Star Rally', *The Namibian*, 24th October, 1989, p6.

245 'SWAPO's Rundu rally is going ahead', *The Namibian*, 19th October, 1989, p7.

The 1989 Election Result

After the evidence that Angolans had been encouraged to register for the Namibian election it was not surprising to find that there was evidence of extensive logistical planning in place to bring Angolan voters across the border to vote. Numerous evidence was provided to election observers that the DTA was actively transporting Angolan voters across the border and assisting them with accommodation, although only a few examples will be given here. At Maara “A lorry with 4 whites brought 80 people, probably from Angola, to vote”. The significance of the figure can be seen from the fact that a total of only 630 votes were cast at that polling station. At Shighuru, Paulus Nkamba alleged that 100 Angolans arrived during the election and stayed at the local DTA office before voting. At Shitemo SWAPO activists also alleged that 100 Angolans had arrived and stayed at the DTA offices the weekend before the election. At ‘Kao’, it was alleged that 200 Angolans had arrived to vote, at Katere 180 and in Rundu it was alleged that 300 people had slept at the DTA office so that they could vote. One Angolan headman even suggested that he and his village had been forced at gunpoint by a ‘colonel’ from UNITA to cross the river and vote DTA. In the climate of confusion and suspicion SWAPO activists alleged that the DTA were organising braais on the riverbank to provide cover for the Angolans who were crossing to vote (M’Passou, 1990: 18, 33).

A report by the National Association of Democratic Lawyers (NADEL) a delegation of black South African lawyers actually identified ten locations at which Angolans had crossed into Namibia to vote (Shikenge, Kasote, Ekongoro, Mazana, Rundu, Mayara, Kadedere, Kapako, Bunya and Kayengona).²⁴⁶ Evaluating all the evidence the CMIS estimated that not

246 ‘Voting at gunpoint’, *The Namibian*, 8th November, 1989, pp1-2.

more than 10% of votes cast were probably cast by Angolans. Whilst there was no evidence that these were 'illegal' voters the high number of voters who were living across the border in UNITA controlled territory was bound to have an influence on the Kavango result. However, despite the few scattered incidents of violence in the months before the election, there was only one isolated case of possible election irregularity in Kavango. Allegations were made that a DTA agent was assisting some of the 2,600 people registered at 'Omega' to vote.²⁴⁷ Two election supervisors at 'Omega' were recalled when it was judged that they had not taken sufficient action to prevent this version of 'guided democracy'!²⁴⁸ Generally, the CMIS observers were pleased with the behaviour of the residents of Kavango during the actual election: "We were particularly impressed that during the election time no cases of intimidation were reported in and around the polling stations" (M'Passou, 1990: 32). When the polling booths closed it was reported that a total of 64,156 votes had been cast in Kavango, the equivalent of a 94.65% turn-out.²⁴⁹

On 14th November, 1989, The Namibian headline was 'Countdown Halt: Last-minute hitches in neck-and-neck SWAPO/DTA election race' with results announced from 21 polling districts and only the Kavango and Owambo results to be announced. At that point the DTA had 134,184 votes (42.9%) and SWAPO 108,532 (34.7%).²⁵⁰ However, when the results of the last two districts came out the election swung decisively to SWAPO. In the Kavango Region there were a total of 22,046 votes for the DTA and 27,256 for SWAPO. In 'Ovambo' the DTA only obtained 9,200 votes, whilst SWAPO obtained a massive 197,100 votes.²⁵¹ The DTA has viewed the Kavango Region as crucial to their strategy to defeat SWAPO.

247 '“Helping” them to vote', The Namibian, 13th November, 1989, p7.

248 'Election officials recalled after irregularities', The Namibian, 14th November, 1989, p3.

249 'Nearly 100% Poll', The Namibian, 13th November, 1989, pp1 & 11.

250 'Election Results', The Namibian, 14th November, 1989, p7.

251 'Election Results', The Namibian, 15th November, 1989, p12.

The strength of the DTA's victory in the region in 1978, eleven years earlier, had given them the belief that, perhaps, they could sustain this level of support. The election was vigorously contested in the Kavango and SWAPO's election victory was, perhaps, the most significant electoral district victory of nationalism over regionalism.

Conclusion

An overview of the evolution of the electoral process in the Kavango Regions up to independence provides a useful understanding of the political dynamics of the regions and the ways in which these changed over time. Traditional authorities seem to have, initially, been attracted by the lure of economic investment that was channelled to the Kavango by South Africa as an incentive to encourage support for their 'internal settlement'.²⁵² Deborah Posel has argued that the development of a grid of 'Homelands' in Namibia and South Africa in the 1960s and 1970s can be viewed as the fruition of a second phase of apartheid designed to entrench the economic and political power of the white population (Posel, 1991: 227). The increased impact of the armed struggle in Kavango in the early 1980s and the growth of civil society (the student and trade unions) in the late 1980s contributed significantly to the growth of popular nationalism. People were increasingly persuaded that only a SWAPO victory would bring peace to the Kavango and that there would be a greater prospect of prosperity within a unitary nation state. The change in popular consciousness laid the foundation for SWAPO's electoral victory in Kavango in 1989. The liberation struggle had achieved its political goal. Independence would see the focus shift to the struggle to achieve economic goals.

252 Research is still required on the economic impact of the major development projects initiated as a result of the Odendaal Plan. Evaluation of failures and successes could be useful for future macro-economic planning.

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An attempt has been made to give uniformity to the spelling of names, although transcripts, newspaper articles and archive documents often provide different versions of names. We have also listed organizations by their acronyms in cases where they are commonly referred to by these. We apologize in advance for any errors.

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The collection of ten papers in this book grew out of two community-based regional history conferences that took place in Rundu in 2005 and 2007. The conferences inspired historians from the Kavango Regions to continue their studies and research. Funding from the Embassy of Finland has enabled MAN to publish this volume that presents a new, regional, perspective on anti-colonial resistance and the liberation struggle. Topics range from the military conflict with the German colonial state in the early twentieth century to the armed struggle and student protests in the 1970s and 1980s.

"This book will help to promote and develop basic knowledge of Namibia's history and encourage a wide ranging discussion of existing sources and abroader debate on the contribution of the inhabitants of the two Kavango Regions to the liberation of our motherland, Namibia" Mr Sebastian Kantema



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