

Luregn Lenggenhager, Martha Akawa, Giorgio Miescher,  
Romie Nghitevelekwa, Ndidzulafhi Innocent Sinthumule (eds.)

# THE LOWER !GARIB ORANGE RIVER

Pasts and Presents of a Southern African Border Region

[transcript] GlobalStudies

Luregn Lenggenhager, Martha Akawa, Giorgio Miescher, Romie Nghitevelekwa,  
Ndidzulafhi Innocent Sinthumule (eds.)  
The Lower !Garib – Orange River

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# Introduction



# The Lower !Garib / Orange River: A Cross-border Microregion

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*Giorgio Miescher, Luregn Lenggenhager and Maano Ramutsindela*

The Orange River is the most prominent river in South Africa and one of the longest on the continent.<sup>1</sup> In his quest for a new historical narrative, Neville Alexander uses the Orange River as a metaphor to describe the long and complex processes that have formed the multilingual and diverse post-apartheid South Africa of today.<sup>2</sup> However, as powerful as the metaphor is – as a way to reconceptualise South Africa's past – it also stands for a certain kind of self-referentiality that is prevalent in South African scholarly debates.<sup>3</sup>

Understanding the Orange River as a South African river ignores the multinational and cross-border nature of the river: its source in Lesotho and its lower course towards the Atlantic Ocean. It is this last section of the river that is the focus of this volume, namely its lower reaches, where the river forms the border between Namibia and South Africa. Here, the river is both a symbol and space that holds the complex histories of the international border separating South Africa from its northern neighbour Namibia, which was colonised by the former for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Furthermore, this stretch of the river is critical for understanding a specific regional history, namely historic Namaqualand, to which our naming of the river as !Garib / Orange River refers.<sup>4</sup> Due to the specific local climatic and topographical conditions – which are notably very different to those at the upper river – the Lower !Garib / Orange River forms an exceptional oasis in an otherwise mountainous and arid landscape. A combination of the multiple and contested functions of the river, the natural resources of the area, migration, and economic activities in the Lower !Garib / Orange River led to the development of this area as a cross-border microregion.

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1 With a length of 2,092 kilometres, the Orange River is the sixth longest river in Africa and the second longest in Southern Africa, after the Zambezi.

2 Alexander 2003: p. 107

3 See the concept of a South African empire in Henrichsen et al. 2015.

4 Officially, in Namibia the river is called the Orange River. On the South African side, however, the name Gariiep is also widely used, and an application for officially renaming it is pending. Gariiep is the Afrikaans way to spell the Khoekhoegowab name !Garib. Throughout this volume, we use Orange River, !Garib or the combined form !Garib / Orange River interchangeably.

We use the concept of micro-regionalism to denote the many and varied informal and formal processes that shaped a site-specific form of regionalism across the Lower !Garib / Orange River. Such a regionalism brought the southern part of Namibia and part of the Northern Cape in South Africa together, to form a geographic area within which human and environmental histories unfolded over time. Region formation in this part of Southern Africa is not only a product of activities at the locality but is interwoven with local and global events and processes. As Söderbaum and Taylor noted ‘micro-regional processes are not only about micro-regions but also reflect greater processes at the macro-level.’<sup>5</sup> This volume is about the development of the Lower !Garib / Orange River cross-border microregion and the social, political, economic and environmental dynamics associated with region formation. It draws attention to the consequences of region formation on the landscape and for the people of the region.

The region’s historiographical and political marginalisation stands in contrast to the centuries-long cross-border economic activities, physical movements and cultural connectivities of the space. Despite a thriving mining industry operating in closed areas, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century the border region is marked by widespread poverty and a lack of economic opportunities for most of its inhabitants. The economic marginalisation is mirrored by the little academic interest that the region has received in both South Africa and Namibia’s national historiographies, paralleled by a lack of historical research on the region’s mining activities, and in particular on its diamond mining. This academic oversight is rather surprising given that South Africa’s unilateral claim over the whole border river is an open sore for Namibia and a constant reminder of the continuing imperial attitude of its southern neighbour.<sup>6</sup>

Our project never had the intention to provide a comprehensive historical narrative, but rather aims to stimulate critical research on the diverse historical developments and dynamics shaping the Lower !Garib / Orange River region at particular times and places. In doing so, our engagement with the Lower !Garib / Orange River region sheds light on practices of control, exploitation and integration of peripheral (border) regions into colonial, apartheid and post-colonial territorial and political formations. By studying the ‘material, symbolic and discursive flows’<sup>7</sup> over the borders of Southern Africa, we contribute to nuanced historical geographies of the subcontinent, paying greater attention to local experiences outside the nation-state framework. Thus, we anchor our discussion of the Lower !Garib / Orange River region within Namibian, South African, and regional historiographies.

## The making of a colonial border

Before arriving at the Atlantic Ocean, the !Garib / Orange River crosses about 500 kilometres of extremely arid landscape, with an average rainfall of below 100mm per annum. Consequently, the river and its rich vegetation along the banks constitute an elongated

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5 Söderbaum and Taylor 2018: p. 15

6 See Wanda Rutishauser’s chapter in this volume.

7 Lester 2003: p. 609

oasis and a source of human and animal life.<sup>8</sup> To farmers living in the region, the river's permanent water has been of central importance for many centuries. Here, they can water their livestock, find grazing, as well as even plant additional fodder. People along and in the vicinity of the Lower !Garib / Orange River have developed complex and innovative economic and social systems, enabling them to sustain themselves. Archaeological sites on the river banks and early travel reports of the 18<sup>th</sup> century confirm the Lower !Garib / Orange River's historical role as a central artery of life in this (semi-)desert area.<sup>9</sup> However, a perspective on the Lower !Garib / Orange River as the core of a region, with flexible spatial dimensions of nomadic pastoralists, mixed subsistence specialists and newcomers, was successively displaced by the narrative of the Cape's ever-expanding settler society. The notion of the Lower !Garib / Orange River as the Cape's hinterland gained prominence and eventually consolidated into a dominant trope within a particular conceptualisation of the region.<sup>10</sup>

For 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century explorers from the Cape, the Orange River constituted remoteness: a threshold to unknown lands, which also remained inaccessible by sea.<sup>11</sup> To them, crossing the river held the promise of discovery – of gold and other treasures of the African interior.<sup>12</sup> Their hopes were disappointed, but the areas known as 'Little Namaqualand' (south of the river) and 'Great Namaqualand' (north of the river) were subjected to the advancement and violence of the Cape Colony's northern frontier. A complex dynamic of conflict, alliance, confrontation and collaboration ensued, whereby local communities were caught in the crossfire – literally and figuratively – with newcomers. The region witnessed the arrival of white settlers, runaway enslaved people, displaced Khoen and San, Christian missionaries, and traders. These conditions led to disputes over control of resources, of power, and of physical and social reproduction.<sup>13</sup> Pressures on livestock and game increased, leading to the emergence of the commando economy: mounted and armed forces engaged in hunting and raiding, expanding the northern frontier across the !Garib / Orange River into Great Namaqualand.

In 1848, the Cape Colony claimed the whole territory up to the !Garib / Orange River, and for the first time the river became an official colonial border.<sup>14</sup> The formal integration of Little Namaqualand into the Cape Colony enabled both the establishment of loan farms south of the river – where settlers could now count on state protection – as well as the start of commercial copper mining in Okiep, South Africa's oldest mining town, about a hundred kilometres away from the river.<sup>15</sup> African farmers were further dispossessed and forced to either live under the protection of the mission stations established in the

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8 Blanchon 2017

9 For archaeological research on life along the river, see Kinahan 2001, Orton 2012 and Mesfin et al. 2022. For historical research on the river in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, see Penn 1995 and Legassick 2010.

10 Andrea Rosengarten in this volume challenges the stereotypes of southern African historiography, which are built on narrative conventions of colonial determinism and teleology.

11 See, for an alternative reading of one of these accounts, Dag Henrichsen in this volume.

12 Penn 1995: p. 64

13 Penn 1995, Dederling 1997.

14 On the Lower Orange River as a border, see Wanda Rutishauser's contribution to this volume.

15 Loan farms were based on rather loosely specified property rights that did not involve tradable land titles; they were mostly given to rich farmers from the Cape, who did not live on the loan

far north of the colony, or else they had to cross the river and settle in Great Namaqualand. In the following decades, huge swathes of Little Namaqualand were divided into settler farms.<sup>16</sup> Due to the harsh, arid conditions, however, the region usually attracted settlers with very limited means. Therefore, the region did not become prime farmland but instead remained the hinterland of South Africa's commercial farming industry. At this time, white farmers in Little Namaqualand could not afford huge investments, such as fencing, and they were very dependent on the presence of a resident African labour force. Hence, as Robert Gordon shows in his contribution, until well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Africans recruited into tenant farm labour maintained a certain degree of economic independence, based on livestock ownership and grazing rights on settler-owned farmland.<sup>17</sup>

The colonial border established along the Lower !Garib / Orange River and proclaimed in 1848 did not mark a boundary between two colonial powers, but the formal limit of colonial expansion. For a few decades, the Lower !Garib / Orange River divided an area of direct colonial rule in the south from a highly militarised territory under African control north of the river. In Great Namaqualand, today's Southern Namibia, competing interest groups – Khoekhoegowab-speaking pastoralists, European traders, northwards-trekking African farmers from the Cape, and missionaries – formed changing alliances. Newcomers from the Cape who had merged with the local population and relied on sophisticated commando structures, were often the dominant political and military force for most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>18</sup> In 1884, when imperial Germany successfully claimed Great Namaqualand as part of a German Protectorate, the Lower !Garib / Orange River turned into a formal border between two distinct colonial territories.<sup>19</sup>

## Competing colonial powers (1884–1915)

Germany's colonisation of Namibia proceeded along two main axes from the seashore; starting at the ports of Lüderitz in the south and Swakopmund in the north and continuing through the desert into the highlands. Whereas Windhoek – founded by the Nama leader Jonker Afrikaner – became the political centre in the north, Warmbad and Keetmanshoop were its counterparts in the south. As its name implies, Warmbad possessed rich artesian hot springs – useful for pastoralists' livestock after the 75km trek from the !Garib / Orange River – and the town contained numerous mission churches and some of the earliest German police patrols.

From 1903, Nama groups began to take up arms against German rule, intensifying from 1904–1906 under the leadership of Hendrik Witbooi – whose family had crossed

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farms (Dye and La Croix, 2020 p. 34). The official surveying of the farms along the Orange River only happened in mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. See Bernard C. Moore in this volume.

16 Surplus People Project 1994; Penn 2005.

17 See, also, Rhode and Hoffman 2008.

18 Lau 1987, Pool 1995.

19 Barnard 2000

the !Garib / Orange River in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Several years of substantial human and financial investment and military force were required to defeat decentralised and highly mobile Nama commandos. The !Garib / Orange River gained strategic importance, as anti-colonial fighters would seek refuge on its south banks, and refugees regularly fled to the mission stations in the Cape Colony, such as Pella. Imperial Germany fought this war with utmost brutality. Civilians were killed in their thousands during the military campaigns and died in concentration camps, or else were deported to other German colonies – therefore making the war a genocide.<sup>20</sup> The colonial strategy aimed at destroying independent local African societies to make space for an emerging settler economy. Consequently, from 1905 all African communities who had fought against the Germans were made subject to a near total expropriation of land and livestock.<sup>21</sup> With the completion of the southern state railway in 1908 – which did not reach Warmbad – Keetmanshoop rose in importance to the imperial government, and settler farms were increasingly sold off in the aftermath of the Nama-Herero Genocide.<sup>22</sup>

After 1908, the German Empire heavily invested in the transformation of Southern Namibia into a commercial farming area. Huge farms were surveyed, boreholes drilled, and the general infrastructure improved. In 1909, the state railway reached Karasburg, 50km north of Warmbad, laying the foundation for a territorial, political, and economic integration of the south with Windhoek.<sup>23</sup> The discovery of rich diamond deposits close to Lüderitz in 1908 gave a further boost to the colonial economy. However, the outbreak of the First World War and Namibia's occupation by South African troops abruptly stopped Imperial Germany's settler ambitions in the region. Diamond deposits and the farming potential had been a crucial incentive for South African occupation and, once again, political turmoil and economic interests changed the status of the Lower !Garib / Orange River from an international to an internal border.<sup>24</sup>

## Integration under South African Rule (1915–1990)

The status of the Lower !Garib / Orange River as an internal South African border, separating South Africa proper from its supposed fifth colony, persisted for 75 years (1915–1990). However, neither the League of Nations nor its successor, the United Nations, ever formally recognised South Africa's de-facto annexation of today's Namibia. From a South African perspective, things had changed significantly in 1915 and the Lower !Garib / Orange River area was no longer considered a hinterland but placed at the heart of a predominantly Afrikaner livestock farming community.<sup>25</sup> With the discovery of

20 Erichsen 2005; Zimmerer and Zeller 2008; Biwa 2012.

21 Werner 1998; Zimmerer 2001.

22 However, it was only in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – after the First World War – that colonial power fully unfolded in the southernmost parts of the territory. See Silvester 1993, Botha 2000 and Kaulich 2001.

23 Kaulich 2001

24 Miescher 2012a

25 Silvester 1998

more diamond deposits at the mouth of the !Garib / Orange River in the late 1920s, the region also became the backbone of the diamond mining industry.

During the period of South African rule, Namibia's most relevant colonial border shifted northwards up to the Etosha Pan, a huge saltpan situated between central and northern Namibia. Due to its strategic location the Etosha Pan, which was declared a Game Reserve with restricted access in 1907, became a central piece of the so-called Red Line in the 1920s. The Red Line, a combined veterinary and settlement border, drew the line between two essentially different domains: the heartland of settler colonialism in Central and Southern Namibia and the African interior in the northern part of the colony, where most Africans lived.<sup>26</sup> Whereas all traffic of humans, animals, and goods over the Red Line was heavily regulated and controlled, white people could cross the !Garib / Orange River border without any restriction. Movement of African people over the river was controlled in the framework of the general pass laws, and local border crossings were possible at some places – for example for workers in the irrigation schemes on both sides of the river.<sup>27</sup> Movements of animals and goods remained controlled here as well, albeit – at least in the memory of people living at the border – being more relaxed than in the north.<sup>28</sup>

The South African amalgamation of areas south and north of the !Garib / Orange River homogenised the experience of colonial rule to a certain extent.<sup>29</sup> Most African communities on both sides lost their land, and all felt the consequences of an exploitative colonial economy and the growing rigidity of consecutive systems of racial segregation and apartheid.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, there were differences in the consequences thereof. A particularly long-lasting way in which the border generated division and ambiguity was in the different classification of Khoekhoegowab-speaking communities south and north of the river. Under South African population registration legislation during the apartheid-era, Khoekhoegowab speakers in the Northern Cape were classified as Coloured. In contrast, those in Southern Namibia were gradually subsumed under the ambiguous denomination of Nama, though many self-identifying Nama registered as Coloured. Additionally, Khoekhoegowab speakers living in central and northern Namibia were predominately classified as Damara.<sup>31</sup> Today, Khoekhoegowab is hardly spoken in South Africa, but remains a vivid language in Namibia, where – ironically perhaps – it was cultivated by systems of segregation, which included Bantu education and radio language programs and newspapers launched in the 1970s.<sup>32</sup>

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26 Miescher 2012

27 See the contribution by Luregn Lenggenhager in this volume.

28 The legislation clearly prohibited the crossing of Karakul sheep from Namibia to South Africa, and other livestock and consumer products needed to be registered. See Moore 2021, particularly p. 97.

29 See Janie Swanepoel's contribution in this volume.

30 McKittrick 2015. See the contribution by Bernard C. Moore in this volume.

31 On population registration in Namibia, see Rizzo 2019 (especially pp. 80–99).

32 See the portrait of Izak Dirkse in this volume.

## Mining and the enclosure of land

Mining had an enormous impact on the Lower !Garib / Orange River region, particularly in its most western part towards the river mouth. However, unlike pastoralism and irrigation, we have hardly discussed the mining activities in this historical overview, nor is it thoroughly discussed in the contributions that follow.

This silence is not least the result of enduring politics of closure by the mining companies and the state. This closure was territorial and had various consequences for people's movement and the social fabric of the region. Mining, in particular diamond mining, went hand in hand with the large-scale foreclosure of land to prevent uncontrolled access to it. In 1909, the German administration, most prominently, proclaimed a huge territory along the Atlantic Ocean as a closed area: the *Sperrgebiet*.<sup>33</sup> The declaration of the *Sperrgebiet* meant that a stretch of around 100km in land width along the coast from the !Garib / Orange River up to 100 kilometres north of Lüderitz was declared a closed-off and prohibited area, to which access was strictly controlled.<sup>34</sup>

For local communities, the closure constituted an enormous physical barrier to lands closer to the coast, used for grazing and hunting.<sup>35</sup> The *Sperrgebiet* remained a closed area for the entire period of South African rule and still is today – even though sections of it have been officially declared a National Park. The extraction of rich diamond deposits at the mouth of the !Garib / Orange River in the 1920s led to the establishment of the twin towns: South Africa's Alexander Bay and Namibia's Oranjemund in 1926 and 1936 respectively. The eventual relocation of De Beers' headquarters, including some of the buildings and infrastructure, to Oranjemund was a symbol of how the Lower !Garib / Orange River had turned into an extractive centre for the global diamond trade. In the following decades hundreds of thousands of migrant workers reached the twin towns, and Oranjemund and Alexander Bay became thriving company towns with hospitals, schools, shops and recreational facilities. From 1950 onwards, the twin towns were linked by the first ever bridge built over the Lower !Garib / Orange River – which was aptly named after the chairman of the mining company as The Ernest Oppenheimer Bridge. However, the mining towns at the mouth of the !Garib / Orange River were completely sealed off from the area upstream. Additionally, heavy policing of mining area's borders allowed for no interaction or exchange with local residents in the interiors.

The mining companies' attitudes towards historical research suggests that they have completely internalised their politics of closure and limited access. It is almost impossible to access the *Sperrgebiet* and the archives of the mining companies, which explains the paucity of research on the subject. It seems that the companies only open their doors to selected people, who they are convinced will not ask the wrong questions. The existing

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33 In German, *Sperrgebiet* means 'prohibited area'.

34 On the South African side of the river, diamond-mining land was closed off, too, although on a smaller scale.

35 The government still granted emergency grazing rights in the *Sperrgebiet* to white farmers at least until 1979 (National Archives of Namibia, Land Administration (LAN), 084/02, Grazing in *Sperrgebiet*).

literature, hence, either relates to German mining activities based on German archives,<sup>36</sup> is written by insiders who have worked for the mines,<sup>37</sup> is based on personal memories,<sup>38</sup> or else is written without consulting the mining archives.<sup>39</sup> Those who conducted research within the framework of our project were also denied access to these records, and thus could rely only on materials collected by former employees and on oral history methodologies.<sup>40</sup>

## Dynamics along the river after 1990

In 1990, after a long struggle for liberation, Namibia gained independence and political priorities shifted towards the development of areas in the far north – beyond the Red Line. The South, once privileged and highly subsidised as the settler heartland, lost most of its political influence and access to state resources. Consequently, it became a marginalised region distant from the centres of power. Due to its small population, the South was also left with no decisive voting power within the political landscape of the emerging democratic country.

Likewise, the end of apartheid in South Africa put an end to significant subsidies for white farmers, who had formed the ideological backbone of the old regime.<sup>41</sup> The redirection of state subsidies towards formerly disadvantaged constituencies was a heavy blow for many whites who farmed along the Lower !Garib / Orange River. Many white-owned farms, especially those with low carrying capacity or without irrigation potential, were gradually deserted. As a result, the Lower !Garib / Orange River became a hinterland in ways that had not been known or experienced for more than one hundred years. However, the loss of state subsidies under the new democratic governments is neither the only nor necessarily the most important reason why many people in the broader Lower !Garib / Orange River region – with the exception of the immediate riparian areas – can hardly make a living.

Years of extensive mining has depleted the diamond deposits in the desert and along the Lower !Garib / Orange River, and mining companies have moved much of their extractive activities offshore.<sup>42</sup> As part of this shift, corporate capital has lost interest in municipal administration and investment. Alexander Bay has turned into a semi-deserted ghost town, while Oranjemund has only recently been opened to the public and permanent residence is now welcome. Oranjemund's residents have embraced the possibility of a prosperous future by way of turning their town into the gateway to both the

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36 E.g. Drechsler 1996.

37 E.g. Corbett 1998.

38 E.g. Bertoni 2008.

39 E.g. Amupanda 2020.

40 See the contributions by Tim Rüdiger, Romie Nghitevelekwa and Matha Akawa, and Ulla Mussung in this volume.

41 Bernstein 2013

42 However, in late 2021 Namdeb Diamond Cooperation expanded the lifespan of its onshore mines for another twenty years, after being granted a massive tax reduction by the government.

Namib Desert and the Lower !Garib / Orange River valley. At this stage, success remains a matter of conjecture, but there are signs of change in Oranjemund and beyond.

Aussenkehr, situated 180 kilometres upstream, on the Namibian side of the river, has become the biggest settlement on the Lower !Garib / Orange River. Here, mostly private investors run large irrigation farms producing table grapes for the international market. Since independence, Aussenkehr has attracted tens of thousands of seasonal workers, mostly from northern Namibia. Like in Oranjemund, the companies have passed the responsibilities for housing workers to the public sector, which is currently preoccupied with developing Aussenkehr into a regular town, where permanent settlement for farm workers and their families could become a real option.

Some indications for a more permeable international border include the formation of the !Ai-!Ais / Richtersveld Transfrontier Park in 2003, as well as the closer collaboration of Nama-speakers on both sides of the river.<sup>43</sup> Many other developments, however, appear to perpetuate and reinforce exclusion and territorial closures: this includes the establishment of strictly controlled private conservation areas; the growing capture of irrigation farming by global capital; and, most recently, the closing of the border due to Covid-19.

## The volume

This volume results from a joint research project involving universities in South Africa, Namibia and Switzerland.<sup>44</sup> It reflects the intentions and considerations behind the international conference 'Space in Time – Landscape narratives and land management changes in a Southern African cross-border region' held in Oranjemund in January 2020.<sup>45</sup>

The conference was, in many ways, exploratory. Firstly, it brought together researchers from diverse disciplines, backgrounds and career stages who have been working on the Lower !Garib / Orange River, or who planned to begin new research in the region. Secondly, the conference's site was Oranjemund, one of the largest towns along the Lower !Garib / Orange River, in order to allow for direct collaboration with people living and working in the region. For us, as the organisers, it was crucial to

43 See also Pinto et al. in this volume. However, the plan to turn the entire region into a large trans-frontier conservation area never materialised (Lenggenhager and Ramutsindela 2021). Concerning language terminology, see the interview with Izak Dirkse in this volume.

44 The Swiss South African Joint Research Project: 'Space in Time: Landscape narratives and land management changes in a Southern African cross-border region' was jointly financed by the South African Research Fund and the Swiss National Research Foundation (IZLSZ1\_170956; 2017–2022). The publication of the volume was supported by a Swiss National Research Foundation's open access grant (10BP12\_214016).

45 The editors like to thank all contributors to the volume as well as other participants of the workshop: Nahas Angula, Ruben Diederik Frederick, Wayne Handley, Kai Herzog, Lazarus Kairabeb, James Mapanka, Nelson Mlambo, Ricky Motinga, Lorena Rizzo, Eleanor Schaumann, Katharina Schramm. We further want to thank Danielle Bowler for her excellent and thorough language editing, and the people at the *transcript* publishing house for their great support.

share our findings and ideas – both through the publication and dissemination of this volume, and by way of publicly accessible lectures and presentations in Oranjemund. Rooted in the belief that research must be a dialogue at all stages this conference was a medium for discussion, collaboration, and exchange with relevant interest groups in the region.<sup>46</sup> The participants of the Oranjemund conference comprised professionals, politicians and activists from both sides of the river, as well as master students and doctoral researchers from South Africa, Namibia and international universities, as well as some more experienced scholars. Further to this, we organised a public forum, titled *Resource Rights and Development: Visions for the Lower !Garib / Orange River Landscape*, where conference participants discussed past narratives and future visions with local politicians and the general public.

In preparing the conference, we intentionally kept our call for contributions thematically open and encouraged non-academic and early-stage researchers to contribute. This led to highly interesting and strongly contested discussions – particularly around more recent topics, such as migrant labour, language politics, land rights, as well as questions of belonging and identity. However, not all these topics have been academically explored in this volume, and some planned research could not be conducted due to the pandemic – a limitation we further speak to below.

Turning such an open and collaborative conference format into an edited volume comes with challenges. These are, firstly, the inclusion of topics which are important to the region yet not sufficiently researched, and secondly the inclusion of non-academic and early career voices in an academic publication. In addressing and speaking to these challenges, this volume reflects the approach of the Oranjemund conference by accepting that the publication is an opening for further research in the region, rather than being a comprehensive study of the Lower !Garib / Orange River. Therefore, as opposed to taking a totalising approach, it brings together new research and local voices focusing on an often-marginalised border region. In doing so, we hope to stimulate interest in and further debates on the Lower !Garib / Orange River region. Furthermore, we have included a section of interdisciplinary conversations with those researching topics outside of the humanities and social sciences, to allow for reflection on their methods, archives, and research frameworks.

We are, therefore, aware of the limitations of this volume and its most obvious thematic gaps. In our historical overview above, we have included some of the topics that are hardly addressed in this volume, such as the Namibian genocide, the political economies of mining and tourism, as well as the growing importance of specific ethnic identities. Additionally, we have sought to briefly survey these topics in portraits and short biographies of people living in the area, as a way to touch on crucial themes and research focuses that are not the subject of any individual chapter. These portraits also add the important perspectives of people in and from the region who attended the Oranjemund conference in 2020 but did not write a contribution. All the portraits and biographies featured are based on extensive interviews with these individuals.

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46 E.g., The Horizon 2020 online manual, [https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/docs/h2020-funding-guide/grants/grant-management/dissemination-of-results\\_en.htm](https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/docs/h2020-funding-guide/grants/grant-management/dissemination-of-results_en.htm) .

The first section '**Movements, networks and imaginations**' focuses on the complex networks and entanglement of people who have lived on both sides of the !Garib / Orange River, and how they have been depicted in the accounts of outsiders. These three contributions challenge the region's depiction by travellers, historians and novelists as a remote and static backwater of the Cape Colony or as a space of transit. With a new reading of Robert Jacob Gordon's 18<sup>th</sup>-century travel journey and an astute engagement with Khoe language concepts, Andrea Rosengarten reconstructs the complexity of the Lower !Garib / Orange River region's social formations and their spatial arrangements beyond its common representation as a static society doomed to acculturation. Similarly, Dag Henrichsen is re-engaging with a travelogue, this time by the Scottish officer James Edward Alexander (1803–1885). Henrichsen understands the travelogue as a description of how the river was a cosmopolitan and increasingly globalised cultural landscape in the making. He shows how 'stories' told to Alexander by his African interlocutors related to landscapes, environmental representations, as well as emplaced pasts and presents in the continual effort of people to constitute a habitat. Coletta Kandemiri and Julia Rensing discuss two recent literary texts which embody outsider perspectives on the region and, in many ways, perpetuate the idea of a remote empty land of transit. They contrast these two texts by white male authors with a contemporary poem by a young South African woman.

The second section '**Changing Dynamics of Settler Farming**' engages with late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century developments around farming, at a time when settler farming gradually changed the agricultural systems and spatial configuration of the region. Robert Gordon uses largely ignored mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Afrikaans-language studies of the region to show how so-called trekboers relied on close collaboration and exchange with 'non-white' populations. This hierarchical co-existence was crucial for a transhumance pastoral livelihood, which many trekboers still practiced in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Within the thematic focus of this section, Janie Swanepoel situates the entrenchment of a Boer community after the defeat of Imperial Germany in Southern Namibia alongside the development of commercial sheep farming in the region. Under South African rule, the area on both sides of the !Garib / Orange River became a heartland of Afrikaner commercial farming. This process developed alongside economic and political transformations and – as Bernard C. Moore shows – large-scale planning of irrigation and settlement. In his contribution, Moore demonstrates how the objectives of these state interventions shifted from racially exclusive smallholdings in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century towards a neo-liberal, cash-crop orientated model of production by the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In the third section '**Living along the River**', four papers zoom into the lives of residents along the !Garib / Orange River. The section covers three of the region's main economic sectors today: irrigation, mining, and conservation/tourism. It begins with Luregn Lenggenhager's local history of people living in and around a small irrigation settlement initially established for 'poor whites'. Lenggenhager shows how the gradual decline of smallholder farming also changed the relationship between the plot owners and those working for them. Tim Rüdiger's contribution gives a detailed account of the lives of mineworkers in Oranjemund in the 1970s – a time when the company town's strict racial segregation was increasingly replaced by the 'Patterson' job grading system. The Patterson system also allowed for a few Black labourers to bring their wives

to Oranjemund. The lives and experiences of these women is in the focus of Romie Nghitevelekwa and Martha Akawa's contribution. Closing this section, Mecthtilde Pinto and her co-authors conducted interviews with people living in the !Gamaseb conservancy, focusing on their struggle to get their share of the profit from the !Ai-!Ais / Richtersveld Transfrontier Park, established in 2003.

The fourth section '**Contested Land, Water and Borders**' positions local divisions within larger historical trajectories. Wanda Rutishauser retraces the conflicts around the exact course of the international border in the !Garib / Orange River and shows how this assumingly irrelevant detail impacts life along the river up to today. Kolosa Ntombini's contribution uses the region's mining history as a lens into how the state used its hegemony over property to assert and instrumentalise control over land. Based on this, she discusses the successful Richtersveld land restitution claim as an example of how local African residents contested colonial property regulations in the post-apartheid era. Finally, Sindi-Leigh McBride's chapter offers a theoretical exploration around a planned dam on the Lower !Garib / Orange River, linking the question of control over the river's water with ongoing debates around resilience and the Anthropocene.

The last section '**Interdisciplinary Conversations**' brings together more exploratory contributions. Here, authors from diverse disciplines discuss how their frameworks, archives, and data collection methodologies offer insight into how humanities and social science practitioners can produce more holistic studies. Firstly, Ulla Mussnug revises the personal archive of an archaeologist who worked for the Consolidated Diamond Mines, Ltd in the Sperrgebiet and urges us to pay more attention to archaeological heritage management in the post-apartheid era. In the second contribution, James Meron takes his co-authors Klaus and Brigitte Kuhn's orthomosaic reconstruction of the !Garib / Orange River mouth as a starting point to discuss the importance of spatial and geomorphological archives. Closing this section, Justina Nangolo, Martin Hipondoka and Eliakim Hamunyela research the water quality in the !Garib / Orange River close to the largest irrigation scheme, Aussenkehr, and reflect on the significance of their data for the people living along the river.

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# **Movements, Networks and Imaginations**



# Entangled Networks: Ethnicity, Mobility, and Exchange in the Lower !Garib / Orange River Region in the Late 18<sup>th</sup> Century

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Andrea Rosengarten

## Introduction

This chapter examines a newly available 18<sup>th</sup>-century source in order to reconstruct dynamic group networks in the predominantly Khoi-speaking and mobile pastoralist communities of the arid Lower !Garib / Orange River region beyond the Cape Colony's northern border.<sup>1</sup> The digitised, complete journal manuscripts of the Dutch expedition leader Robert Jacob Gordon, who travelled along the Lower !Garib / Orange River in July–December 1779 for scientific reconnaissance, go far beyond the earlier published versions of a portion of Gordon's papers in their details and complexity. This digital humanities resource offers new clues about the entangled genealogical and exchange networks of Africans and newcomers in this region.<sup>2</sup> These insights trouble a range of assumptions in historical literature on 'Khoisan' societies in 18<sup>th</sup>-century colonial southern Africa.

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2 The complete digitised journals and drawings of Robert Jacob Gordon have been provided through a digital humanities partnership between the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, and The Brenthurst Library, Johannesburg. This material is available at <https://www.robertjacobgordon.nl/>. The majority of these journal entries also contain Dutch transcriptions and English translations through the website of this digital humanities project. Transcription and translations for this digital project include the work of: the late Patrick Cullinan, Duncan Bull, Geoffrey Badenhorst, Peter Raper, and Maurice Boucher.

Previous translations of Gordon's journals have been available to scholars but only from a portion of his papers and without the manuscript digitisation. See principally: Patrick Cullinan, *Robert Jacob Gordon, 1743–1795: The Man and His Travels at the Cape* (Cape Town: 1992). For a larger bibliography of past commentary and analyses of Gordon's travels as well as related research, see the 'bibliography' section at: <https://www.robertjacobgordon.nl/about> (last accessed: June 05, 2022).

Most South African historical literature has conveyed an impression of Khoi-speakers' arrangements of kinship as static. While some research has gone further by discerning from colonial source material dynamic flexibilities in mobile pastoral exchanges with hunters and foragers, these practices have been narrated as markers of economic and political weakness that destined these groups for decline following the entry of colonial capital in Southern Africa.

In the Lower !Garib / Orange River region, I argue that developing a view of the region's 'entangled networks' can address outstanding historical questions about varieties of African ethnicity and groupwork practiced by Khoi-speakers in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, while also challenging lingering stereotypes about these groups in a southern African historiography built on narrative conventions of colonial determinism and teleology. With the subject of 'groupwork,' I draw upon the recent work of David Schoenbrun, who demonstrates the usefulness of this analytical category in studying how Africans in the Great Lakes region thought about and built communities that both included and also transcended 'ethnic' or descent-based memberships in recent and much earlier pasts.<sup>3</sup> 'Entanglement' as a category embraces multi-directional flows of people, movement, and intellectual influences, which I set against a literature on colonial Southern Africa that has yet to dislodge 'acculturation' from the vocabulary of colonial-era intergroup exchange analysis. With 'networks,' I attempt to unfasten assumptions about static kinship practices from scholarly descriptions of African groups around the Lower !Garib, while also signalling a sensitivity to the spatial dimensions of group-making among mobile pastoralists, mixed subsistence specialists, and newcomers in this region in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. My chapter uses Gordon's notebooks as an entry point into reconsidering groupwork along the Lower !Garib in 1779. Groups of this region included layered and dynamic genealogical networks, as well as forms of belonging that transcended kinship and looked outward, far beyond the immediate context of the river.

This approach harmonises with trends in the archaeology and anthropology of neighbouring regions in the last decades, which has considered the 'the situational fluidity of social identity' among hunters, herders, and agro-pastoralists in the past, while also calling for deeper-time African histories that contextualise varied African responses to European arrival within a longer-term view toward African accommodation, resistance, stability, and change.<sup>4</sup> I argue that carefully revisiting 18<sup>th</sup>-century eyewitness sources can enhance the findings of innovative archaeology conducted in central and southern Namibia specifically, which has documented a dynamism in pastoral migration and alliance patterns. Furthermore, Gordon's notations call attention to

3 Schoenbrun 2021: p. 3 states that framing groupwork in 'broad terms relaxes ethnicity's grip on thinking about groups'. His study foregrounds the importance over the *longue durée* of groups in the Inland Sea region beyond both genealogical descent groups and royal state formations, focusing – in particular – on the groupwork glossed as 'clan' formation, among other examples of non-ethnic groupwork. Thus, his project 'resists ethnicity's power to dominate our attention by exploring other kinds of imagination, forms of assembly, and methods of division to understand African groupwork.' (p. 6).

4 See Denbow 1999: pp. 110–123; 110. These questions have been taken up extensively by historians, archaeologists, and anthropologists in the neighbouring region of the Kalahari. See, e.g.: Wilmsen 1989.

how material culture evidence deposited in the ground cannot account for all concepts, incentives, and imaginations that animated African groupwork values and decisions in the late 18<sup>th</sup>-century Lower !Garib / Orange River area. This chapter also demonstrates that taking 18<sup>th</sup>-century fragments of Khoi language concepts seriously through a critical engagement with ethnographic material can aid in the historical analysis of complex Lower !Garib region social formations and their spatial arrangements – particularly beyond the level of the mobile pastoral household that the archaeology of the region has already brought into view.

### **‘Khoikhoi’ ethnicity and groupwork in the colonial period: a deferred research agenda**

Questioning the colonial and apartheid-era vocabulary of supposedly distinct ‘Khoi’ and ‘San’ ethnic entities became a project in southern African historiography in the 1970s. In a landmark 1972 article, Shula Marks revisited 17<sup>th</sup>- and early 18<sup>th</sup>-century Dutch East India Company (VOC) sources to question whether the ‘Bushmen’ (San) and ‘Hottentot’ (Khoi) categories described in colonial archives were in fact unstable distinctions and weak colonial approximations of much more complex African intergroup relations. A colonial report would typically describe ‘Bushmen’ (*Bosjesmans* in 17<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup>-century Dutch) when observing indigenous Cape people without livestock. The term ‘Hottentot’ was usually reserved for cattle-keepers. However, as Marks showed, subsistence and pastoral accumulation strategies could shift for African individuals and groups over the course of years.<sup>5</sup>

Although not addressed in the essay itself, Marks’ work raises further questions about the meaning and uses of the ethnonyms employed by 17<sup>th</sup>- and 18<sup>th</sup>-century indigenous Cape people and by their associates further into the interior, in regions like the Lower !Garib. VOC scribes, as well as senior Company figures like Jan Van Riebeeck himself, made notes based on conversation with Khoi-speaking translators such as Eva/Krotoa and Autshumao to indicate the African socio-political entities of the region in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. ‘Chainouqua’ – ‘Ubiqua’ – ‘Goringhaikona’ – ‘Cochoqua’ – ‘Gonaqua’: these are among the group names recorded in VOC journals, many of which contained the suffix ‘khoi’ (rendered as ‘-qua’), meaning ‘people’. Colonial writers of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries mapped these entities onto specific locations around the Cape Peninsula, while simultaneously recording extensive evidence of the dynamism of movement and exchange practiced by these groups in their notations. Thus, even while Europeans used narrative and cartographical conventions that presumed the discovery of stable ethno-territorial units in Africa, their observations attested to the flaws of those assumptions. Yet, scholarship had tended to reproduce these maps and lists when naming the political entities of the early colonial Cape, without engaging the challenging questions of what these cat-

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5 See Marks 1972, particularly pp. 55–80.

egories of belonging meant in practice or the nature of permeability in and between these groups.<sup>6</sup>

Marks' essay also helped demonstrate that VOC sources rarely provided clear indication of differences or uniformity in languages spoken by the Africans they described. It is likely that many of the 'Bushmen' dispossessed of cattle who are visible in the colonial Cape records were also Khoi-speakers sharing the same language as their cattle-keeping neighbours and kin. Linguists today distinguish between disparate San languages in Southern Africa that share no discernible etymological relationship with Khoi-family languages, while historians accept 'Khoisan' as a useful term for encompassing people speaking all these non-Bantu click languages and who primarily subsisted through mobile herding, hunting, and foraging. All of these non-Bantu southern African languages only collectively share phonological similarities in their multiple click sounds and tones. The VOC source writers of Marks' study were generally not interested in understanding or recording this level of ethnographic detail when describing their conflicts with 'Bushmen' stock raiders and or their trading with 'Hottentot' cattle keepers. In 1779, the VOC official Robert Jacob Gordon also used 'Bushman' as a shorthand for people without stock in the Lower !Garib region, even while his notations indicate that these were often people speaking a Khoi dialect along with pastoralist kin and other exchange partners. In some cases, he learned that people he initially assumed to be 'Bushmen' held cattle out of his view.

In the half-century since Marks' 1972 intervention, research addressing complexities in Khoi and San economies and social formations has been dominated by two agendas. In the 1980s and 90s, Marks' essay inspired the 'Kalahari Debate.' Here, historically-oriented anthropologists debated the time depth of the impoverishment and social marginalisation of 'Bushmen' or San hunting and foraging communities visible in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the broader Kalahari region, encompassing parts of Namibia, Botswana and South Africa – an area adjacent to and overlapping with some parts of the Namaqualand region.<sup>7</sup>

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- 6 See, e.g., Marks 1972: p. 65. In a 1989 volume, the linguistics researcher G.S. Nienaber made the highly valuable contribution of compiling most known archival references to different Khoi 'tribes' of southern Africa – primarily of the Cape Colony, the Lower !Garib region, and South West Africa (Namibia) – by mining a wide variety of traveller and missionary reports. However, the study is predicated on the idea of tribal separateness, and thus engages little with how these groups may have been entangled spatially, genealogically, and economically. Only the word 'khoa' meaning 'people' (rendered as the suffix '-qua'), is discernible for translation in the ethnonym transcription examples above. Recently, Wilfrid Haacke's compelling article on the '[e]thnonym of the "Griekwa" or "Griqua"' investigates the Khoi-language contours of one ethnonym as it appears in 17<sup>th</sup>-century Cape colonial sources. Haacke locates the 'Charigurina' of van Riebeeck's records as the #*Kharixurina* (or 'little Xuri'), i.e., a group in a junior position to the more senior 'Xuri' group, who later migrated to the Orange River area and became known as the 'Xri' or 'Griqua' by the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. See: Haacke and Snyman 2019: pp. 267–328 and Haacke 2008: pp. 163–77.
- 7 The main proponents of the two sides of the debate were Richard Lee for the primordialists and Ed Wilmsen for the revisionists. See e.g.: Wilmsen 1989; Lee and DeVore 1976. In a 1992 essay titled *The Kalahari Debate: A Bibliographical Essay*, Alan Barnard provides a useful overview of the anthropological and historical texts related to the debate.

Secondly, regarding mobile pastoralists, the ‘Khoikhoi’ colonial-era history of the past decades has focused on forms of settler violence within the Cape Colony in its frontiers. This literature has tended to reproduce an older colonial narrative of the supposedly inevitable ‘decline’ and disappearance of Khoi-speaking mobile pastoralist groups throughout South Africa in the colonial period.<sup>8</sup> Importantly, this scholarship has documented colonial brutality as well as the increasingly genocidal dynamics of settler assaults on Cape indigenous pastoralists and hunters. Thus, it has enhanced historical understanding of the relationship between Khoi servitude, Cape slavery, the growth of settler land control, and emergent forms of anti-Black law and racial thought in South Africa before the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>9</sup> However, these research projects typically centre colonial actors and intellectual frameworks as well as European language sources, leaving little room for indigenous visibility except for narrating the African suffering captured in court and administrative records. Beyond ill-fated attempts at ‘resistance’, the only other visible African cultural response in this literature is colonial assimilation. There has been a curious staying power in this southern African historical literature that tends to reproduce the logic of the colonial ‘encounter’ for Khoisan histories by reading an overwhelming asymmetry of European cultural and technological power in any interaction between Africans and colonial newcomers.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, we still have a limited understanding of the internal dynamics of indigenous mobile pastoral societies within and beyond the Cape Colony outside the flawed analytical categories of acculturation, as well as ‘tribe.’<sup>11</sup> How exactly did Khoi-speaking mobile pastoralists interact with outsiders and with *each other* on the ground in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. On which terms did they conceive of group belonging and exclusion, however situationally, in the context of their complex regional economies of trade? These are questions that still lack precise answers.

I would contend that these lacunae have been a result of the types of historical questions asked and skillsets applied, rather than the qualities and varieties of available evidence. One revealing dynamic of knowledge production about ‘Khoisan’ history within the South African academy, for example, is that command of Khoekhoegowab (KKG) as a research language has never been an expectation for scholars working on colonial history topics involving Khoi-speakers, despite the possibility of language training or expert collaboration with KKG-speakers in Namibia and the availability of significant KKG

8 See, e.g., the central premise of Elphick’s 1985 monograph: *Khoikhoi and The Founding of White South Africa*.

9 See, e.g., Newton-King 1999; Penn 2005 and Adhikari 2010.

10 For examples of critiques of the ‘colonial encounter’ paradigm in African history, see: Hunt 1999: pp. 7–11; Bernault 2019: pp. 8–11.

11 The most nuanced studies on cultural and political transformations among Khoi and San-speakers in the northwestern Cape through the 19<sup>th</sup> century tend, nonetheless, to emphasise only the qualities of colonial cultural assimilation that Africans engaged while building and rebuilding their communities: Legassick 1969; Legassick 1989: pp. 358–420. For a classic analysis of the Cape Peninsula and adjacent ‘frontier’ regions, albeit one that maintains the category of ‘tribe’, see e.g.: Elphick and Malherbe 1989: pp. 3–65.

language archives for the period before the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>12</sup> The answers to our questions above will be grounded, in part, in studying Khoi-language intellectual categories and terms.

In the past decades, adjacent fields of archaeology and anthropology have provided methodologically sophisticated and empirically convincing counterpoints to historians' assumptions about colonial teleology and determinism in the decline of hunter, forager, and mobile pastoral economies in southern Africa, based on new studies of material culture and exchange in regions such as the broader Kalahari. Archaeology from southern Namibia and the Lower !Garib region, specifically, has also undermined a pervasive idea in the historical literature on Khoisan 'extinction'. That conventional logic has attributed to decentralised, mobile pastoralist societies, the trajectory of cultural and political deterioration following the advent of colonial capital interests due to the inherent 'weakness' of their social structure.<sup>13</sup> By contrast, recent archaeologies of the Lower !Garib region help clarify that flexible social structures in smaller mobile groups was an important feature in the high productivity of dryland pastoralism. Additionally, they show that pastoralists maintained control over their economy to the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, even as Euro-American whalers at the Namibian coastline and settlers from the south vied for increasing access to cattle. The next section summarises these findings about mobile pastoral social structures from that archaeological material, before engaging with Robert Jacob Gordon's eyewitness clues and language inferences that can add complexity in recovering kinship imaginations, exchange relations, and other varieties of African groupwork in the entangled networks of the Lower !Garib region.

## Interpreting the Materiality of Social Structure in the Namib Desert and Lower !Garib regions

Archaeological excavations at sites within the Namib desert region in today's Namibia provide the foundation for John Kinahan's analysis of the mobile pastoral economy of a broader southwestern African region before the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In Kinahan's reconstruction of mobile pastoralist practices, based on his team's stratigraphic excavations of a variety

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12 Historians taking Khoekhoegowab and related dialects seriously in academic research has begun recently. This crucial change has been led by heritage speakers. See e.g., Biwa 2012. In the field of linguistics, Menán du Plessis has carried out interpretive work with !Kora sources that will be of great use to historians of the region. See e.g.: du Plessis 2017: pp. 123–137; du Plessis 2018. The scholarship on !Xam informant oral histories and language archives, which mostly centres the source base of the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century Bleek and Lloyd projects, tends to approach !Xam-speakers as well as Bleek and Lloyd's !Kora-speaking informants as relics of the past, to be placed within a colonial teleology of extinction. See e.g., Bank 2006; Penn 1991.

13 In a sentence from Marks' (1990: p. 77) essay that has not aged so well, Marks summarised that idea: 'In accounting for the ultimate disappearance of the Khoisan as an ethnic entity, their propensity for acculturation has thus to be taken into account, a propensity which must be closely linked to their loosely knit social organisation. They literally acculturated themselves out of existence.' For the 'weakness' argument made explicit, see: Elphick 1985a.

southern and central Namibian sites, Kinahan interprets that several overarching principles of indigenous social and economic organisation applied to the Lower !Garib river area and more southern regions of today's Western Cape in and before the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>14</sup> These findings upend popular and scholarly narrations of precolonial and early colonial-era ethnicity and group-making practices in the region, which emerged from traditions of apartheid-era colonial ethnography and archaeology. Previous studies imparted an impression of static African group identities, in which clearly distinct genealogical and ethnic units or 'tribes' of Khoi-speakers could also be located at particular points in space. Instead, Kinahan found that 'the nomadic pastoral economy...does not admit of ethnic or geographical limits as rigid as those suggested by colonial historians and administrators.'<sup>15</sup> His rebuke of previous Namibian archaeology goes further to describe an unscientific practice that sought to validate assumptions about ethnicity through searching for supposed ethnic 'signatures' in the ground, rather than objectively testing and rejecting hypotheses about groupwork based on the empirical results of the archaeology.<sup>16</sup>

Kinahan states that 'while Namib pastoralism was highly productive, it lacked stable localized communities. This is consistent with nomadic herding under arid environmental conditions, which required a highly mobile herding pattern based on self-sufficient family groups.'<sup>17</sup> This concept of self-sufficient or 'autonomous' household groups is central to Kinahan's analysis. Furthermore, he extrapolates from trench work that while individual households certainly pursued alliance and association with others, '[a]lliances among these people were probably quite ephemeral, with a strong tendency to break up and recombine whenever circumstances affected the management of the herds.' Excavations at sites within the Hungorob and Zerissene areas document 'a long series of unique, temporary associations between autonomous pastoral families.'<sup>18</sup>

Households included dependents and could vary in size. Sites such as !Nâu-aib suggest that pasturage conditions determined the aggregation opportunities for multiple households, while we can also glean that 'aggregations were an opportunity for social intercourse, and the loose clustering of, particularly, simple huts reflects the complexity of the relations between autonomous households.' Simple huts, Kinahan finds, likely

14 Kinahan 2001. This analysis centres on sites from the Hungorob ravine as well as the !Khuseb delta region. Kinahan's cross-referencing of these findings with Lower !Garib River area eyewitness descriptions of encampment practices from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century lends credence to the usefulness of Namib pastoralism archaeology for the Lower !Garib area.

15 Kinahan 2001: p. 126. Here Kinahan cites as examples Heinrich Vedder's 1938 writings on precolonial African ethnicity in South West Africa, as well as South African government archaeological reports on South West Africa from 1964. Map projections of distinct and tiled ethnicities dotting the Orange River area in the 18<sup>th</sup> century are reproduced in more recent scholarship such as Penn 2005: 157–169.

16 Ibid.: p. 126. Kinahan states: 'An uncritical acceptance of the colonial ethnography is indeed the unifying premise of earlier archaeological research in this area...[in which] the archaeological evidence could only reflect rather than evaluate the ethnography. In effect, archaeological research has often extended a spurious historical legitimacy to the notion that precolonial economies in the Namib were static and that cultural diversity could therefore only result from the immigration of people from elsewhere.'

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.: p. 82.

reflected accommodation for 'men who lacked property and households of their own', and the occupants of smaller huts were probably connected to larger household relations nearby in a temporary encampment. Thus, considering differences of wealth in cattle and in people across different households and even within households, Kinahan found that '[t]he encampment sites therefore contain a simultaneous expression of outward tension in the community of autonomous families, and of the cohesion that is vital to their unity in aggregation.'<sup>19</sup>

Kinahan produces a highly dynamic view of mobile pastoral communities of the Namib region. He postulates that this picture of mobile pastoral families and their impermanent aggregations in the Namib also applies generally to the Lower !Garib area pastoral economy up to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This view complements Gordon's 1779 eyewitness descriptions of small groups constantly on the move, in an arid environment where only certain locations along the river's high banks were suitable for temporary encampment. Furthermore, as Gordon's accounts corroborate, pastoralism was not the only strategy for daily subsistence, with other foraging, hunting, and food preservation strategies at play in 'a rather complex set of subsistence arrangements.'<sup>20</sup> Kinahan's findings suggest that pastoral households might recombine to form temporary larger household assemblages in patterns that were unpredictable and informed by contextual economic logic and dryland environmental factors. In this project, he does not formulate questions of whether other social conventions or kinship imaginations practiced by Khoi-speakers of the region could have incentivised or structured group aggregation and disaggregation.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, this illuminating archaeology of the mobile pastoral economy might yet overstate the ability of the material culture evidence to produce a conclusive account of the multiple groupwork strategies pursued by mobile communities of the region in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Kinahan emphasised that 'the household unit was the basic economic entity of the pastoral community, and a key to interpreting the archaeological remains.'<sup>22</sup> We can accept this finding, while also looking out for evidence of economic and social incentives toward groupwork and concepts of collective self-identification that transcended

19 Ibid.: p. 77.

20 Ibid.: p. 114. Describing evidence from a site near Walvis Bay, Kinahan notes that: 'Evidence from the pottery and domestic animal remains show that the technology of pastoralism was one dimension of a rather complex set of subsistence arrangements.' On October 17–18<sup>th</sup> 1779 Gordon saw, for example, wicker traps for catching fish, traps for hunting larger animals such as rhinoceros, elephants, and hippopotamus, as well as hemp and dagga gardens. He was also presented provisions of 'finely pounded dried fish' by pastoralists of the Lower !Garib not far from Augrabies Falls. Robert Jacob Gordon Journals, Oct 17 1779, available at: <https://www.robertjacobgordon.nl/travel-journals/fourth-journey/17th-October-1779>. Robert Jacob Gordon Journals, Oct 18 1779, available at: <https://www.robertjacobgordon.nl/travel-journals/fourth-journey/18th-october-1779>.

21 Kinahan's recent work on shamanic practice in the Namib in earlier periods explores how archaeology can serve an entry point into questions about imagination, whether social or religious. See e.g.: Kinahan 2018: 40–62. On what the archaeological remains lack, he states: '...the shaman was a figure who belonged more to the imagination than to the material world – and by implication – the archaeological record', (p. 41). See also: Kinahan 2017: pp. 553–569.

22 Kinahan 2001: p. 126

the pastoral 'household unit' – evidence which might not have survived in the archaeological record or ever have been deposited in the ground. The following sections engage that agenda through a close reading of Gordon's journals and intriguing textual details about groupwork from the 18<sup>th</sup>- and relevant 19<sup>th</sup>-century documentary record.

## Households in Motion: Family Assemblages and Larger Kinship Associations in Robert Jacob Gordon's Eyewitness Accounts

During the months of July to December 1779, the Dutch military official Robert Jacob Gordon took on the role of a colonial scientific explorer and kept a daily journal throughout his journey in ox-wagon, travelling several hundred kilometres north from Cape Town, past the official colony boundary of the Oliphants River. For all of Gordon's subjectivity and limitations as a European observer in this foreign African setting, his manuscripts nonetheless stand apart as the richest and most extensive ethnographic source from the region in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, surpassing the insights and details of the exploratory journeys of previous VOC officials and scientific travellers.<sup>23</sup> Below I attend closely to the ethnographic details that Gordon noted in his journal in 1779. I also discuss the problems caused by some of the blind spots of his colonial outsider positionality in using this particular source to probe kinship and exchange networks in the Lower !Garib area and interconnected regions.

An overarching theme in Gordon's journals from June to December 1779 is his observation of pastoral households constantly on the move. Furthermore, individuals and families engaged in pastoral mobility practices also claimed membership in a variety of networks, including ones that transcended ideas of descent. The observation of such dynamic pastoral assemblages aligns with archaeological findings on mobile pastoral household alliances in the larger Namib desert and Lower !Garib region. Gordon's transcriptions of Khoi language vocabulary about groups provide opportunities for historians to further examine the arrangement of Lower !Garib region communities. While Gordon's vocabulary reflects contemporary colonial assumptions about Africans' organisations into discrete, cultural nomad groups, Gordon recorded evidence day by day to the contrary when he observed group fluidities and network dynamism.

The first region Gordon visited after departing from Cape Town in late June 1779 was the area of the Kamiesberg mountains, north of the Oliphants River, which at the time served as the official boundary of the Cape Colony. Between the Kamiesberg and the mouth of the !Garib / Orange River at the Atlantic Ocean, Gordon encountered an arid country, with small encampments of cattle- and sheep-herders mostly camped on or near

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23 Robert Jacob Gordon's Fourth Journey journals, hereafter 'RJG journals'. All digitised journal entries exist at the website: <https://www.robertjacobgordon.nl/travel-journals/fourth-journey/fourth-journey/>. Other 17<sup>th</sup>- and 18<sup>th</sup>-century sources from Northern Cape frontier scientific expeditions include the accounts of: Van der Stel (1685); Hop and Brink (1761); Wikar (1779–80); Le Vaillant (early 1780s); and Paterson who travelled alongside Gordon (1779–80). Many of these journeys are addressed in: Huigen 2009. Paterson's independent account from his shared journey with Gordon lends validation to Gordon's own accounts. See Paterson 1789.

dry river beds, as long as sufficient grass lasted. The encampment locations were also selected for their potential for producing wells of groundwater – usually brackish – to be dug up for animals and people to drink. A scant few Dutch farmers rotated their stock throughout multiple sites in the region. They did this work with the assistance of Khoi-speaking herders, who went back and forth between herding for European associates and for relations at their own independent encampments.

The African encampment formations that Gordon observed in this area were frequently in the process of being packed up for relocation due to pasture giving out. On average, the encampments Gordon observed as he travelled through this area in June and July 1779 were composed of around 10 mat houses (called ‘huts’ by Gordon, or *oms* in singular in Khoekhoegowab), with a family of relatives and dependents occupying each mat house. An encampment headed by one chief called ‘Noebee’ – who also went by the alias ‘Captain Wildschut’ when among the Dutch farmers – was illustrative of these numbers. On the day Gordon first encountered the pastoral encampment led by Noebee/Wildschut, he saw nine discrete huts and about fifty people, with a maximum of four children in the group’s larger nuclear families.

At Wildschut’s encampment, a pattern emerged that Gordon would continue to encounter over the following five months in the region. Encampments often included some people with origins in areas much further away than the site of Gordon’s inquiries. Thus, although the encampment members here counted themselves among the ‘Klein Namaquas,’ Gordon nonetheless encountered members who had been ‘born in the Great Namaqualand,’ to the north beyond the !Garib River.<sup>24</sup> Some time in their earlier lives, these individuals had survived a pestilence that left scars all over their bodies. They described the disease as having originated in areas yet further to the north.<sup>25</sup>

As outlined above, Kinahan’s archaeology of the region indicates that pastoral households stayed and moved together as family units in this arid region. Gordon provides contemporary eyewitness evidence further supporting this interpretation of the archaeological record. After departing from the mouth of the !Garib / Orange River, Gordon met a group of self-identified ‘Einiquas’, who also appeared to be members of one family on the move. Gordon remarked upon their naming conventions:

The Hottentots that I saw, Einiquas, all called themselves Naugaap: this is their family- or maternal name. But they also had another name; and thus one was called Naugaap Toenemap, Naugaap having been his mother’s name; and daughters are called after their father.<sup>26</sup>

19<sup>th</sup>-century missionary reports and Nama oral traditions also record this naming convention, which is no longer practiced in the region today (where Christian names have become the norm). Within a family or household of Khoi-speakers in the broader !Garib

24 RJC journals, July 27<sup>th</sup> 1779. <https://www.robertjacobgordon.nl/travel-journals/fourth-journey/27th-july-1779>.

25 RJC journals, July 26<sup>th</sup> 1779. <https://www.robertjacobgordon.nl/travel-journals/fourth-journey/26th-july-1779>.

26 RJC journals, October 3<sup>rd</sup> 1779. <https://www.robertjacobgordon.nl/travel-journals/fourth-journey/3rd-october-1779>.

region, all sons were named after the mother, while all daughters were named for the father. If there were multiple sons or daughters in family, a secondary name such as 'Toenemap' above could distinguish an individual child. This additional name often indicated either their birth order among the siblings or an element of their individual personality.

After this meeting, Naugaap Toenemap became one of the guides for Gordon's onward expedition for several weeks. He travelled with Gordon's party further upriver a few hundred kilometres into the more lush and environmentally hospitable area of Augrabies Falls, in the stretch of the river between present-day Kakamas and Upington in South Africa. Along the vegetation of the river in the otherwise expansive arid landscape, patterns Gordon began to see in the Kamiesberg intensified. At each of the numerous pastoral encampments he visited, everywhere Gordon viewed encampments in the process of physical relocation according to changing river water levels.<sup>27</sup>

Toenemap's insights and introductions as a guide revealed further complexities and interconnections of social groups in this area of the Lower !Garib. On October 15<sup>th</sup> Gordon reported: 'We saw a fire half a day's ride ahead of us. This, Toenema said, was either Anoe eijs or Helderkraal (Bright kraal) these being Bushmen without livestock, or Nemei-qua (or Karoskraal) who do have stock.'<sup>28</sup> When they approached the fire, the group was identified as the 'Anoe eijs'. However, the fact that either of these two groups was a reasonable guess from a distance for a local expert such as Toenemap further indicates that these groups moved frequently within this region, rather than residing at permanent location and in a stable sequence in relation to one another.

In the following days Gordon learned that the 'Anoe eijs' – a group without livestock at the time of Gordon's visit – counted themselves among the 'Einiquas.' It was apparently in the context of this larger 'Einiqua' network that Toenemap maintained a close friendship with members of this group. Gordon encountered this first 'Anoe eijs' pastoral encampment nearly two weeks' journey upriver from the location where Gordon had first met Toenemap and his brothers, who counted themselves as Einiqua. Later, a man from the 'Anoe eijs' whom Gordon recorded as 'Doëga' gave Gordon a tour of the waterfall area on October 17<sup>th</sup>, and indicated that his group frequently moved their encampment between the right and left banks of the river according to quickly-changing water conditions.<sup>29</sup> When Gordon travelled further up the river in the next days, he met members

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27 RJG journals. See, e.g., the description from November 3<sup>rd</sup> 1779, when visiting an encampment of the 'Goeringneis': 'Here was a small, stony island with some thorn trees in the defile. Before we entered it a group from the second Goeringneis kraal approached us. A middle-aged man of medium stature called Tatabe Caboe was the Kaw waup or Kawkaup. After saying "tabé" I gave him a pipe of tobacco and they turned back with us. The defile was an hour from the first kraal of these Goeringneis, and after a quarter of an hour in it we reached an open place where the kraal was busy moving house. They will travel some distance down-river tomorrow. Their huts were therefore not completely put away. They too had 20 huts and a fair number of sheep, cattle and goats, although the first kraal had hidden many of its animals, as our Hottentots told us.' <https://www.robertjacobgordon.nl/travel-journals/fourth-journey/3rd-november-1779>.

28 RJG journals, Oct 15<sup>th</sup> 1779. <https://www.robertjacobgordon.nl/travel-journals/fourth-journey/15h-october-1779>.

29 RJG journals, Oct 17<sup>th</sup> 1779. <https://www.robertjacobgordon.nl/travel-journals/fourth-journey/17h-october-1779>. See also the October 16<sup>th</sup> journal entry regarding movements across the banks.

of the Nemneiqua/ Karoskraal, wealthy in cattle, and learned that one of their two most senior leaders was in fact a brother of Doëga from the 'Anoe eijs' from the same mother (and thus, following Khoi naming conventions, this man was also called Doëga).<sup>30</sup>

Thus, groups and individuals of this region claimed membership in different scales of genealogical association – from larger groups such as 'Einiqua,' to smaller household assemblages such as the 'Anoe eijs' and 'Nemneiqua,' which often had strong links of kinship and friendship between them, even while their control of livestock varied.

Another pervasive type of group relationship that Gordon recorded evidence of all along the Orange River, was the aspect of *seniority* within subdivisions of a larger network. In his broader analysis of the African political traditions of outsider incorporation throughout the neighbouring Highveld region, Paul Landau identified the Geissiqua in Gordon's journals and other early 19<sup>th</sup>-century sources as 'twin court' people, describing such senior/junior and right river bank/left river bank pairings as '*moieties*', or two parts of whole.<sup>31</sup> Adding further nuance to this picture, Gordon's entries from October in the most densely populated part of the river indicated that '*moieties*', or pairings of two groups, were not necessarily the most common quantity for group relations that implied seniority and junior status. More often, Gordon recorded three or more group subdivisions, as he marked the '*eerste*' (first), '*tweede*' (second), or '*derde kraal*' (third) of a larger group network on his map. Some of these notations might have merely indicated the order in which he encountered encampments of people who named affiliation to one larger group association. However, we know that the location of these groups shifted frequently. The ethnographic record of Khoi-speakers in Namaqualand in the 19<sup>th</sup> century implies that these subdivisions were organised around discourses of seniority rather than an ordered positioning of groups in space.<sup>32</sup> The origin of the distinction between so-called 'Great' Namaquas and 'Little' Namaquas, who were usually found north and south sides of the river, respectively, may also relate to this language of seniority and junior status. These groups could also practice multi-lingualism or incorporate speakers of different languages. For example, as Gordon followed the river further to the east, the 'Geissiqua' mobile pastoral encampments of Gordon's observation contained Tswana-speakers as well as Khoi-speakers.<sup>33</sup>

30 RJG journals, Oct 18<sup>th</sup> 1779. <https://www.robertjacobgordon.nl/travel-journals/fourth-journey/18th-october-1779> .

31 Landau 2010: p. 6

32 Theophilus Hahn was born on a Namaqualand mission station to a missionary father and was a rare European proficient in Khoekhoegowab. He became a 19<sup>th</sup>-century researcher of Khoi language and regional customs as well as a trader in Namaqualand. In one publication, he described tribute relationships ordered by seniority that linked groups of the Orange River to central Namibian groups into the 1860s: '...Certain it is that the Geilkhous once ruled from the borders of Ovamboland to the mouth of Olifants river, and that all the tribes of Great and Little Namaqualand sent annually a tribute to the paramount chief, generally consisting of a heifer, buchu, spears, and copper or iron beads, and milk-tubs. The last tribute of that kind was paid in 1863; and in 1856 even from Koranaland the chief Poffadder came to do homage to !Oasib on #Hatsamas, acknowledging that his tribe, the "Springbucks," were a branch of the Geilkhous'. See Hahn 1881: p. 97.

33 See Barnard 2008: pp. 61–75. Barnard uses !Kora ethnographic research from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to interpret that the terms 'great' and 'little' could describe political alliances across the re-

### 'Ais', '!Aes', or '!Khais'?

The Khoi language evidence recorded by Gordon in his 1779–1780 journal presents challenges of interpretation. Gordon deserves further evaluation as a language witness if we are to make sense of inconsistencies and puzzles in his transcription attempts. Generally speaking, Khoi and San vocabulary proved very difficult for foreigners to accurately describe throughout southern African colonial traveller archives, in comparison to the vocabulary of Bantu languages which had fewer (or no) clicks, fewer tonal elements, and contained longer words which created more redundancies for the novice ear to latch onto and make sense of.

Gordon self-reflectively addressed these issues in a journal from a previous journey in 1777–78 in the Eastern Cape frontier, in a region where he encountered Khoi-speakers living alongside Bantu-language speakers of the Nguni family language that came to be called isiXhosa by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Describing isiXhosa, Gordon observed that the language was 'very clearly pronounced' noting a full-throated, loud, 'vehement' manner of speaking that typically emphasised the penultimate syllable. By contrast, he described Khoi as extremely difficult for foreigners to speak and understand, although he did point to the existence of colonials he had met at the far eastern reaches of the colony who were practically fluent in Khoi (*'die seer coulant het hottentots spreken'*). This language competence in Khoi implied these distant settlers' close associations with Khoi-speaking herders, potentially from birth. Gordon indicated, correctly, the necessity of knowing exactly which click was used to understand the meaning of the word. In one puzzling notation, Gordon stated that he would only compile a list of Khoi words without clicks, suggesting that later readers of his work could then be sure of the words in question and their approximate pronunciation. His isiXhosa list in the same journal entry did not include this stipulation, despite it also being a language with clicks. Thus, his isiXhosa list was much longer and more detailed.<sup>34</sup> Gordon's omission of the vast majority of essential Khoi vocabulary in his personal journal was most likely a reflection of his uneasy grasp on the sounds of the language compared to isiXhosa, in which he was far more confident.

On the !Garib River region journey in 1779, Gordon did attempt to transcribe the words he heard repeatedly when asking new people to introduce themselves. These fragments are worthy of further analysis, while keeping Gordon's shortcomings, biases, and outsider position in mind. His notations suggest confusion over when and whether he was being given the word 'ais' (place, side), '!aes' (one of several Khoi terms for a genealogical grouping, often translated today as 'clan'), or even '!khais' (point, place, spot, locality), whenever he indicated the term 'eis' or 'ëis' or 'eijs' to describe a people, as in the 'Anoe eijs', the 'Noekoekeis kraal', the 'Hoekingeis', 'Goeringeis', and the 'Nouw Eis Bushmen.'

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gion's mobile groups: 'establishing relations of "great" and "little", as the Khoekhoe say, not in terms of descent, but in terms of alliance.' (p. 70). Following Engelbrecht's 1936 study of !Kora informants, Barnard summarised that the senior-junior juxtaposition could also describe family relations across different households (p. 73).

34 See: <https://www.robertjacobgordon.nl/manuscripts/appendix-to-ms-107-1-2#page2>; undated manuscript (MS 107/1/2) appendix to Gordon's Second Journey, from 6 October 1777 to 8 March 1778 in the Eastern Cape frontier.

To fluent speakers, the differences in sound and meaning between these three terms, 'ais', 'laes', and '!khais', would be unmistakable. But to foreign ears, these three words could sound very similar except for the click consonant – and discerning between the clicks of 'laes' and '!khais' could be a challenge to a new student. Because Gordon was inconsistent about notation with Khoi click sounds, as evidenced in his commentary above on reservations in compiling lists of Khoi vocabulary with clicks, it is hard to know whether his frequent notation 'eis' or 'eijs' implied a word without a click (which would likely be 'ais', place/side), or if Gordon was transcribing the word 'laes' or '!khais'.

The question of whether indigenous interlocutors described the Scorpion 'people' or the Scorpion 'point' to Gordon and several other 18<sup>th</sup>-century travellers is indicative of this puzzle. Untangling this issue has consequences for how historians might interpret the relationship between groupness ideas and territorial identity at this point in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century in the !Garib region. On November 4<sup>th</sup>, 1779, Gordon described:

[W]e marched along... for a total of four and a quarter hours from our sleeping place until we came to the Hoekingeis which is the Scorpioenkraal of twenty huts, all the same as the ones already seen. They are also a very sturdy, well-made people. They were more accommodating than the previous kraals and we traded some beads and tobacco for a pack-ox.<sup>35</sup>

In 1981, the archaeologist A.B. Smith published a commentary on Gordon's 1779 route in which he noted that in the direct vicinity of the area on the Orange River where Gordon mapped the 'Scorpion kraal,' there was a contemporary place name called 'Skerpioenpunt', in Afrikaans.<sup>36</sup> Afrikaans place names in this region are often direct translations of earlier Khoi-language place names. By this time in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, no guides in the region had direct knowledge of the terms of membership for small, mobile, !Kora-identifying groups who had dissolved politically by the later 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, local use of this 'Scorpion' place name remained. Thus, it is possible that the 'scorpion kraal' Gordon encountered was in fact a mobile pastoral assemblage that had encamped at the 'scorpion point' on that day in November 1779. If we extrapolate from this inference, then Gordon's attestations of 'eis' names for 'kraals' in his journals might refer to locations of encampment that a variety of mobile groups could occupy depending on the date of the visit.

In another possible interpretation, some mobile groups may have developed a group name for themselves through association with a place, even while they migrated throughout the region. This relationship features in the common translation of the group name for the †Aonin (Topnaar) of the Walvis Bay area, or 'people of the point.' The 'point' in this context may refer to the coast as a boundary or area of furthest margin before the sea, rather than a particular location in the natural harbour area. Khoi-speaking pastoralists of the Walvis Bay region come into archival view beginning with

35 RJG journals, Nov. 4<sup>th</sup>, 1779, <https://www.robertjacobgordon.nl/travel-journals/fourth-journey/4th-November-1779> '...marcheerden langs deselve op wy in het geheel vier en drie quartier uur van onse slaapplaats toen wy by de hoeking, eis synde Scorpioen kraal van 20 hutten alles als de vorsten quamen, (ook seer fris groot volk, sy waren williger als de vorige kralen en wy ruilden een draagoo voor wat kralen en tabak.'

36 Smith 1989: pp. 58–61 (Quoted in Nienaber 1989: 501).

late 18<sup>th</sup>-century whaler records as cattle bartering partners, while the archaeology of the !Khuseb Delta indicates that these pastoral families migrated widely throughout the region for pasturage and were not permanently sedentary by the sand dunes at the coast.<sup>37</sup>

Gordon's journals contain some notable omissions of Khoekhoegowab genealogy categories. For one, he never indicated conversations about the concept of '!haos,' a significant genealogy term attested in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century ethnography of the region, which appears to have described related households that Europeans translated roughly as 'clans'. This omission hints at the likelihood that other relevant vocabulary about kinship and group-making did not come up in Gordon's interviews, or that he never discerned these additional nuances through translation.<sup>38</sup>

### Groups beyond kin: 'Swimmers' or !Garib River Crossing Specialists

Reading within and around Gordon's manuscripts reveals a variety of other groupwork practices that transcended bounded geographies and networks of immediate family relation. On October 11<sup>th</sup> 1779, Robert Jacob Gordon made a note about a strategy for crossing the Lower !Garib river. This was a strategy that Europeans travellers in the region continued to remark upon throughout the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Gordon and others described the bands of 'swimmers' who assisted visitors and inhabitants in fording the !Garib / Orange River. Gordon described their use of flotation aids made from trees of the !Garib islands:

37 See, e.g.: Kinahan 2014: pp. 96–102; Kinahan 2000 ; Kinahan 1990: pp. 23–61.

38 On the historical distinction between '!laes' and '!haos': '*!laes was formerly all inclusive while !haos was within the !laes but it has lost that distinction*', Dr. Levi Namaseb, personal correspondence, 12 August 2020. 20<sup>th</sup>-century anthropological literature on Khoi-speakers' culture and politics is largely based on Agnes Winifried Hoernlé's two stays with Khoi-speakers in Namibia in 1912–13 and 1925, primarily in Walvis Bay and the Richtersveld area. This literature discusses the idea of '!haos' as a clan within a larger tribal association. The reports are structured by assumptions about the distinct nature of 'clans' and of tribes. See e.g., Hoernlé 1925: pp. 1–24; Schapera 1930: pp. 225–228. Using contemporary social anthropology terms of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Hoernlé further described clans or *!haoti* (singular '!haos') as 'sibs' within the '!laes', which would break into further sibs/clans over the march of time and new household establishment. She also noted that Dutch-origin terminologies for family were prominent among her informants in the 1910s and 1920s. Barnard 2008 uses early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Nama and !Kora ethnographic material from Hoernlé and Engelbrecht (respectively) to discuss kinship terminologies about immediate and extended family. See Barnard 2008: p. 69. In a recent article, Sian Sullivan and Welhemina Suro Ganuses have revealed a tight relationship for Khoi-speaking, Damara-identifying people today between the concept of clan (!haos) and specific land areas (!hūs) in northwestern Namibia. See Sullivan and Ganuses 2020: pp. 283–324. By contrast, the !Garib / Orange River material provokes questions of the changing relationship between territory and ethnicity ideas in southern Namibia since the 18<sup>th</sup> century among Khoi-speakers in the expansive region often termed 'Namaqualand'. Interdisciplinary material from this region suggests that African views about discrete territorial identities emerged as part of community driven 19<sup>th</sup>-century processes, rather than as reflections of ancient expressions of autochthony or fixed territoriality in this dryland environment of highly mobile pastoralism and dynamic intergroup relations. I explore these questions further in: Rosengarten 2022.

'Saw the Bushmen swimming across the river; this they do with a piece of dead willow-wood between their legs, going from one stone to the next.' He also observed the Dutch stock farmer Pienaar contracting these figures to assist him in moving his items across to the far bank.<sup>39</sup>

The Albrecht missionary brothers mentioned teams of 'swimmers' as their only hope in fording the !Garib / Orange River in their crossings of 1805–1807. The missionary Robert Moffat offered an extensive description of the river crossing procedure and swimmers' expertise from his time in the region in 1819.<sup>40</sup> The missionary Abraham Albrecht's experience in December 1806 implies that some kind of exchange or tribute to the swimmers was typical for their services:

Some of the swimmers said, that they had always received a young cow as their remuneration, when they had conveyed other persons with their goods across the river, but as we were their teachers [i.e., missionaries], they would leave it to our discretion what we chose to give them.<sup>41</sup>

The missionary Wimmer described in 1820 the necessity of recruiting swimmers upon attempting to cross the high-banked river with its quick currents. On March 22<sup>nd</sup> 1820, he wrote in his journal: 'We sent John Engelbreg's people to seek swimmers. They promised to return in four days'. Two days later, on the 24<sup>th</sup>, Wimmer followed instructions from unnamed indigenous guides on how to prepare for the swimmers' work: 'This morning we cut down a quantity of dry willow wood to make a float & brought it with our waggon to the place where we intended to cross some time in the night. John Engelbrecht, his son, & two swimmers arrived.' The next day on the 25<sup>th</sup> he recorded: 'the people begin early to tie the wood together,' and they proceeded '[about] nine A.M., all being in readiness & having about ten swimmers'.<sup>42</sup>

These multiple descriptions over the 1779–1820 period suggest a relationship of coordinated labour and a part-time occupational speciality among these river crossing guides, rather than a haphazard labour assembly for colonial visitors. While their primary economic activities in daily life away from the river were likely directed toward herding or hunting and foraging endeavours, reliable 'swimmer' men with a reputation for expertise in river crossings needed to be gathered from the surrounding region for a fording activity. The role of the 'swimmers' also underlines the regularity of traffic and trade taking place across both sides of the river, despite its fast currents and high banks.

These fascinating references to the swimmer institution provide another example of a groupwork arrangement previously missed by historical scholarship of the region. Furthermore, if the swimmers did leave behind material culture remnants, these traces have thus far gone undetected in the published archaeology. In fact, material evidence of these

39 RJG Journals, October 11<sup>th</sup> 1779. <https://www.robertjacobgordon.nl/travel-journals/fourth-journey/11th-October-1779>.

40 Moffat 1842: pp. 101–102

41 Abraham Albrecht journal, December 22<sup>nd</sup> 1806, CWM-LMS South Africa journals, Box 1 item 15–1, SOAS Special Collections, University of London.

42 Br. Wimmer, 'Steinkopf to Great Namaqualand' Journal, 1820, CWM-LMS South Africa journals Box 3 Item 73, SOAS Special Collections, University of London.

river crossing specialists may have never survived in the ground for the longer term, considering the potential decay of the willow wood materials that the swimmers used as rafting implements. Furthermore, fording materials discarded and buried (intentionally or not) in the high riverbanks in and before the 18<sup>th</sup> century may have also become degraded or lost due to the erosion dynamics of the !Garib / Orange River itself. Geomorphologists have shown that the course and location of the !Garib / Orange River all the way to the river mouth location at the Atlantic has itself changed quickly in the march of geological time, which may render the !Garib / Orange River banks unideal sites for digging trenches that can reveal a longer time depth of material culture in human riverside occupation and use.<sup>43</sup>

### 'Mâ-gu' partnerships and pathways

Anthropologist Polly Wiessner has illuminated the partnered gift-giving institution of '*hxaro*' as one of many important 'risk reduction' strategies historically used by hunter-foragers in the dryland region of north-western Botswana. Historical insights about *hxaro* among the !Kung San may provide useful clues for understanding 19<sup>th</sup>-century missionary documents describing similar partnerships used by Khoi-speakers in the Lower !Garib river area. As Alan Barnard has discussed through comparison of southern African herder and forager practices of trade networking and exchange, 'comparative ethnography shows us that specific exchange practices like *hxaro* are not as unambiguously 'hunter-gatherer' as we might think.'<sup>44</sup>

Wiessner's oral historical work through ethnographic interviews in 1975–77 implied that *hxaro* networks in past centuries likely extended far to the south, and probably into areas today called central and southern Namibia and the Orange River / !Garib region. A careful combing of earlier missionary records implies that similar and perhaps even overlapping arrangements existed throughout southern and central Namibia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and earlier, while Khoekhoegowab speakers may have used different vocabulary from !Kung San informants to describe these gift-giving and exchange networks.

In 1856, the Wesleyan missionary Henry Tindall delivered 'Two Lectures on Great Namaqualand and its Inhabitants' in Cape Town based on his experiences at the Warmbad mission station in the 1840s (then called 'Nisbett Bath' during its brief occupation by Wesleyan missionaries). The station was located at the !Aixa aibes spring, which Robert Jacob Gordon visited and described in his 1779–1780 journey to the Lower !Garib / Orange River, about 25 years prior to the establishment of the mission station there. Of the gift-giving and exchange relationships observed among the !Gami- +nun/ Bondelswarts people at Warmbad (or the 'Caminoekwas' of Gordon's 1779 observations), Tindall wrote in 1856:

43 This concern about pace of erosion remains my own speculation, based on my understanding of scientific presentations at the Space in Time Conference in January 2020 in Oranjemund, Namibia, at the NamDeb mining offices. I look forward to follow-up discussions with regional archaeological and scientific experts about this question.

44 Barnard 2008: p. 61

It is usual among them to carry on a kind of 'maatschappy' or partnership. Two men, living perhaps three or four hundred miles apart, 'make mates', the understanding is that...each may take from the other whatever he pleases. They profess to believe this is a very profitable kind of engagement, and it is difficult to persuade them to the contrary. The following instance will illustrate the extent to which this 'magu' or 'give-each-other' system proceeds.

Tindall's Khoekhoegowab vocabulary manuscripts from later in the 1860s suggest that he had sufficient language interest and exposure in Khoekhoegowab to attempt reliable transcriptions.<sup>45</sup> Here, '-gu' is a reflexive verb form in Khoekhoegowab implying two or more actors involved, and 'mâ' is the verb to give. If we accept that Tindall understood the name of this institution correctly from his informants, then participating in *mâgu* implies a chain of two and possibly more partners at the great distances he indicated. Tindall proceeded with his description of the exchange relationship below. Tindall's colonial chauvinism illustrates a broader European missionary preoccupation with the superiority of commercial exchange and denigration of indigenous economic practices:

A poor man as Nisbet Bath had, by diligence, obtained a horse and gun, he had a good hat, a very decent suit of clothes, a warm over-coat, and his wife had a tolerably respectably wardrobe. One fine morning a mate, with whom he had in an evil hour entered into partnership, turned up from the borders of Damaraland, and claimed as his right, horse, gun, hat, clothes, coat, and all his wife's apparel, except her undress, and with these he departed with true native sang froid, leaving the other his tattered garments and riddled hat, which had been so repeatedly patched, that it was almost impossible to discern the original stuff.

The probable sequel of this affair would be that the man would return his mate's visit, who would either manage to avoid him or get all his valuable cattle out of the way; and yet not the least suspicion would be awakened that there was any villainy or dishonesty in the matter.<sup>46</sup>

Wiessner's research on *hxaro* suggests that these networks were in operation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, if not also in earlier centuries in some form. If we accept that a groupwork practice like *mâ-gu* had older origins before the 19<sup>th</sup> century, then Tindall's recollections of this practice from the 1840s implies longevity and usefulness in this type of relationship for African participants – even decades after Africans took up using European-origin clothing and materials like gunpowder. Tindall's assertion that Warmbad area residents believed 'this was a very profitable kind of engagement' suggests that while individuals might adjust their decisions about participating in the trade based on their relative accumulation of wealth at the moment a '*mâgu*' exchange partner arrived, they also had long-standing faith in the utility of this kind of exchange relationship as they distributed the environmental risks of mobile pastoralism across an array of social relationships with people both near and much further away. In 1903, the Rhenish missionary Wandrer who

45 See e.g., "Tindall's Nama Vocabulary", dated 5 September 1862 and interlineated by Rev. G. Krönllein, in the Sir George Grey Collection, National Library of South Africa, Cape Town, Shelf Mark: g-10-c-14-8.

46 Tindall 1856: 40–41

was also stationed at Warmbad wrote of the '*mâgu*' practices among his Bondelswarts congregants observed during his period of residence there in the 1890s, thereby confirming the longevity of this practice within southern Namibian exchange networks until at least the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>47</sup>

Speaking of *hxaro* networks, Wiessner found that these exchanges involved 'explicit, semi-formalized and long-term partnerships of gift exchange' as well as 'pathways of exchange that extend far beyond the knowledge of individual participants', which were maintained through 'efforts to preserve these pathways over generations.' Furthermore, 'when explored within a broader historical and geographical context, *hxaro* pathways appear to have originated as a means to tap into the larger trade networks of the past in southern Africa.'<sup>48</sup> Tindall's recollection provides a rare written indication about the possible southwestern expanses of these types of trading partnerships and networks, which reached the Lower !Garib area.

### Conclusions: 'Another Child of Man'

Before he embarked on his Lower !Garib/ Orange River journey, Robert Jacob Gordon was primed with a colonial literary knowledge of several larger categories of supposedly distinct 'nations' in this region. These were: the 'Namaqua', 'Einiqua', and 'Koranna' groupings. Gordon did encounter numerous people, households, and pastoral encampments self-identifying according to these group names. However, a closer reading of Gordon's journals makes clear that these ethnonyms served as only one type of network layered upon many as he travelled along and around the Lower !Garib for several hundred kilometres in 1779. He encountered a wide variety of other self-identifying ethnonyms, and he observed the prevalence of smaller-scale encampment communities made up of household groups constantly on the move. People of this region had many ways of speaking about groups and participating in them, and all these groups defied the colonial ethnographic convention of mapping a particular community onto a fixed land area.

Reading Gordon's journal alongside archaeological evidence from the region and relevant ethnographic records from the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century bolsters the following interpretation: claiming membership in such large networks of kinship as 'Nama(qua)' probably helped small, itinerant communities and household units distribute the risks inherent to pastoralism in a challenging arid environment. These larger genealogical associations served as just one type of alliance that pastoral households cultivated for their success and that they could draw upon for crisis management.

In the context of these broad and entangled networks, how did people of the region receive Gordon? One final vignette from Gordon's journals invites us to consider the incorporative and outward-looking orientations of mobile herders and traders in the region. On November 5<sup>th</sup>, 1779 Gordon wrote:

47 Wandrer 1903: pp. 313–25, pp. 315–317

48 Wiessner 1994: pp. 101–124, p. 101

[We] departed at dawn, south again and still alongside the river, and arrived after an hour at the Noekoekeis kraal. These people had never seen anyone from our colony and were very afraid. However we had an old man from Hoekingeis with us...and he said to them: 'This is another child of man; look at his hair! He comes from far. Be not afraid. He is good. Bring cattle for barter!' He screamed himself hoarse. He jabbered so many good things about us that they became tamer and more than a hundred men, women and children came to us.<sup>49</sup>

On the one hand, moments like this from Gordon's text reveal clearly to the contemporary reader his entrenched colonial vision. In the longer journal entry, Gordon noted the nickname he had given to the old man from the Hoekingeis who travelled with him as a guide while they met the Noekoekeis pastoral assemblage: Gordon mused that he dubbed the man 'Hansworst.' This was a reference to a satirical comic figure, both a fool and a cunning rascal, in the travelling theatre and puppet shows of early modern German-speaking lands. With the perspective of hindsight and knowledge of systemic colonial violence to subsume this region within the following two centuries, Gordon's casual racial chauvinism is deeply unsettling.

On the other hand, there is little reason to doubt the occurrence of this interaction or the broad discursive contours of the energetic man's comments. Gordon understood himself as someone who came to the region to learn and to record. He was meticulous throughout his travels in 1779–80 about providing direct transcriptions of conversations with Africans as he understood them. His translators on this trip apparently moved well between conversing in Khoi and providing useable Dutch explanations for Gordon. Thus, to friends and kin from another pastoral assemblage who were unsure of this newcomer's intentions, this elder man extolled the virtues of Gordon's friendliness as he had experience it over the past days. This man of social standing emphasised the usefulness of this opportunity to make a new trade connection with a wealthy foreigner of clearly broad networks of his own. Gordon described similar interactions throughout his months along the !Garib with a variety of people who were surprised and intrigued, at first, by his skin and hair and who then turned eagerly to commencing exchange invitations after determining that he was passing through with apparent good will.

Near and beyond the Lower !Garib, there is more to know about 18th-century African approaches to network-making, belonging, and exchange beyond the familiar narrative of Cape colonial power and racial thinking entering 'frontier' regions. In this essay, Gordon's material has allowed us to revisit these questions. The material invites us to reconsider the projection of anachronisms of colonial domination onto this space in time by recentring regional African attitudes toward the benefits of incorporation. In the late 18th century, the broad cultural orientation of the region's mobile and entangled pastoralist networks included the expectation of encountering peoples of diverse and even unfamiliar origins and incorporating them carefully as clients and contacts with goals of wealth, trade, and subsistence security in mind.

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49 RJC Journals, November 5<sup>th</sup> 1779. <https://www.robertjacobgordon.nl/travel-journals/fourth-journey/5th-november-1779>.

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# The Visit of the Snake: The Storied Landscape of the Lower !Garib in the mid-1830s

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*Dag Henrichsen*

## Introduction

In 1838, after travelling for two years along and across the !Garib / Orange River – north of the British Cape Colony – the Scottish officer James Edward Alexander (1803–1885) claimed that this river is the most important natural object on the map of South Africa:

... It is difficult to speak of the Gariép<sup>1</sup> otherwise than in the most enthusiastic terms. Besides its beautiful African features, its utility is very great. ... That there will be white men sojourning on the banks of the Orange river at no distant day, I have little doubt; for I found, at convenient distances from the river, great store of valuable iron and copper ores, for which there is always a great and increasing demand in Europe.<sup>2</sup>

Alexander's account of 'An Expedition of Discovery into the Interior of Africa, through the hitherto undescribed Countries of the Great Namaquas, Boschmans, and Hill Damaras', the title of his two-volume book, is in many ways a glowing account of colonial exploitation possibilities along and in the vicinity of the river. In particular, he referred to the potential of copper mining and also of husbandry and agriculture due to the abundance of wood, gum, honey and wildlife, including seals and fish along the coast.<sup>3</sup> His travels included a visit to the !Garib river mouth, 'in compliance with the wish of his Excellency the Governor' in Cape Town.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, his enthusiastic reporting was linked to the wider needs of the Cape colonial economy and to British imperial sovereignty claims, writing: 'Suppose "an Orange River Wood and Mining Company" was established, the natives and speculators might both be benefited'.<sup>5</sup>

Additionally, he claims:

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- 1 This is the Afrikaans spelling of the river's name.
  - 2 Alexander 1967 (1838): I, pp. 106–108
  - 3 Historiographical contextualisations of Alexander's travels and writings are discussed, for example, by Dederig 1997, Keegan 2016, and Richings 2016.
  - 4 Alexander 1837: p. 440
  - 5 Ibid.: p. 442

The natives ... are friendly disposed. None occupy the ground where the Orange river copper is, and if white strangers were kept under proper restraint and control, the natives would be pleased to see them among them, for the sake of the articles of European manufacture which would be introduced among them. The natives might even be induced to assist in working the mine.<sup>6</sup>

The !Garib habitat<sup>7</sup> and, indeed, much of the area's desert, drylands and coast were at that time becoming a 'globalized cultural landscape', as Sian Sullivan et al. have recently observed with reference to the presence of Alexander and other colonial representatives. They write that 'its biophysical resources and indigenous practices were becoming shaped by, as well as shaping, cultural projections and extractive demands arising in distant locations and peoples',<sup>8</sup> in particular due to the tentacles of global mercantile capitalism and the Cape Colony's territorial expansion. In Alexander's perception, a reorganisation of the region's society and environment was at stake.

In this essay, I pay attention to what some scholars call 'emplaced experiences'<sup>9</sup>, and to those recorded experiences which not merely reflect but shape meaning and activity in the mutually constitutive relationship between people and their biophysical environment. In particular, I attempt to re-read some of Alexander's writings in order to highlight aspects and issues of the arguably more intimate and as such (also) intersensorial ways in which people living *with* (and not merely along) the !Garib in 1836/7 constituted a habitat in the broadest sense. Neither an ethnography of the Lower !Garib as a space and place, nor a re-narration of what Alexander had in mind in view of his (Western) readership – namely an illustrative exoticisation and racialisation of people's lives and knowledge in the region – I search for tags in order to qualify a particular African habitat beyond the fairly static colonial re-imaginings claimed by Alexander himself. As it will become evident, I focus on those 'interspersed' (Alexander) text fragments in his travel chronicle which he regarded as 'anecdotes illustrative of African manners and of the chace [sic]'.<sup>10</sup> Before I discuss these particular fragments, I briefly sketch aspects of the prevalent colonial discourse as reflected in his account.

## A Region in Crisis

Alexander mentions multiple engagements with, in particular, the male (African) elite residing along the !Garib and chronicles some of their mutual 'conversations' (usually conducted in Cape Dutch, it seems) in some detail. Combined with a plethora of observations

6 Alexander 1967 (1838): I, p. 119

7 I purposefully use the term 'habitat' to point to environments – and narratives – for any organisms, and with reference to aspects beyond the societal agency of humans, and point to the relational nature between society and bio-physical environments.

8 Sullivan et al. 2016: p. 10

9 Parkington et al. 2019: p. 732. The authors emphasise 'a mutual coming into being' of people in, and of places, and with regard to the 'constitution of environments'.

10 Alexander 1967 (1838): I, p. xii. Alexander often weaves 'quotes' from his African interlocutors into his narrative.

of life and livelihoods along the river, his account vividly indicates how much political, economic, social and cultural change and issues of control, authority and power were at stake. Given the encroaching Cape Colony border and largescale population migrations since at least the late 18<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>11</sup> Alexander met (or, at times, heard about) ‘Namaqua chiefs and tribes’, ‘Bastaards’, ‘Boers’ and ‘Boschmans’, ‘banditts’, colonial farmers and hunters, missionaries, and, along the coast, ship crewmen, seal hunters and whalers. Often, he encountered ‘the coloured classes’<sup>12</sup>, i.e., people and families of varied backgrounds and with histories of intermarriage. Alexander traveled a region which in 1836/7 constituted a cosmopolitan, multilingual and – in terms of economic, social and cultural practices – complex and flexible society. By the mid-1830s, the Lower !Garib was not a colonial frontier nor border region engaged in sudden change, but a region whose people had experienced, debated, embraced and/or rejected change and transformations for centuries.

Judging from Alexander’s account, a sense of urgency, if not crisis, seems to have been expressed by, at least, some of his male interlocutors. Alexander quotes Paul Lynx (Links), a *kaptein* (leader) of the Lower !Garib at the time, with reference to a conversation both men held at Aris, some 30km inland from the !Garib mouth, and revolving around a ‘white man’ claiming to take possession, in the name of the Cape Governor, of a ‘Seal Island’: ‘We shall shoot the white man if he attempts to catch seals on our island.’<sup>13</sup> Indeed, the Lower !Garib in the mid-1830s had become an area on the brink of colonial plunder. As Alexander had to learn during his travels, rumour had it ‘of our having gone to Namaqua land to take the country and enslave the people!’<sup>14</sup>

Alexander’s ‘Namaqua’ interlocutors like Paul Lynx were well-accustomed to the imperial discourse of claims being directed towards people living in the !Garib area.<sup>15</sup> As such they articulated their sovereignty with regard to land, territory and resources, and thus also with reference to their rights of access to the !Garib river mouth and its meadows, and to hunting seals along the coast, in ways and forms comprehensible to colonial representatives such as Alexander. However, the differently perceived political economy of the region reverberated, as I argue in the following, with conceptual complexities beyond a discourse of sovereignty, accessibility and control.

## Beyond the Colonial Discourse

The ‘conversations’ with interlocutors in the !Garib area, as narrated by Alexander, were obviously often staged and need to be regarded as highly skewed if not fabricated, nothing to say of the manipulated forms in which they were apparently lifted out of his notebooks for the purpose of publication.<sup>16</sup> A critical reading of these ‘conversations’ indicates

11 In general, see Lau 1987, and Detering 1997.

12 Alexander 1967 (1838): I, pp. 126, 140–141

13 Ibid.: I, pp. 112–113

14 Ibid.: II, p. 252

15 See esp. Dedering 1997, and Penn 1995 on these discourses.

16 Alexander’s private papers remain largely in private hands and have so far not been accessible to researchers, according to Richings 2016: p.41.

that there were also numerous other, different conversations taking place in, along, about and with (sic) the !Garib, than those shaped by an imperial discourse.

When leaving Aris in November 1836 for the river mouth with a few 'Namaqua' people under the tutelage of Paul Lynx, and eventually reaching the 'overlap' of the !Garib and the Atlantic Ocean, Alexander was not only thrilled by the impressive beauty of the wetlands with their 'green islands' and 'the quantities' and 'cries of innumerable flocks of wild fowl', hares and flamingos.<sup>17</sup> In passing he also pointed out that:

an immense snake is occasionally seen whose trace on the sand is a foot broad. The natives say, that when coiled up, the circumference of this snake is equal to that of a wagon wheel; and when it visits the Orange river mouth it is a sign of a good season for rain.<sup>18</sup>

Alexander did occasionally not only pick up 'other conversations' but might have realised that there were also other powers which influenced people's lives.

Here, I take the visit of the 'immense snake' to the !Garib river mouth as a point of departure, to trace some of these other powers alluded to in Alexander's chronicle and which seem to have tuned and turned the mind and bodies of people in the area at the time. Which other powers and intimacies could have actively guided people in the area to shape, transform and as such constitute (anew) a habitat in, alongside and with the Lower !Garib? Which kind of knowledges and which experiences were deployed by people in order to shape, encompass and embody livelihoods in the area in the mid-1830s?

As indicated, Alexander's narrative is 'interspersed' with 'anecdotes', clearly a euphemism considering the fact that he regarded these text fragments as 'absurd' stories which 'show how "children of a larger growth" can be amused in the region of the Orange river'.<sup>19</sup> Typically, he invoked imperial psychology in order to disregard the knowledge and narratives that the region's inhabitants associated with their habitat, effectively constructing (and manipulating) an imperial hierarchy of 'race' and knowledge for the sake of the colonial project he envisioned for the region.

The visit of an 'immense snake' at the !Garib mouth alerts us to a 'storied landscape'<sup>20</sup> of great complexity. Alexander did possess some kind of an 'ear' to such complexity when travelling up and down the Lower !Garib. Importantly, 'his anecdotes' were conveyed to him by people who were simultaneously engaging in colonial and Christian discourses and who were accessing, to various degrees, political, economic and ideological avenues heavily influenced by colonial markets, authorities and mission churches. Indeed, these 'stories' do not only point to complex, but multilateral and intimate worlds and view-points and a shared 'common sense' perspective in and along the !Garib in 1836/7.

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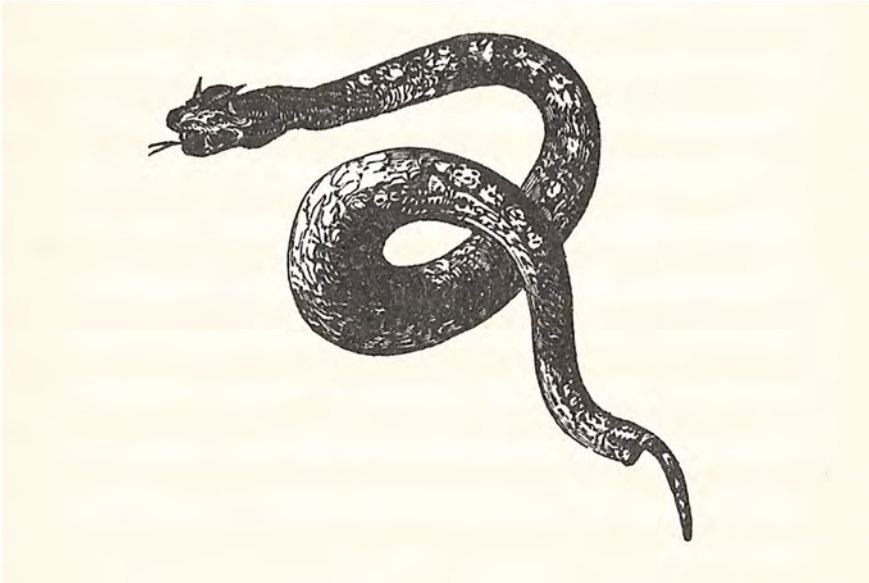
17 Alexander 1967 (1838): I, pp. 113–114

18 *Ibid.*: I, p. 115

19 *Ibid.*: II, p. 250

20 As used by Parkington et al. 2019: p. 735.

Fig. 1: 'Horned snake'. (Illustration, possibly by the Cape Colony's Surveyor-general Charles Cornwallis Michell).<sup>21</sup>



## Snakes and Water

The occasional visit of an 'immense snake' at the !Garib river mouth constitutes a relational intimacy, in the literal, practical and cosmological sense, with a habitat beyond Alexander's own perceptions.<sup>22</sup> Snake and water narratives are a major trope in historical southern African cosmologies, as evident in landscape narratives and archives,<sup>23</sup> and Alexander's chronicle conveys this to some degree. As Chris Low's widely-cast analysis of a broad range of historical Khoisan 'ethnographies' vividly shows, snakes, water and, in particular, rain during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, generated entangled and, indeed, powerful and ambivalent relationships with people.<sup>24</sup> As such, dead people or ancestors could become snakes – 'spirit snakes' – and were not to be killed; and rain itself could transform women into snakes.<sup>25</sup> Snakes, in particular, transcended the human, natural and spiritual environment, and as such framed meaning – and possibilities – for people and their habi-

21 In Alexander 1967 (1838): I, p. 56.

22 Recent research into southern African histories of habitat moves away from clear-cut anthropo- and ecocentric perspectives and stresses relational and entangled practices, attitudes and ethics. See, for example, the work of Sullivan et al. 2016, Parkington et al. 2019, and Low 2012.

23 See, with particular reference to the following sections in this paper, the extensive analysis of the fluid and ambiguous connections and entanglements between people, snakes, rain, divinity and healing in (historical) Khoisan worldviews, by Low (2012). His work provides the broader contexts of many of Alexander's mid-1830 observations as referenced in the rest of this paper.

24 Ibid.

25 The Digital Bleek and Lloyd (DBL), Notebooks, keyword 'snake'.

tat.<sup>26</sup> Knowledge about rainfall and water was – and is – crucial in the !Garib area, and knowledge about the snake’s visit must have carried profound meaning for the whole region. As is clear from the significance attested to the visit of the snake at the !Garib river mouth, its powers related, amongst other aspects, to people’s ability to construct a future; the snake’s visit ‘is a sign of a good season for rain’.

The ‘immense snake’ radiated meaning not only for people. As Alexander had to learn on another occasion, ‘monstrous snakes ... whose bulk, when coiled up, occupied a space as large as an after wagon wheel [sic]’ indicated their ‘presence ... among long grass by their smell, which was most offensive to cattle’.<sup>27</sup> This particular aspect of ‘snake power’ was pointed out to him by ‘a respectable old Bastaard’, Mr Balli, a wealthy stock owner residing close to Karahas further upstream from Aris. Mr Balli, no doubt, must have also held experiences with reference to the colonial farming community and Christianity. ‘His’ snake story obviously reflected not simply an ahistorical ‘myth’ or ‘primordial’ narrative, but emplaced experiences which were probably shared by many people in the region.<sup>28</sup>

A few months after his visit to the !Garib river mouth and now travelling to the north of Bethany in southern Namibia, Alexander picked up a conversation with two ‘Boschmans’, a man and a woman, at the fountain of ‘Ahuas’. Apparently, to the dismay of the woman, the man had killed a snake:

He excused himself by saying that he was a stranger in that part of the country, and did not know that the snake he had killed at the edge of the water, was the snake of the Fountain.

‘Ahuas was not the only fountain in Namaqua land which was superstitiously believed to be preserved by a snake...It was singular enough that it should have dried up immediately after the death of the snake; perhaps a hole which the snake made in the soft mud might have kept the fountain open.’<sup>29</sup>

This particular narrative points to the fallacies experienced by people not complying with or knowing about culturally shaped reasoning and perceptions: the fountain dried up because the man (in contrast to the woman) lacked the knowledge of attesting meaning to the snake. As such, the text is also a poignant reminder that any storied landscape is shaped by ‘dense cultural meanings’<sup>30</sup> and discursively. Through these narratives and their narration, nature is historicised and history becomes naturalised. Their relational character points to an epistemology in which the entangled activities of people, animals and a biophysical environment mattered and shaped a habitat.<sup>31</sup>

26 See also Low 2012: esp. pp. 81, 92.

27 Alexander 1967 (1838): I, p. 145. See also Low 2012: p. 88.

28 See *ibid.*, esp. pp. 73–80, 87.

29 *Ibid.*: II, pp. 227–228

30 Sullivan et al. 2016

31 For greater detail on this see esp., Low 2012.

## (Absent) Ways of Sensing

The !Garib river mouth landscape was not only populated by animals, reptiles and birds, as encountered by Alexander. Temporarily, and especially in times of drought along the river, its tributaries and surrounding mountains, people from either side of its banks migrated to the wetlands and meadows of the river mouth together with their horses, goats and cattle.<sup>32</sup> As such, the river mouth became a changing environment and landscape. One aspect that fascinated Alexander was its perceived soundscape. He moved, as he wrote, amidst the 'distant bellow of the breakers [of the sea], and the clamour of the wild-fowl'<sup>33</sup> whilst 'the air was darkened with them, and the shore constantly resounded with their cries'.<sup>34</sup>

Alexander effectively introduced his readers to his own (inter-)sensorial and intimate responses to a particular space and place at a particular moment in time. When leaving the river mouth again in order to return to Aris, he writes:

we rode...across a country composed of sand and scattered bushes, and in which numerous mole-holes rendered riding dangerous. A feeling of heart-sinking took possession of one in traversing these hot, flat, and lonely wastes, on which there was no object to interest one, and no sound struck the ear...<sup>35</sup>

In other parts of the !Garib gorge, he was particularly struck by the 'disagreeable "quah," of different cadences' from the 'baboons' who 'make the lonely banks of the Gariep to re-echo'.<sup>36</sup>

Paul Lynx or Mr Ballie and their migrating families would most probably have objected to such descriptions, and to the limited sensory responses of Alexander. They might have wanted to communicate, for example, a different culture of hearing and listening. Alexander conveys very little about his interlocutor's ways of sensing. Consequently, the 'Namaqua's' dance and music were 'wild' for him<sup>37</sup> and their language 'is of great difficulty for a stranger to acquire and pronounce; the clicks resembling one another so closely, and each conveying a different signification'.<sup>38</sup> He did notice that 'the Namaquas, like other African hunters, can track a man or beast by marks on the sand, among stones, or by bushes, which would be perfectly unnoticed by a white man's eye'.<sup>39</sup> When he noticed 'a reddish cloud' at the horizon and 'thinking it must be the Boschmans cooking one of the oxen', a 'Namaqua' told him that it 'is a cloud of locusts we see'.<sup>40</sup> At times he provided so-called translations of a place or river name such as the 'Humabib (root water) river' or 'the fountain of 'Kururu (the noisy)'.<sup>41</sup>

32 Alexander 1967 (1838): I, pp. 113–114; Hoff 2018: p. XX.

33 Ibid.: I, p. 117

34 Ibid.: I, p. 114

35 Ibid.: I, p. 117

36 Ibid.: I, p. 152

37 Ibid.: I, p. 234

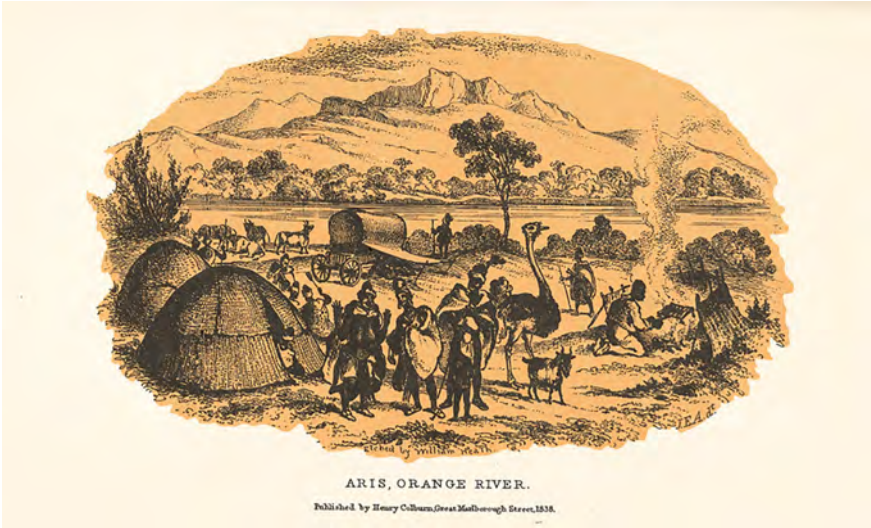
38 Ibid.: I, p. 193

39 Ibid.: I, p. 272

40 Ibid.: I, p. 296

41 Ibid.: I, pp. 276, 180

Fig. 2: *What do we hear?* Illustration of 'Aris, Orange River' (original caption), east of the !Garib river mouth (by the Cape Colony's Surveyor-general Charles Cornwallis Michell).<sup>42</sup>



As Steve Connor reminds us, 'cultures are sense traps'.<sup>43</sup> Just how much Alexander got trapped in his sensory responses towards the Lower !Garib environment becomes apparent when he sums up 'Namaqua knowledge',<sup>44</sup> interestingly in the form of some kind of cross-examination:

I got old men together, gave them tobacco, and cross-questioned them as follows:

What laws have the Namaquas?

They have none, they only listen to their chiefs. ...

Do the people know anything of the stars?

Nothing. ...

Do the Namaquas believe in lucky and unlucky days, omens, &c.?

They don't know anything of these things. ...

What do the Namaquas think of white men in general?

The first time we saw white men we thought they were 'angry things' that would hurt us, but after we heard the Word of God we thought that the white men were better than ourselves, or that they were above us.<sup>45</sup>

Quite obviously, his interlocutors guarded their answers and 'played to the tunes of the examination', and to the colonial (knowledge) hierarchies which took root in the region at the time.

42 See the discussion of Michell's illustrations in Richings 2016. In Alexander 1967 (1838): I, p. 82–83.

43 Connor 2005: p. 156

44 Alexander 1967 (1838): I, p. 165

45 Ibid.: I, pp. 170–174

As indicated, Alexander at times witnessed dance performances and ‘cited’ from the one or other ‘song of the wild Boschman’,<sup>46</sup> as he labeled these, as such providing additional glimpses of a storied landscape and ways of sensing. Additionally, his account is interspersed with numerous descriptions of hunting and other daily practices of place making or food security, amongst others, all crucially shaping emplaced experiences and knowledge, rooting habitat conceptualisations and attesting to a complex intersensorial ecology of people and space.<sup>47</sup> A few decades later, trained European scientists would write about ‘the Namaquas’ being ‘*wenig naturkundig*’ (with little knowledge about nature)!<sup>48</sup> As for Alexander, the !Garib was, as referenced above, foremost a ‘*natural object on the map*’.<sup>49</sup>

## Hippopotami, Honey and Floods

Along the Lower !Garib, Alexander now and then observed bleached carcasses of hippopotami, at times hanging in the river bank trees:

Besides trees torn up by the roots and rolling down the flood, sick or wounded hippopotami are sometimes borne down from the upper parts towards the mouth; these, occasionally before they reach the sea are fixed in the trees, and on the subsidings of the waters, they remain (in Dutch phrase) ‘spurtelen’; or kicking among the branches. ... the natives lose no time in stupid wonder, but quickly dispatch them with their javelins, and make merry over the rich spek, or fat under the skin.<sup>50</sup>

Apart from the sounds which these apparently dying animals inflicted onto the landscape, their presence changed the visual outlook of it during and after each flood, with hippo carcasses in the trees as time markers of previous floods. Narratives from Khoisan speakers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century provide much detail about what some of them referred to as ‘water things’, ie. sea cows which populated the upper and middle !Garib. Alexander, too, refers to the ‘sea cow holes’ in the riverbed and under-water landscape and the dangers this entailed for human activity.<sup>51</sup>

Floods shaped the landscape of the Lower !Garib and its tributaries in profound ways. Alexander’s account is dotted with references to narratives by his interlocutors about sudden floods and what this entailed in the everyday lives of people, animals and for the biophysical environment at large. Floods, real or anticipated, structured the actions and movements of people, stock and animals, and when they occurred, inflicted great dam-

46 Ibid.: II, pp. 25–26

47 See also more detailed contextualisations by Low 2012.

48 Henrichsen 2012: p. XVII

49 Alexander 1967 (1838): I, p. 106, italics added by DH.

50 Ibid.: I, p. 110. According to Ulla Mussgnug (personal information to DH, January 2022), the last surviving hippopotamus at the Lower Orange River was shot in 1925 at Beauvallon between Aris and the river mouth.

51 Ibid.: DBL, Notebooks, keyword ‘hippopotamus’. See also the analysis by Low 2012.

age. Alexander provides a lengthy quotation from an account by *kaptein* Jan Buys<sup>52</sup> about ‘men’ and animals experiencing such floods:

I remember ... some terrible floods ...A man and a snake would then be seen in a tall tree, and they did not molest each other, from fear of the torrent; or a man and a panther would be seen together. Many of the people who were living on the banks were swept away and drowned ... On the banks of the Gariëp, too, I recollect ... that a honey seeker once climbed a cliff and loaded himself with honey; whilst he was securing his burden, he heard below him a roar, and looking down, he saw that the river had come down so as to separate him from his people on the other side; he accordingly cut a block of wood, launched it, and bestriding it, he tried, for a long time, to get into the stream...he was carried down, and was quite unable to help himself. He saw dead sea cows rolling down the river, and trees which had been torn up by the roots...At last he came to where the trees ended below ‘Aris, and he thought that he should surely now be carried out to sea, when a lucky branch caught him, and he stuck fast; but he was so cold and benumbed that it was a long time before he could walk and get to his friends again.<sup>53</sup>

There is a point to make here about Jan Buys and his storied landscape archives. ‘Old Jan’, as Alexander dubbed him, was the leader of the Bethany Oorlam who in the decades before had migrated from areas south of the !Garib across the river to southern Namibia. He actively promoted Christianity and commercial trade relations with the Cape Colony and spoke Cape Dutch fluently, it seems. Yet, Alexander labeled him ‘uneducated’, though with ‘a very good sense...very ready to communicate’.<sup>54</sup> Like Mr Barrie or Paul Lynx, Jan Buys embodied the cosmopolitan culture flourishing in and along the !Garib in the 1830s. His recorded ‘stories’ clearly show how this culture continued to be shaped by an entangled human and wider biophysical environment and informed the constitution of a habitat.

## Heitsi-eibeb

Jan Buys was, of course, familiar with those spiritual and sacred spaces of the wider !Garib area which were linked to the deity of Heitsi-eibeb. Alexander had learned about such places of the ‘Namaqua deity’, often marked (according to him) by a ‘long pile of stones ... under [which] a person they call Haiji Aibib, of whom they stand in some fear, but of whose appearance and power they entertain no distinct ideas’; as such he also learned about the ‘offerings’ made by people passing by.<sup>55</sup> Buys took Alexander to such a place – ‘the wonder of the country’, according to Alexander – showed him a deep pit and then ‘stood in alarm’ when Alexander threw burning bushes and a stone attached to a fishing line into it. Whilst Alexander concluded that his own doings showed that the pit

52 Alexander 1967 (1838): I, p. 256; II, p. 231

53 Ibid.: II, pp. 244–245

54 Ibid.: II, p. 49; see also *ibid.*: I, p. 255.

55 Alexander 1838, p. 21

contained ‘nothing ... and so ... lost its reputation’,<sup>56</sup> Buys’ reaction indicates that it most certainly did not lose its reputation. Rather, it simply confirmed the violence and disrespect enacted by yet another colonial agent. In the paragraph following the description of this incident, Alexander recalled the above-mentioned rumour about him ‘enslaving the people’.

As Sigrid Schmidt<sup>57</sup> has observed, places associated with Heitsi-eibeb were and are often found near water (points). Rivers, as such, as Alexander was to learn in central Namibia from a ‘Boschman’, were places which, when digging for water, had to be approached with ‘an offering’; by not doing so, a person could fall ill.<sup>58</sup> Schmidt’s overview of Heitsi-eibeb-related places throughout southwestern Africa shows that its landscapes were heavily imbued with spiritually signified places and spaces of various kinds, and human agency and experience flowing from these.<sup>59</sup>

## Outlook: Endurance

James Alexander’s expedition narrative entrenched what during the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century became the hegemonic Western society-nature dualism paradigm. This had marked consequences, as Manno Ramutsindela has recently stressed with reference to the conceptualisation of landscape and environment:

Though humans, animals, and their biophysical environment are mutually constitutive, this entanglement has been undermined by ideas and discourses of landscapes and wilderness that thrive on social hierarchies often underpinned by a set of moral assumptions.<sup>60</sup>

Alexander’s account is shot through with all of this and goes much further. Embedded in an imperial vision of plunder and subjugation, his narrative fed into the making of what Ramutsindela with reference to more recent times has labelled environmental racism.<sup>61</sup>

My attempt at reading the storied landscape along the (Lower) !Garib of 1836/7 conveys, not surprisingly, complexity and dense conceptualisations of, in, and with space, environment and place and, as such, complexity in the constitution of a habitat and a particular landscape. As I have argued elsewhere, we deal in part with topological (and not simply topographical) complexity, i.e., entangled, multilateral spatial conceptualisations and differentiations rooted in (historical) time.<sup>62</sup>

Given the cosmopolitan and increasingly globalised cultural landscape in the making along the !Garib, the ‘stories’ related to Alexander by his African interlocutors do not simply attest to the aestheticisation of (narrated) landscapes or environmental representations. They signify a selective duration of intimate, emplaced pasts and presents,

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56 Ibid.: II, p. 251

57 Schmidt 2014

58 Alexander 1967 (1838): II, pp. 124–125

59 See, importantly, also Low 2012.

60 Ramutsindela 2018: p. 103

61 Ibid.: pp. 105–106

62 Henrichsen 1999

knowledge, memory, experiences and ways of sensing by people in their continual effort of constituting a habitat. In 1836/7, these 'stories' and people's ways of sensing implied endurance not merely because of a past sliding away in a rapidly changing present, but because of the significance – and power – attested to them by people engaged in shaping a future. Their many echoes can still be heard today.<sup>63</sup>

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63 On the reverberations of Alexander's descriptions in 'ethnography' see Sullivan et al. 2016: p. 10; for reverberations in recent Khoisan cultural and spiritual practices see Low 2012.

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# Imaginations and Constructions of Literary Spaces: The Lower !Garib / Orange River Region in Literature

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Julia Rensing and Coletta Kandemiri

## Introduction

As a *border area*, a *political space*, and a historically *contested terrain*, with its massive river a *majestic sight*; in various ways the Orange River region is a rich site of interest and fascination. Even so, it has received little academic attention, as lamented by the organisers of the conference ‘Space in Time – Landscape Narratives along the Lower !Garib / Orange River’, held in Oranjemund in 2020, and the editors of this collection. As scholars of literary and cultural studies, we wanted to explore how this discrepancy translates into the literary sphere. Hence, in this contribution, we look more closely at anglophone literature to examine the ways in which the Lower Orange River features in these texts. With this essay, we wish to offer an insight into three works written by ‘outsiders’ to the region, who use the area as a stage for their imaginations. In our analyses we explore the different roles, functions and forms that the area takes in the chosen texts, identifying certain tropes and styles that are activated to (re)produce the !Garib River region as a literary space.

As part of our engagement with the literature written in English and set in the region, we encountered how various examples of ‘white writing’ – to use J.M. Coetzee’s terminology here – repeatedly activate the motifs of either the *traveller tale* / the *explorer narrative* or the *escape journey*.<sup>1</sup> In our essay’s opening we examine these prominent themes in more detail. In the three case studies that follow, we investigate how the area emerges as a setting for the authors, produced to raise a certain critique, to evoke specific associations, or to unwind larger political debates. Following a chronological approach, we begin with a discussion of J.M. Coetzee’s ‘The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee’, published in 1974. We explore the strategies used by South African writer Coetzee in his novella to produce space literarily with a specific focus on the textual construction and negotiation of the *traveller tale*. In a second step we move to more contemporary writing, offering an analysis of the novel *The Lie of the Land* (2017) by UK-based author Jaspal Singh who works with the

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1 Coetzee 1988

motif of the *escape journey*. Towards the end of our essay, we shift the attention to a voice from democratic South Africa through examining the poem 'Mountain' (2017) by the poet and writer Koleka Putuma, who appropriates the idea of motion via taking her readers on a bicycle tour through Namaqualand, and with this journey, articulates a critique of land claims and property rights. As we shall see, these versatile perspectives on and distinct functions of the Lower Orange River region in writing further an understanding of the area as a political and cultural space that bears layers of histories and meanings.

### Considering the traveller tale / the explorer narrative and the escape journey

In our attempt to understand what kind of literary texts employ the river area as a setting, our research has shown how the notion of movement features prominently in various forms of writing located in the Lower Orange River region. In a broad number of texts – particularly those written by white authors – this notion either takes the form of the main protagonist's travels or escapes. Taking a closer look at the former motif, we encountered the rich repository of the *travelogue*-genre – one insightful example of this form of writing being William John Burchell's *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa* from 1822.<sup>2</sup> It revolves around Burchell's travels to the South African 'hinterland', scientifically investigating, recording, and documenting his journey and the region.<sup>3</sup> The ethnographic, geographic, and ecological interest of the first-person narrator who explores the area is central to and characteristic of this genre. In a similar vein, yet quite distinctively, the traveller's tale in Coetzee's 'The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee', published in 1974, equally deploys the concept of a white explorer, traveling from the Cape northwards, naming and claiming the space. However, written by the Nobel Prize-winning author, who is famous for his critique of issues around colonialism, apartheid, and white supremacy, 'The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee' rather takes the form of a *travelogue parody*, a critical reinterpretation of this genre, as further elaborated at a later point in this essay.

The *escape* theme that we identified in literary pieces set along the Orange River shares with the traveller's tale the element of motion, either from south to north (as in 'The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee') or vice versa. The trajectory of the escapees is rigidly structured along these binary lines – either depicting an escape from today's Namibia southwards to the river or following an escapee moving from the Cape northwards to the !Garib River. What is more, the escape stories we encountered share the common focus on narratives of European oppression, violence and danger while taking on the perspectives of the *Othered* – the colonised and formerly enslaved people in these histories. One contemporary novel devoted to such experiences is *Philida* (2012) by well-known South African writer André Brink. The book tells the story of a slave girl, fleeing from South Africa to the 'Promised Land' – the !Garib.<sup>4</sup> Seeing through Philida's eyes, the reader envisions the river as a paradise, evoked through comparisons with the 'land of Canaan' or depictions

2 Burchell 2015

3 Easton 1995

4 Brink 2012: p. 297

of it as a place from where 'the land is open and everything is free'.<sup>5</sup> The physical space is idealised and depicted as 'an in-between space that acts as a metaphor for the futility of slave freedom at the official slave emancipation in 1834', as Serah Namulisa Kasembeli explores in her dissertation on the literary representations of slavery in post-apartheid South Africa.<sup>6</sup>

It is vital to consider *Philida* in the context of the broader literary oeuvre of Brink, with his strong commitment to the country's history, the 'intimate brutalities of a society founded on a dehumanizing ideology' and his engagement with 'feminist and subaltern politics', focusing on women's roles in these histories.<sup>7</sup> In this vein, it is important to reflect on Brink's position as a white, male South African author conjuring up these issues, and choosing the Lower !Garib River region as his setting for such narratives to play out. This consideration is equally crucial in our first analysis, which focuses on a text written by Brink's contemporary J.M. Coetzee.

### Spatial Reading of 'The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee'

Our first case study investigates how the !Garib River region is designed in 'The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee' which is the second part of J.M. Coetzee's first novel *Dusklands*, published in 1974. Our prime concern with this text is to offer a spatial reading that illuminates how the narrative is constructed to produce a certain conception of space, closely tied to a particular colonial trope: the idea of *empty land*, which Rizzo describes as follows: 'Vacant land is a well-known *topos* in imperial and colonial imagery, suggesting the absence of indigenous people and visualising territorial claims by the colonisers.'<sup>8</sup>

In our analysis of 'The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee', we take our cue from Renzo Baas' *Fictioning Namibia as a Space of Desire*, in which he analyses the production of literary space in texts that are set in (German) South West Africa. Yet, while we share interest with Baas in 'how narrators and characters engage with, imagine, and inhabit this specific type of space', in our reading of Coetzee, we focus particularly on how space is produced through a specific multi-layered narrative construction, towards thinking about why the author designs his text in this way.<sup>9</sup> As our reading of 'The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee' will show, we argue that Coetzee deploys a tripartite narrative structure as a way to *empty* and simultaneously *design* the Orange River region in front of the reader's eyes.

'The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee' is, according to Baas, 'a multi-layered account of the trip undertaken by Jacobus Coetsé, the Dutch colonial farmer who is considered the first white person to have crossed the Orange River.'<sup>10</sup> While Jacobus Coetsé is the name of the historical figure, the name of the protagonist in the novella is Jacobus Coetzee. What is more, two further contributors (author J.M. Coetzee and his father S.J. Coetzee)

5 Brink 2012: pp. 285; 297

6 Kasembeli 2018: p. 78

7 Dovey 2013, *The New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/17/books/review/philida-by-andre-brink.html> (accessed 03 October 2020).

8 Rizzo 2005: p. 690

9 Baas 2019: pp. 6; 162

10 Baas 2019: p. 162

are named Coetzee – these ‘strong ties accorded to the name ... further complicate the narrative layers’ as well as an understanding of the texts’ relation to history and fiction.<sup>11</sup> Due to the limited scope of this paper, we cannot offer a more in-depth analysis of these aspects, however, they contribute significantly to the novella’s complexity. Another notion that adds to this complexity is the text’s composition of multiple units with distinct perspectives on Jacobus’ journey to Great Namaqualand and each of the units’ ‘strong claims to truthfulness and historicity’.<sup>12</sup> And yet, due to this rather unconventional structure, Baas argues ‘that the narrative is in fact the product of a fictionalised, manipulated history.’<sup>13</sup> Drawing from this we argue that the novella appears as a fictionalised version of the *explorer narrative*. In many ways, the plot of the central narrative evolving around Jacobus Coetzee’s travels bears characteristics of the colonialist travelogue, focalising ‘the archetypal hunter-explorer’ that embarks on his journey into the yet ‘unknown’ South African interior, ‘treks through the wilderness, naming it and claiming it as he goes along.’<sup>14</sup> On his route, he crosses the Orange River and enters Great Namaqualand where he encounters its inhabitants, who show little enthusiasm or hospitality towards their new visitor. During the course of his stay, Jacobus Coetzee falls sick and is designated to the margins of the village, where he suffers from poor health in solitude. The villagers’ hostility towards their white visitor increases, finally culminating in a fight at the river where Coetzee bites off a young boy’s ear and is consequently forced to leave the village. At this point, the Boer frontiersman’s hunting expedition turns into an ironic failure story for the explorer, as Coetzee is deserted by most of his servants and forced to embark on his homeward journey alone, only accompanied by his loyal servant Klawer. Coetzee later returns to the village in a second expedition on a revenge campaign, killing the inhabitants and *emptying* the place.

What struck us as remarkable, as we engaged with the novella, is that the emptying of the place and the construction of an uninhabited African space, happens not only on the level of plot but particularly emerges through the form and structure of ‘The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee’. The novella begins with a ‘Translator’s Preface’ written by J.M. Coetzee, in which he declares:

The present publication is an integral translation of the Dutch of Jacobus Coetzee’s narrative and the Afrikaans of my father’s Introduction, which I have taken the liberty of placing after the text in the form of an Afterword. In an Appendix I have added a translation of Coetzee’s official 1760 deposition. Otherwise the sole changes I have made have been to restore two or three brief passages omitted from my father’s edition and to reduce Nama words to the standard Krönlein orthography.<sup>15</sup>

Hence, at this point, we find out about the organisation of the text as well as about certain textual modifications made by J.M. Coetzee. After this preface, the main narrative (as

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11 Baas 2019: p. 191

12 Baas: 2019: p. 169

13 Baas 2019: p.192

14 Easton 1995: p. 592

15 Coetzee 2004: p. 55

outlined above) follows. This narrative makes up the main part of the text as well as portraying the core story that the novella centres on. It is followed by the Afterword, which ‘was drawn from a course of lectures on the early explorers of South Africa given annually’ by the historian S.J. Coetzee and then followed by an Appendix – the official deposition of Jacobus Coetzee at the Castle of Good Hope.<sup>16</sup> These units inform the tripartite narrative structure in which space is produced.

Let us now take a closer look at these single units and at the ways in which space – and particularly the !Garib River region – is designed and imagined. As readers enter the main narrative with Jacobus Coetzee as the I-narrator, they dive into the first stage of spatial production. On Jacobus’ travels to the north, he punctually maps his route, mechanically recounting certain stages and naming particular places: ‘We stopped short of the Oliphants River...’; ‘Between August 2 and August 6 we covered the fifty miles to the Groene River. The going was hard.’<sup>17</sup> Yet, despite these spatial markers, we are left with only sparse information about the space the protagonist treks through. We can only fathom the route he journeys roughly, being provided with little knowledge about the landscapes he passes. Interestingly, however, the I-narrator recurrently refers to traces of people that he identified along the way, pointing to signs of the inhabitants: ‘Two days north of the Groene River we passed an abandoned Namaqua kraal’ or: ‘...we found traces of Bushman encampments.’<sup>18</sup> This imagery of a *peopled space* increases at the point where he reaches the village in Great Namaqualand – the place where he would later come into violent conflict with the inhabitants. Through this climatic structure, readers encounter the landscapes around the Orange River region as *essentially peopled*. The little details on the setting where the encounters take place are then coupled with the explorer’s dreams and fantasies when he suffers from poor health and solitude after being designated to the margins of the village:

I move through the wilderness with my gun at the shoulder of my eye and slay elephants, hippopotami, rhinoceros, buffalo, lions, leopards, dogs, giraffes, antelope and buck of all descriptions, fowl of all descriptions, hares, and snakes; I leave behind me a mountain of skin, bones, inedible gristle, and excrement.<sup>19</sup>

Jacobus is envisioning himself as the masculine, fearless discoverer in the wilderness hunting animals with his gun – a conception that strongly resonates with colonialist fantasies and ideas about colonial travellers. However, the imagery of his dream is in stark contrast to the protagonist’s reality, as he is too weak to move and wrapped sickly in a blanket.<sup>20</sup> Jacobus emerges as an emasculated character, suffering from illness in solitude.<sup>21</sup> This motif points to the author’s strategy to parody the explorer narrative and the traveller’s tale.<sup>22</sup> The colonialist’s desire for untamed space and uninhabited wilderness

16 Coetzee 2004: p. 55

17 Coetzee 2004: p. 63

18 Coetzee 2004: pp. 63–64

19 Coetzee 2004: p. 79

20 Coetzee 2004: p. 75

21 Which is taken to the extreme, as Jacobus ‘fouled’ his blankets and suffers from a large, purulent fistula on his buttocks; pp. 76, 89.

22 Attwell 1991: pp. 8–15

is opposed to the situation Jacobus encounters in Great Namaqualand. Thus, on his second journey to the Great Namaqualand, Jacobus sidesteps ‘the apparent “lack” of “empty space” ... by creating it’, as Renzo Baas explains.<sup>23</sup>

In the depiction of this second journey of Coetzee, the I-narrator again disregards the landscape which he passes, instead focusing on his plan of emptying the village, which he then brutally does.<sup>24</sup> A spatial reading of this unit of ‘The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee’ revealed that on the level of the plot a first step of *depeopling* the space around the Orange River has taken shape.

The second section of the *tripartite narrative structure* is then heralded with the Afterword, which would formally serve as an introduction (as we have learned in the preface), but which was moved to follow the main narrative. This Afterword is part of a lecture series from the years 1934–48 by S.J. Coetzee, and functions as an ‘appraisal of Jacobus Coetzee’s achievements’ and his persona as a whole.<sup>25</sup> This informs the production of space as follows: S.J. Coetzee’s depiction of Jacobus’ travel route is much more elaborate than what we previously learned about the path, as S.J. Coetzee offers pictorial as well as factual information on the journey. For example, we are informed about Jacobus’ ‘slow progress through country of strange pyramidal sandstone hills and sandy plains where his wheels sank axle-deep’, and that as he moved further, ‘[o]n July 18 Coetzee crossed the Olifants River at latitude 31°51’, where he then ‘turned in a north-easterly direction to avoid the coastal desert’.<sup>26</sup> As S.J. Coetzee explains, Jacobus moved along and skirted the Onder Bokkeveld and with ‘the crossing of latitude 31°S the party entered the country of the Namaquas’.<sup>27</sup> He then describes how Jacobus ‘glanced to neither right nor left as he passed through the defiles of the Khamies mountains’ which ‘abounded in game’, moving further into deserts that were ‘barren and presented a variety of dangers’ as he trekked towards and finally passed the Great River.<sup>28</sup>

S.J. Coetzee then speculates quite elaborately on how Jacobus and his team spent their days at the Great River: ‘The sight which greeted him was majestic, the waters flowing broad and strong, the cliffs resounding with their roar. Here he might have rested all day...’<sup>29</sup> These musings deserve further attention as part of our spatial reading. However, what is interesting for us is at this point is how S.J. Coetzee paints a pastoral scenery of the river region, envisioning Jacobus Coetzee within this idyllic landscape, where ‘[t]he cooing of doves soothed his ear. The cattle, unyoked, drank at the water’s edge. He saw that the banks, clothed in trees (*zwartebast, karrehout*), might furnish timber for all the wants of colonization’.<sup>30</sup> The lecturer elaborates extensively on Jacobus Coetzee in the Southern African nature, painting a picture for the readers – or listeners in his classroom – to imagine the traveller within the landscape. Interestingly, S.J. Coetzee’s further recounts Jacobus’ subsequent journey into the Great Namaqualand while being ignorant

23 Baas 2019: p. 171

24 Coetzee 2004: p. 100 ff

25 Baas 2019: p. 262

26 Coetzee 2004: pp. 112–113

27 Coetzee 2004: p. 117

28 Coetzee 2004: pp. 118–119

29 Coetzee 2004: p. 120

30 Coetzee 2004: p. 120

of the events that took place between Jacobus and the inhabitants of Namaqualand. Neither Jacobus' time spent in the village, nor his fight with the people receive any attention. Instead, S.J. Coetzee continues to talk about Jacobus' travels further up north, where he discovered and claimed places, and 'camped at a warm spring which he named Warmbad'.<sup>31</sup>

These exemplary quotes portray how in front of the reader's eyes a certain conception of space is taking shape. We learn about the variety in soil and weather conditions as much as we picture a multitude of sceneries and landscapes (mountainous, sandy etc.) Jacobus Coetzee trekked through. This idea of a sole wanderer moving through an untamed, picturesque landscape resonates strongly with the earlier introduced, 'imperial-born myth of the "unsettled" land.'<sup>32</sup> It is striking here, how S.J. Coetzee increasingly paints a more and more nuanced picture of the space, particularly in contrast to the sparse information we gained with regards to the landscape in the first unit, the main text of the novella.

However, when taking a closer look at the word choice, the imaginative character of S.J. Coetzee's depiction comes to the fore. Phrasings such as 'We picture him...', or: 'Here he might have rested all day...' dismantle his report as a retrospective *construction* of a colonial explorer journey.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, the reader is left with these ideas of the space, while the indigenous people Jacobus had met remain unaccounted for. Their role and position in the space as well as their violent encounter with Jacobus Coetzee becomes secondary, as S.J. Coetzee instead focusses on crafting an imagined idyllic and ideal colonialist landscape. This narrative structure thus creates the second step of *depeopling* the space.

The third point and climax of the spatial construction is reached with the official deposition at the Castle of Good Hope – the last unit of the novella. Taking the function of an Appendix, the deposition portrays a concise summary of Jacobus journey, pointing to certain places, outlining the rough route and dates of the expedition, referencing earlier explorer's discoveries and mapping the space. The places, flora, fauna, and rivers referred to are claimed as Jacobus' discoveries. The authorities recount:

The Narrator also told of finding in the said land of the Great Namaqua's heavy trees, the heart or innermost wood being of an uncommon deep red hue and the branches bathed in large clover-leaves and yellow flowers. He the Narrator having, besides divers as yet unknown copper mountains, encountered about four days' journey from the Great River a mountain covered all over in a glittering yellow ore, of which small fragments were broken off and brought hither by him.<sup>34</sup>

Space, as it is depicted and envisioned in this quote is essentially a *space of interest* for the authorities at the Castle of Good Hope. In the report of the expedition, at this third stage of the narrative structure, the encounter with the inhabitants of the Great Namaqualand is yet again disregarded. Great Namaqualand is solely depicted as a space that was 'not without danger to his Person' but there is no further indication of the violent conflicts and

31 Coetzee 2004: p. 121

32 Easton 1995: p. 588

33 Coetzee 2004: pp. 109; 120

34 Coetzee 2004: p. 125

his annihilation of the village.<sup>35</sup> Through the deposition, space is once again solidified as discovered, named, claimed and possessed.

Considering the absence of the massacre in the reports on Jacobus' travel in the last two units of the novella and their 'claims to truthfulness and historicity', might indicate that such a brutal encounter had never occurred in the life of the historical figure Jacobus Coetsé.<sup>36</sup> However, J.M. Coetzee's choice to include these allegedly 'official reports' may also be a gesture to the contrary: the violence might have taken place but had been unattended to in the myth-making around colonialists' travels. From Coetzee's broader oeuvre we know that it became a central concern for the author to dismantle colonial violence, oppressive regimes and racist ideologies.<sup>37</sup> In 'The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee' the author scrutinises colonial 'notions of space' by deploying the *tripartite narrative structure*.<sup>38</sup> Coetzee uncovers the conception of empty, pastoral space as a colonial fantasy that had to be actively (and brutally) constructed. The author's critique of colonial violence, the traveller myth, and the travelogue as a genre 'works by means of an explicit parody of a particular text or group of texts' as David Attwell describes.<sup>39</sup> Appropriating and parodying the travelogue and – as our spatial reading has shown – with the unconventional composition of the different units in the novella, Coetzee questions colonial conceptions of space and landscapes, and colonial tropes and imaginaries. Only the *depeopling* allowed colonialists to 'freely' claim it. What is more, through the complex, climactic composition of the novella, space (the river region) is increasingly *shaped and designed* in the readers' mental image, while it is simultaneously being *emptied* of its people.

### A safe haven – Utley's *The Lie of the Land*

UK-based author Jasper David Utley places his novel in a violent and atrocious period in the history of southern Africa. *The Lie of the Land* revolves around the Herero and Nama Genocide in 1904–1908, when the territory that is now Namibia was under German colonial rule and during which Herero and Nama fought against German settlement, land acquisition and colonial politics. The novel centres on themes such as war, death, colonialism, deception, physical and psychological violence, as well as perseverance and love. In light of this complex social and political landscape, the Orange River region is portrayed as a source of life, refuge and riches. It is the space where Sam – a British agent and the main protagonist of the novel – finds himself, on his quest to rescue Leah, the African woman he had fallen for. Leah had been captured by the German soldiers and taken to the concentration camps where she is expected to be a source of cheap labour. Within the narration, the significance of the river is emphasised and envisioned through particular

35 Coetzee 2004: p. 124

36 Baas: 2019: p. 169

37 He knew about the Nama and Herero genocide that would happen from 1904–8 and other 'punitive expeditions' that colonists launched in the region, which had motivated him to write *Dusklands*, as described in an article from 1984, <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/97/11/02/home/coetzee-learned.html> (accessed 03 January 2021).

38 Attwell 1991: p. 11

39 Attwell 1991: pp. 8–15

narrative strategies: When applying an ecocritical approach this becomes apparent, as the nexus between humans and nature is vital within the text. A glance at specific passages from *The Lie of the Land* illuminates this. The following is a quote by Sam when he comes to the Orange River:

First ... I stripped off and trusting there were no crocodiles, I slipped into the cool water. My God it was good! I scrapped off the dirt and dust and then lay on the bank, drying myself in the sun, contemplating how I was on the junction of two worlds in more ways than one.<sup>40</sup>

Scrapping off the dirt and dust in the river can be seen as symbolic of a symbiotic human-nature interaction: The cleaner Sam is, the more invigorated and regenerated he becomes in his search for his love Leah. The Orange River provides a space for temporary refuge and peace – it is a safe haven in light of extremely confining circumstances. Sam's bathing in the river is his momentary escape from the horrors of the ongoing war. In the previous quote, Sam talks about being on 'the junction of two worlds in more ways than one' which may be interpreted as the Orange River being the boundary that separates two different territories:<sup>41</sup> the one to the northern part of the river being under German control and the one to the southern part of the river falling under British administration. At this line of demarcation, Sam has choices: Firstly, to cross the river and be free from the raging war; or secondly, to stay on the northern part of the river and continue with his search for Leah. Thus, the Orange River may be viewed as a hallway that allows Sam to escape and be free if he chooses to cross into the British territory. However, Sam remains on the northern part of the river to continue his journey to find Leah.

Still on the Orange River and the region surrounding it, Sam draws from the region's power to sustain human life. The reader learns about the area's vast supply of minerals and resources such as copper and zinc as well as diamonds, and Sam has the chance to access 'some quartz pebbles from the river'.<sup>42</sup> In contrast to this, the more people move away from the Orange River region into the country's interior, the more problematic life becomes. In this respect, Lüderitz Bay (away from the Orange River) is described as 'a place of pain and darkness ... it is a home of the dead and the near dead.'<sup>43</sup> The area in-between the Orange River in the south and Zambezi River to the north is German colonial territory and described as a terrain which has 'nothing except waterholes and dry river beds hoping for a rare downpour.'<sup>44</sup> This comparison between the dry and bleak land further up north and the beauty, water and richness of the river region furthers the idea of the border area as an oasis, a space of possibility, choice and peace for those who manage to escape from the more populated areas.

Looking at the setting construction with this more eco-critical lens, we see how Utley imagines spaces that are touched by people as arid, bleak, in conflict and at war. He portrays them in stark contrast to those areas that yet evaded human influence, colonial

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40 Utley 2017: p. 115

41 Utley 2017: p. 115

42 Utley 2017: pp. 121; 117

43 Utley 2017: p. 118

44 Utley 2017: p. 115

settlement, land claims or wars resulting from European invasion, such as the one taking place in German-South-West-Africa further north from the river. However, within *The Lie of the Land*'s strong focus on the love story between Sam and Leah, the emotions evoked by the imagination of the Orange River region are mainly personal and connected to the protagonist's quest to find Leah. While the colonial war forms the context in which the narrative unfolds, broader issues connected to the region, such as land claims or border politics, are rather bracketed in the novel. In light of this, the aesthetics of the place as a safe haven seem to almost arise from a lack of historical attachment to the place – a notion that signals again, as established earlier, the fact that the book invokes and centres outsiders' perspectives.

These two spatial readings of Utley's *The Lie of the Land* and Coetzee's 'The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee' offer exemplary insights into the ways in which the Lower !Garib River region is constructed through certain modes: in both cases, it is a territory marked heavily by colonial structures, interests, and influences. Yet, at the same time, the narratives allow the reader to envision the region as beautiful, bountiful, rich with natural resources and promise for the people who encounter or inhabit it. While being a critique of colonialist politics and land claims, both texts also speak to inequalities and injustices of the past that continue to be inscribed in the space. These colonial continuities are at the centre of our last case study.

## Land as Property

'Mountain' was published as part of Koleka Putuma's poetry collection *Collective Amnesia*, in 2017. It is a powerful account of the ways in which land dispossession, white settlement, and conflicting land claims echo forcefully into the present. As stated in the introduction, the lyrical-I takes us to a bicycle tour through Namaqualand, "Trying to locate the start of the mountain / Or the entry point of it / Every entrance (we see) is fenced."<sup>45</sup> As readers, we envision a small group of bicyclists exploring a bountiful territory – a leisure activity that is associated with the urban middle or upper class. This clue serves to establish how the actors in the poem are visitors to the region. Hence, we are engaging again with 'outsiders' perspectives' on the area – not only is the poet Putuma born in the Eastern Cape and now living in Cape Town, but also her protagonists emerge as tourists to Namaqualand.

The landscapes that the bicyclists traverse is heavily marked by human property claims, with the *landlords* eagerly safeguarding what they consider as *theirs*, protecting it from the outside:

When the old white lady in her pyjamas turns my /  
back with her Afrikaans /  
And says, *You are on private property...* /  
I question why I understand what she has said /  
And the mountain she calls private. /

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45 Putuma 2020: p. 174

*You can't go up the mountain without going past my /  
property, /  
She says. /  
I ask if she owns the mountain /  
And she says she owns this land. /  
Namaqualand?*<sup>46</sup>

The absurdity of this claim 'to own the land' ('Namaqualand?') is coupled with the lyrical I's perplexity about their understanding of these bizarre assertions ('I question why I understand what she has said'). It is this notion that defines the tone of the following lines, in which the theme of 'private property' is explored further. 'Private property' becomes a metaphor for the abuse, discrimination and violence experienced by Black people – in the past, just as much as in the present:

*It's just private property, .../  
In the way that your freedom is private property, /  
In the way that your obsessive partner thinks that you are his/her private property, /  
In the way that your body is private property, /  
In the way private property was lynched and sold back /  
in the day.*<sup>47</sup>

This link between past and present becomes even more specific:

*And, of course, we are people who cannot go anywhere /  
Or inherit anything unless we embody roles of servitude. /  
And yet our forefathers built kingdoms /  
We do not own or live on /  
As an inherent aspect of your settling and our /  
consequential migration.*<sup>48</sup>

These lines speak to the troubling double-bind of colonial legacies: While the descendants of colonial settlers inherit what is allegedly their and their families' 'private property', Black people in Southern Africa remain empty-handed in the face of what was built by their 'forefathers'.<sup>49</sup> With this statement, Putuma uses the region as a backdrop for a broader debate on land disputes between white colonialists and African kingdoms, resulting wars and relocations. The legacies of these histories leave Black people with the imperative to migrate, 'to move', as dictated by the 'this current Native Land Act.'<sup>50</sup>

*Move, because the three dogs on a leash need more /  
space on the pavement. /...  
Move the last two syllables of your name off your ID, so /  
I can swallow who you are. /...*

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46 Putuma 2020: p. 174, original emphasis.

47 Putuma 2020: p. 176

48 Putuma 2020: p. 176

49 Putuma 2020: p. 176

50 Putuma 2020: p. 176

Telling us our movements do not matter /  
 Unless we are moving out of the way, /  
 Or moving to make way, /  
 Or moving out, /  
 Or moving in together to squat like sardines in tin /  
 squares they call houses.<sup>51</sup>

The poem powerfully evokes how the ways in which land, ownership, colonial history, racism, discrimination, economic status, township life and the physical and psychological violence inflicted on Black people remain ubiquitous. It is this trauma that manifests itself as the bicyclists in Namaqualand are urged to halt in front of the fence, facing the mountain and the land they wish to access, yet incapable of reaching it, unable to overcome the barriers imposed by white people who continue to control the space. This trauma of the past defines present realities in many ways. Land as depicted in 'Mountain' is a symbol that gestures towards these multiple, unjust power structures. The poem ends with the imagined voice of the white property owner, declaring:

And anyway, you, you can't go up the mountain /  
 It does not belong to you. /  
 Like everything else around here.<sup>52</sup>

## Conclusion

Reflecting on the resonances, the tone and voice of Koleka Putuma's poem, in comparison to Jasper David Utley and J.M. Coetzee's texts, elucidates how space – the river region or Namaqualand in general – is much more than a setting for literary texts to evoke questions around colonialism, slavery or white movement through African landscapes. History played out on these specific spaces, and it marks the land to this day. What is more, there are vast horizons of experiences connected to these sites and places and Putuma's poem is a powerful request to attend to these.

While our investigations of Utley's *The Lie of the Land* (2017) and Coetzee's 'The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee' (1974) show how both authors design and imagine space as a way to explore and critique colonial tropes, or to question political and territorial entities and the battles that emerge from land claims, Putuma's 'Mountain' opens up new perspectives on literary space. Her poem reminds us of the emotional dimensions and the painful realities that colonial constructions of space imply for Southern Africans to this day. The contrasts of the three different texts show how their evocations of particular resonances strongly rely on the issues of voice and format. The two novels/novellas centre the experiences of their main protagonists whereby the role and function of the river region relies strongly on its potential as a setting in which certain actions play out and decisions are made. In comparison, Koleka Putuma's poem deploys more emotive registers in the depiction of the area, narrating loss and injustice from the perspective of the

51 Putuma 2020: pp. 176–180

52 Putuma 2020: p. 180

lyrical I. This lyrical-I powerfully questions and unsettles white claims to Namaqualand. What is more, the text's vividness also emerges from its particular mode of expression. Reflecting on the significance of poetry, South African poet Toni Stuart states:

Poetry gives people the power to make their voices heard in a clear, discernible and distinct way. The brevity, the intentional use of language and the use of metaphor and imagery, allow people to talk about complicated, difficult and large political issues in a human way. It allows us to engage with the human voice, the human experience of these political issues.<sup>53</sup>

In comparison, our 'spatial readings' of *The Lie of the Land* and 'The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee' have shown how fiction and the novel as narrative forms can function to transmit 'not just "what happened" or "what was said to have happened," but rather "what may have happened"', as Wendy W. Walters writes.<sup>54</sup> Similarly, scholar and literary critic Abi-ole Irele emphasises how narrative emerges as 'an imaginative mode of reconstruction: of consciousness, of spirit, and, ultimately, of vision.'<sup>55</sup>

We hope that our selection of 'spatial readings' may function as a starting point for more in-depth investigations of a broad variety of forms of text that (re-)imagine the Orange River region, and that it may ignite further analyses of the ways in which authors imagine the area as a way to raise political, historical or social issues. Further research is needed that focuses more closely on the perspectives of 'insiders' from the region. Such discussions may engage with Afrikaans-speaking texts or explore the vast repositories of oral narratives from local communities that speak to or are set in the river area. These additional investigations together with our case studies might allow us to generate a more nuanced understanding of the region's significance for insiders *and* outsiders, who all share an interest in the space and – through the medium of text or narrative – claim a certain power of defining and generating knowledge on the area.

We hope that this essay can show how moving our attention to the role and constructions of literary spaces might engender new conversations on and (re)considerations of the landscapes we see, cherish, live in, pass through or imagine.

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53 Lecznar 2016, <https://africanwords.com/2016/05/23/qa-with-toni-stuart-poetry-gives-people-the-power-to-make-their-voices-heard/> (accessed 12 June 2022).

54 Walters 2013: p. 1

55 Irele 1993: p. 169

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## Fritz Isak (Zak) Gomaxnab Dirkse IGabaxab: Teacher and Promoter of Nama Language

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*Zak Dirkse (photo by Bernard Moore, 2021)*



Zak Dirkse was born not far from Keetmanshoop on the farm #Upus on 12 August 1973. For most of his life, he has lived between Windhoek, Southern Namibia and – sometimes – the Northern Cape. Dirkse first became an Afrikaans teacher and was later asked to also teach Nama. However, when he started to teach the Nama language, there was not much useful teaching material available, hence he participated in the writing and edit-

ing of learning material. Ever since, he has been engaged, in many ways, in the teaching, promoting and researching of Nama language.

Dirkse argues that, for him, three aspects of the Nama language are of particular importance. Firstly, Nama is a transfrontier or cross-border language; secondly, Nama is not the same as Khoekhoegowab; and thirdly, Nama place names should be reintroduced. Dirkse explains that the Nama language is spoken on both sides of the !Garib, even though it remains much more widely spoken on the Namibian side of the river. For him, the distinct relevance of the Nama language in South Africa and Namibia has historically rooted reasons. He explains that the difference is owed partly to the northwards movement of Afrikaans, the different ways apartheid politics and policies were implemented north and south of the river, and to the distinction in percentage of Nama speakers versus other languages in South Africa and Namibia.

In his work for the !Karas Region Northern Cape Joint Coordinating Committee, Dirkse promotes the training of South African Nama language teachers. 'And I also helped the South Africans to come up with South African teaching material in pure Nama', he explains, 'because the language taught in Namibia is not Nama, but Khoekhoegowab'. For Dirkse, Khoekhoegowab is an artificial language that is not spoken in anyone's daily life. He also emphasises that Nama and Damara are different languages, although they are very similar. While in a linguistic definition the two languages would perhaps be referred to as dialects, 'it is the culture that comes with it, that makes Nama its own language,' says Dirkse. A fascination with Nama culture also drives his active involvement in organising and promoting cultural festivals, often in collaboration with people from the Northern Cape.

As mentioned above, an aspect that is very close to Dirkse's heart is the naming of places in Nama language, as during colonialism many places were given completely new names by the colonial authorities. For example the Orange River, first named !Garib by Nama speakers, was renamed by Dutch 'explorers' in honor to the Dutch royal house of Oranje. In other cases, the original Nama place names were either translated, e.g., Grootfontein from the Nama word for large water hole, or they were Afrikanerised, according to how they sounded to Dutch ears. As an example of this, Dirkse refers to the South African village Goodhouse, which was founded at a place that Nama speakers used to call Gádaos meaning the place where sheep cross, literally 'sheep drift'. Dirkse is very pleased at the recent dynamics around renaming. However, for example, in South Africa the Orange River was not renamed back to its original Nama name, but to the Afrikanerised version of it: 'Gariep'.

Today, Dirkse is a Nama-language teacher at St. Therese RC Secondary School at Tses and works for the Nama traditional leaders organisation. What he wishes for is more Nama literature – books, poems and novels published in Nama languages – and not just the publishing of educational books. He shares that many of his learners and students are highly talented and 'will make this happen soon!'

*Based on an interview conducted by Luregn Lenggenhager, Bernard Moore and Wanda Rutishauser in Keptmanshoop 7 November 2021.*

# Changing Dynamics of Settler Farming



# The Enigma of the Namaqualand Trekboer

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Robert Gordon

## Introduction

Recent studies of Namaqualand focus almost exclusively on communal areas and concentrate on the ecological impact, downplaying the local social arrangements that make such subsistence possible. They also largely ignore work written in Afrikaans. As a result, one such scholar whose work is worthy of re-evaluation is P.J. van der Merwe (1912–1979), a student of Johan Huizinga – one of the founders of cultural history and the author of seminal texts such as *The Waning of the Middle Ages* and *Homo Ludens*. His dissertation, *Die Noordwaartse Beweging van die Boere voor die Groot Trek (1770–1842)* [reprinted 1988] was published in 1937. Unlike mainstream historians who focused on major political events, van der Merwe displayed Huizinga-esque proclivities by examining the more mundane everyday business of living, with a particular focus on mobility. Appointed a lecturer at Stellenbosch in 1938, in the same year he published *Die Trekboer in die Geskiedenis van die Kaapkolonie, 1657–1942*, which was later translated and introduced by Roger Beck as *The Migrant Farmer in the History of the Cape Colony, 1657–1842* (1995).

During university vacations from 1938 to the early fifties he travelled to the north-western Cape, a region of problematic definition encompassing Namaqualand and Bushmanland to the borders of Gordonia. It was here where he believed that he found the 'last remnants of a pioneer population' practicing itinerant livestock farming. Established farmers still practiced Winter transhumance, while there were also landless farmers who trekked around and hired grazing. Nomadism, more accurately transhumance, survived here because of the unique geographical features which provided both Summer and Winter rainfall in different parts of the region, supplementing each other. While the region was one of the oldest colonial settlement areas, its aridity and terrain resulted in a low population density and official land tenure practices discouraged settlement in the Summer rainfall areas, while Government laxity in allocating land encouraged squatters. Namaqualand remained largely forgotten by authorities until the copper mining boom in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

Van der Merwe covered over 15,000 miles interviewing hundreds of farmers, clergymen, teachers, school-inspectors, stock-inspectors, businessmen, police-agents and officials of the magistrates' offices, divisional council and schoolboards, chronicling their

struggle against the twin tyrants of thirst and loneliness and praising their initiative and perseverance in a popular book *Pioniers van die Dorsland* (1941, reprinted in 1945, 1947 & 1949). It laid the groundwork for his classic *Trek: Studies oor die Mobiliteit van die Pioniersbevolking aan die Kaap* (1944) [*Trek: Studies Concerning the Mobility of the Pioneer Population in the Cape*] which utilised archival, oral history and first-hand observations. He was also a prolific feature writer contributing some 200 items to Afrikaans newspapers and magazines.<sup>1</sup>

While Namaqualand was the richest region of the Cape Province, because of its mines, it also housed the poorest whites and it was these people that van der Merwe sought to dignify.<sup>2</sup> To challenge the common stereotype of them being ‘backward’ country bumpkins, he instead celebrated their resilience and remarkable ingenuity in dealing with a harsh landscape. This was in sharp contrast to the views of W.C. Scully, the former Namaqualand Magistrate and author, who was awarded an honorary doctorate at Stellenbosch for being ‘an Irish-born friend of the Afrikaner’. Scully described these trekboers as:

a being sui generis. He is usually ignorant to a degree unknown among men called civilised. He is untruthful, prejudiced, superstitious, cunning, lazy, and dirty. On the other hand, he is extremely hospitable. Simple as a child in many things, and as trusting where his confidence has once been given, he cannot be known without being loved, for all his peculiarities. The desert life, which has filled the Arab with poetry and a sense of the higher mysteries, has sapped the last remnant of idealism from the Trek-Boer's nature, and left him without an aspiration or a dream. The usual lack of fresh meat and the absence of green vegetables as an item in his diet, has reacted upon his physique and made him listless and slouching in gait and deportment, as well as anaemic and prone to disease. This is especially true of his womankind, who, besides being extremely short-lived have, as a rule, lost nearly all pretensions to beauty of face or form.<sup>3</sup>

Highly regarded for his meticulous research by liberal and Marxian South African historians,<sup>4</sup> van der Merwe's work on mobility received accolades from the eminent Australian historian Sir Keith Hancock and is now being translated into English to make it more accessible.<sup>5</sup>

There are, however, a number of shortcomings within his work. Despite his self-image of being a scientific historian who presented complete, rounded accounts, might his avowed nationalist fervour have clouded his judgement?<sup>6</sup> He inexplicably ignores the in-

1 His daughter, Margaretha Schäfer has recently compiled and translated these in *Reports from the Dorsland and other pioneering regions*, which features these popular articles.

2 This effort must be seen within the context of a resurgent Afrikaner nationalism epitomised by the massive emotional celebration of the centennial of the Great Trek.

3 Scully 1898: pp. 8–12

4 Beck 1995: pp. ix-x

5 Beck 1995; Beck (forthcoming); van der Merwe 2019; 2020.

6 Displaying his Nationalist credentials by writing exclusively in Afrikaans, he was a popular Day of Covenant speaker and *Ossewabrandwag* aficionado, an anti-British pro-German Afrikaner organisation which opposed South Africa's entry into the Second World War.

digenous or non-White population despite Schapera's now classic *Khoisan Peoples of South Africa* (1930) which presents extensive Namaqualand material, and also crucially overlooks the trekboer role in eradicating Bushmen from Bushmanland. More puzzlingly, he fails to acknowledge, let alone engage with contemporaneous research done by colleagues at Stellenbosch. This includes the 1942 doctorate by P.W. Kotzé titled *Namakwaland: 'n Sosiologiese studie van 'n geïsoleerde gemeenskap*, a study based on a survey of some 5,310 whites living in Namaqualand conducted between March 1938 and July 1940, as well as another doctoral study presented in the same year by K.A. Heese on the history of education in Namaqualand. Heese taught at Springbok High School from 1938 to 1942, and while their conclusions are different, they appear to have used many of the same informants. In contrast to van der Merwe, Kotzé found the Namaqualanders to be lacking initiative and displaying a serious dependency syndrome. Is it possible to reconcile these diametrically opposed conclusions? A possible compromise is suggested in this essay.

The major shortcoming in van der Merwe's trekboer studies is that he largely ignores a critical part of their social environment, namely those who later became known as 'Non-Whites', despite the fact that in 1921 'coloureds' already constituted 70% of the population in Namaqualand and whites only 29%.<sup>7</sup> They contributed immeasurably to the survival of trekboers providing succour and service. Indeed, the trekboers vaunted resilience would have been impossible without being part of what Rosengarten in chapter 1 calls their entanglement with established Khoi and emerging 'Baster' networks.

Given the gradual, relatively benign infiltration by small numbers of trekboers, there was no attempt to check their migration as Khoi and Coloureds, then referred to as Basters, relied on trekboer part-time traders for commodities such as tea, coffee and brandy. In the fifties, Basters proudly proclaimed that they had pioneered Namaqualand by driving out the wild Bushmen and animals and built churches and schools thus making it safe for Boers.<sup>8</sup> The arrival of trekboers intensified conflict with Bushmen, so much so that in 1861 Civil Commissioner for Namaqualand Louis Anthing was forced to undertake a special mission to Bushmanland to investigate locally organised militias known as commandos and consisting of collaborating Basters, Boers and their Khoi servants. These first took place in the late 1840s and continued until the 1880s.<sup>9</sup>

While there was much Trekboer-Baster co-operation, it was distinctly hierarchical. Early trekboers did not hesitate to mix with Nama and San. Indeed, many trekboers were fluent in Nama and !Xam.<sup>10</sup> Given the isolated population, loneliness was a serious problem and domestic servants provided companionship, especially to women and children. In his survey of 617 farmers Kotzé found that 77.5% employed domestic and farmworkers, while 25% of *bywoners* (client squatters), living on farms but not farming, had servants. Servants were generally paid a low wage, given rations and limited grazing rights, and their womenfolk were expected to assist in household chores and, on occasion, serve as

7 Heese 1942: p. 14

8 Carstens 1966: p. 42

9 de Predo-Samper 2012; Strydom 1929. The remnants of these !Xam were later to be found as itinerant sheep shearers or Karretjies People at a rang below 'coloureds' in the social hierarchy (Sangiro 1954: p.25).

10 van Vuuren 2017: p. 79

wet nurses to Boer children.<sup>11</sup> Coloured workers or *handlangers* (factotums) were simply treated as part of the normal background.<sup>12</sup> In one of his rare references to Basters, van der Merwe observes that in trekking to Bushmanland, trekkers complained that apart from the brackish water ‘there were always more or less Basters there whom they had to sometimes greet with a handshake for the sake of having access to water’.<sup>13</sup> Trekboers could also use the government to advance their interests, thus the Rehoboth Basters were forced to move to Namibia because the Land Beacon Act 1868 caused them to lose access to grazing lands.<sup>14</sup> Passing through Namaqualand in 1903, Leonard Schultze described how the trekboers despised the ‘Coloured Races’, calling them *skepsels* – non-human creatures – or ‘yellow creatures’. The custom of child indenture, euphemised as ‘*Groot-maak*’ [to make big or grown-up] while less profitable than in the past, was still practiced. Trekboers held the power of life and death over their menials (serfs) and would even shoot them for disobedience or desertion.<sup>15</sup>

While Boers publicly ostracised interracial intercourse, its results were obvious to even the most casual observer. Afrikaners visiting the coloured Reserves would be shocked at how ‘white’ the inhabitants were and how almost all had Afrikaans surnames, Heese observed.<sup>16</sup> In the fifties there were still some descendants of trekboers living in Steinkopf Reserve and married to local women. In the first two years of enforcing the Immorality Amendment Act (1950) the police in Steinkopf, hardly a bustling metropolis, investigated 134 immorality cases mostly concerning white males from Vioolsdrift,<sup>17</sup> a short-lived ‘poor white’ resettlement scheme.<sup>18</sup>

Many of the pioneering achievements and activities lauded by van der Merwe and attributed to the trekboers were derived from the Khoi. This includes seasonal transhumance – as the Khoi were reported as early as 1785 as practicing it from the so-called Binneveld to the coast or inland<sup>19</sup> – and the use of *gorries* (sand holes to collect water) and skin bags for carrying water or used as rucksacks. On the domestic front, Khoi women often served as midwives and healing practices like Khoi leechcraft and magic remained an important part in their daily lives into the fifties.<sup>20</sup> Another Khoi preference favoured by trekboers, despite Government discouragement, was for goats over sheep, while the most visible, and certainly most iconic, was the use of oval shaped reed-mat huts. Estimates ranged from 5% to 19% of Whites using them in the twenties and thirties.<sup>21</sup>

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11 Sangiro 1954: p. 37

12 Kotzé 1942: p. 351

13 van der Merwe 1944: p. 188

14 Carstens 1983: pp. 138–9

15 Schultze 1907: p. 329

16 Heese 1942: p. 78

17 Carstens 1966: p.135.

18 Sangiro 1954 : pp. 67–68

19 Levailant 1796 : p. 223

20 Carstens 1966 : p.16

21 van der Merwe 1944: p.174; Kotzé 1942: p.86.

## Origins

Because of its harsh environment, Namaqualand was historically not seen as a priority to the Government and treated as a marginal area, a de facto 'refuge area', or what Scott terms a 'shatterzone' and only formally incorporated into the Cape Colony in 1847.<sup>22</sup> As such, it attracted people escaping or driven out of the colony who were defined as 'lesser', including slaves, freebooters, adventurers and deserters who integrated into the local Khoi populace, and later was supplemented by trekboers. Widely regarded as the most inhospitable area in South Africa, it had the lowest population density namely: 1.47 per sq.mi. compared to 12.74 for the Cape Province as a whole prior to the Second World War.<sup>23</sup> The terrain and incessant drought made travel challenging in the region, resulting in a highly dispersed, mobile and isolated population with considerable autonomy. The first Civil Commissioner/Magistrate was appointed in 1858 and had oversight of some 440,000 sq. km. Gradually and irrevocably this inaccessibility was eroded by the persistent use of state- and market-led 'distance demolishing technologies' such as roads, railways, dams, and telephones.<sup>24</sup>

The Trekboer institution emerged from interconnected developments: farmers had large families and their offspring believed the alternative to farming, artisanal work, was 'slave work'. Additionally, inheritance law meant farms were sub-divided among the heirs, reducing their viability. Since offspring already owned livestock allotted to them on the farm, they simply trekked into the hinterland. Many Boers also objected, or could not afford, to make payments in accordance with the quitrent farm system, so they acquired pasturage simply by trekking around or squatting on unoccupied Crown land, or else by being a *bywoner*<sup>25</sup> on a relative or friend's land. In Namaqualand, for example, in the 1860s there were 678 white farmers. However, only 134 farms had been surveyed suggesting that 544 farmers were trekboers.<sup>26</sup> It took little to survive as an independent trekboer. This livelihood was not initially profit-oriented as the markets were too distant – cash was relatively unknown before the Namaqualand copper mines opened. Instead, household necessities were obtained from hawkers through the barter of livestock, hides and grain, even though these of generally poor quality.<sup>27</sup>

By the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century, a distinction between the more affluent and less affluent farmers was apparent and, over, the course of time, the gap was to increase leading to the inevitable conclusion that this mode of farming required large-scale capital investment.

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22 Scott 2009.

23 Those classified as Europeans constituted a scrawny .45! Kotzé 1942: p.118.

24 Scott 2009: p. 40

25 A landless white tenant-farmer, generally viewed by settlers as a socially inferior, dispossessed or dependent person, who was often appointed as foreman to oversee Black or Coloured workers.

26 Smalberger 1969: p. 107

27 Kotzé 1942: p. 45

## Livelihood strategies

There are three discernible ecological zones in Namaqualand. A sandy, dry, water scarce area on the coast called the Sandveld is located in the intermediate zone of Winter and Summer rainfall – with water scarcity being an issue. While regarded as the most unattractive grazing area – in Winter moisture and dew resulted in less reliance on water and so it would attract graziers from the Binneveld – the best farming land and where most of the population was found. This is a mountainous central area rich in minerals and with a volatile Winter rainfall. To the east of this zone is a large plateau-like area known as Bushmanland, with low and erratic Summer rainfall and lacking open water, but containing a large variety of nutritious perennial plants and relatively free of stock diseases. This was the favoured destination for transhumance from the Binneveld after ploughing at the first rains in May and return in Summer.<sup>28</sup> Later farmers would trek with their families to the outposts on their farms. This was not some ‘inborn Trek-spirit’ but practical, as such moves allowed the pasture near the homestead to recover and kept livestock away from the croplands. Such treks were seen as a vacation, breaking the monotony of life. Moreover, family-labour was needed for lambing, especially as farmers increasingly switched from sheep to goats.

Pasture management through camping was rare before the Second World War and given seasonal differences in the carrying capacity of the zones, most large livestock-owners saw transhumance as a necessity. The Binneveld became unhealthy towards September and October with *krimpsiekte* (cardiac glycosides), and trekkers believed a change in grazing led to improved health – especially in reducing gall and digestive diseases. The Trekveld is seen as ‘fresh’ and plants there provide sodium and phosphates since trekboers did not feed their livestock salt or bonemeal.<sup>29</sup> There was also pleasure in trekking: trekkers would congregate at water sources and socialise, enjoy an opportunity to hunt, make biltong and prepare leather. In these halcyon days trekkers would follow the rain to the nearest vlei with temporary water, even if it was on a farm, as everyone was believed to have equal rights to usage. Farmers tolerated this because of the uncertainties of the region, and the realisation that they might require assistance themselves one day.

There was thus no regular pattern or established migratory cycle. While the ideal involved regular seasonal routes between Winter and Summer grazing areas and later farms, sometimes during the trek season herders would simply wander around. There were also incidental treks which were unexpected or unorganised, largely due to drought, locusts, stock disease or game movements. Sometimes trekboers simply had no fixed address. Later, the more affluent engaged in Uitlê, a practice of moving to outer grazing on large farms in the Winter and Spring months.

28 Movement north across the !Garib was initially largely limited to hunting, raiding and livestock trading although a few hardy trekboers did engage in transhumance and settlement – ecology and local resistance being prime inhibitors. Stals 2009: pp. 1–43.

29 van der Merwe 1944: p. 213

Fig. 1: Namaqualand Transhumance (according to Heese 1942).



Transhumance was a regular seasonal event in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, before declining. Nevertheless, van der Merwe claimed that more than half of the Namaqua farmers still trekked, albeit sporadically and increasingly restricted to farmers who owned second farms in Bushmanland.<sup>30</sup> The ideal destination still remained Crown land where it was illegal to construct anything permanent and trekkers relieved their boredom by hunting or collecting *veldkos* (food gathered from the land) which was an integral part of their diet as it saved them from slaughtering their own stock.<sup>31</sup>

Transhumance waned as expansion was limited by deserts in the west and east. While the Stellenbosch scholarly triumvirate ignored expansion north beyond the Cape border, the number of Boers in Great Namaqualand, that is in the Keetmanshoop and Gibeon districts, increased from 74 in 1,893 to 1,506 in 1902, but declined to 1,154 the following

30 van der Merwe 1944: p. 205

31 van der Merwe 1944: p. 243

year, an indicator surely of itinerancy. They were attracted by cheap land, a dislike of the 'English taxation system' and an alleged lack of government sympathy and assistance in coping with continuous droughts which beset Namaqualand and Bushmanland.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, annual grazing licences in the Cape became more restrictive and expensive. Claiming 'temporary' grazing made it easy to avoid payment as magistrates rarely visited the Trekveld. Less than half the graziers obtained licences and when police were introduced, they were never strict, usually only issuing warnings. Moreover, police never intervened when graziers were trekking so many trekboers simply claimed their camps were temporary.<sup>33</sup>

Crown land also became scarcer. Most of Bushmanland and Namaqualand had been surveyed and was available for permanent settlement on very favourable quitrent terms by 1907. Many however did not want to 'become a slave to land'. Van der Merwe found a farmer who had received an 'application farm' in 1932, but who in six years had spent less than six months on the farm because of a lack of water, arguing that it was not worth making payments if one had to trek in search of water and grazing.<sup>34</sup>

The key impediment to settling in Bushmanland was a lack of water and digging wells was labour-intensive. Van der Merwe found that only one out of every four or five wells dug delivered water. Later the Government provided subsidised drilling, but even this remained expensive. Farmers delayed erecting permanent housing since they did not know where water would be found, and many farmers had only one water source for every 20,000 to 30,000 hectares.

Under the loan farm system crownlands could be leased for up to 21 years at public auction. This was seen as problematic as it was impossible to anticipate which areas would have rain. Farmers would then finesse the Government by forming a 'loan company', agreeing to have one person acquire several farms and to not raise the bidding. Each one would then receive a Trek-letter from the leaser. While sub-letting was illegal, the State tolerated it.<sup>35</sup>

However, the coils of land ownership were tightening. The number of Namaqualand farms increased from 203 in 1916 to 670 in 1938, while – in an attempt to control the recently discovered diamond fields in the Sandveld – the State bought up 127,461.75 ha.<sup>36</sup> This soon shattered the practice of mutual aid as farmers started demanding compensation or refusing access in an effort to save grazing for their own livestock. Progressive farmers started resenting people 'who lived off other people's backs.' Legally, trekkers were allowed to graze at no cost within 400 yards of a proclaimed road, but they began to engage in much chicanery: moving at a very leisurely pace, engaging in night grazing, deliberately confusing trek trails with proclaimed roads and taking wrong roads on

32 Trümpelmann 1948: pp. 63–84

33 van der Merwe 1944: p. 272

34 van der Merwe 1944: p. 52. Most resistance came from the less affluent who had some capital but who believed in avoiding large debts and moreover who, having large families, realised that inheritance made such farms unsustainable in the longer term. 'Application farms' were designed to promote farming by poor whites by providing generous terms.

35 van der Merwe 1944: pp. 273–4

36 Heese 1942: p. 440

purpose. When confronted they became threatening and impounding their livestock was impractical.<sup>37</sup>

Additional grazing regulations served to further throttle trekking. Mange and scab regulations were an added impediment as trekkers had to pay for dipping prior to trekking, and then in 1937 a trekker required the permission of a stock inspector – with such permits only being valid for thirty days along the shortest stipulated route.

Increasing inequality also contributed to the decline of trekking. The more Boers invested in their farms the less the desire and need to trek. These farms generally became smaller (due to inheritance practices of all children getting an equal share) and thus reduced carrying capacity. Affluent farmers could afford drilling and erected windmills – reducing the need for finding open water – while fencing was also important. This served as the death knell for the permanent trekboer, who initially had been kindly received by farmers if grazing was plentiful and human company scarce. There was a complex logic in being a permanent trekboer. While many could not afford to purchase a farm, some were wealthy and saw trekking as a way of avoiding taxes. However, when land was available and inexpensive, they did not want it, but when they had problems and needed it, land was expensive and they could not afford it.

Increasing impoverishment led to many trekboers being unable to trek, leading to massive state intervention.<sup>38</sup> An important factor here was that those who owned farms could use their farms as collateral or credit to purchase or, more usually, barter necessities from local traders. In such cases, credit might be extended for a few years and possibly result in foreclosure. Kotzé found 36 farms owned by absentee owners who were, in all likelihood, storekeepers.<sup>39</sup>

Ecologically these trekboer practices led to a downward spiral. Farmers rarely conserved the veld by limiting the number of livestock. They simply moved on. Spot rains resulted in the congregation of farmers at pans or vleis and thus denuded the grazing. At the same time, farms became smaller due to inheritance practices. Overgrazing increased in the key trek areas of the Sandveld and Bushmanland and increased their vulnerability to drought too. As carrying capacity declined, farmers switched to goats and donkeys. The number of donkeys increased from 100 in 1865 to 221,687 in 1930 while goats increased from 143,359 in 1926 to 221,687 ten years later. Being browsers, goats and donkeys were more resistant to drought conditions, but were ecologically more destructive. Similarly, grain production declined as the soil became more brackish, aggravated by the decrease in transhumance, which resulted in fields not being able to recuperate and the results were seen in the increasingly mediocre quality of the grain.<sup>40</sup>

It is a hoary myth that the trekboers were independent. Rather, they were continuously dependent on outside contacts and almost always, except for the fortunate few, hovering on the edge of precarity. In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century for example, Smalberger reports that there was a heated debate about whether to build a railway line to the copper mines – one of the arguments made was the use of Boers as transport riders to alleviate their

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37 van der Merwe 1944: p. 276

38 van der Merwe 1944: p. 283

39 Kotzé 1942: p. 212; Heese 1942: p. 430.

40 Heese 1942: pp. 441–443

poverty but they, and their menials, would leave their farms for several months and most of the money earned would be spent on liquor, to the detriment of farming.<sup>41</sup> During the heyday of Trekking in Namaqualand in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the major source of income – until they were exterminated – was ostrich hunting. Ostriches would be chased down on horses on warm days and then clubbed to death. Because Basters and Nama weighed less, they were used to the ‘hit the birds.’ Each bird was worth between £10 and £15.<sup>42</sup> Trekboers also engaged in ostrich hunting but, according to van der Merwe, traders were the principal beneficiaries who bought feathers from Basters. The collapse of the feather market during the Great War wiped out this source of income, while conditions surrounding the 1914 Rebellion resulted in most of the wildlife being killed off, forcing Boers to focus on farming amidst diminishing returns.<sup>43</sup> Another lucrative, but risky, source of income until 1907 was illegal arms smuggling to Great Namaqualand.<sup>44</sup> Later, despite generous State support many became part-time farmers, forced to engage in public relief by doing road construction and working on the copper and diamond mines – leaving the running of the farms to their womenfolk and children. In the late thirties 73% of farmers earned less than £100 per annum. Their herds were also insubstantial: 40% of farmers had less than 100 sheep and 47% had less than 100 goats.<sup>45</sup>

Unlike other parts of South Africa, pauperisation did not lead to out-migration. By the late thirties, 93% of the population of the region was born in Namaqualand and most of the rest were born in neighbouring districts.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, on the contrary, there was a steady population increase which Heese attributes to their isolation: They did not know how to leave.<sup>47</sup>

## Conclusion: The Švejk Strategy

In her insightful 1998 thesis on the problems of state enumeration of livestock in the northwestern Cape, Dawn Nell argued that these farmers were not interested in the State’s progressive ‘development’ projects because, from their perspective, it offered very little of benefit to them. One consequence was that the experts dismissed them as ignorant and ‘backward’. Her thesis uncannily foreshadowed Jim Scott’s influential *The Art of Not Being Governed* (2009) which persuasively shows that many people in peripheral areas were not ‘backward’ but rather had made a deliberate choice to avoid the state, and that many of their strategies were designed to keep the state at bay. The sparsely populated, inhospitable area subject to frequent droughts created a ‘friction of terrain’, serving as a prophylactic against state infiltration. Their nomadic subsistence only required low labour inputs and generated a minimal, and usually uncertain, surplus.

41 Smalberger 1969: pp.108-10

42 An English £ in 1900 is calculated to be worth £124 in current value, which seems rather excessive, while in 1938 when van der Merwe did research it was worth £68.

43 van der Merwe 1944: p.17

44 Sangiro 1954: pp. 37–38

45 Heese 1942: p. 455

46 Kotzé 1942: p. 113

47 Heese 1942: p. 445

More importantly, this liquid mobility hampered the State's 'legibility' project. The lack of literacy also generated a rich oral culture which aided selective memory and provided flexibility by allowing the trekboers to reinvent their histories and genealogies. Controversially, Scott suggested that 'virtually everything about these people's livelihoods ... can be read as strategic positionings designed to keep the state at arm's length.'<sup>48</sup>

There is merit in this perspective. The anthropologist Peter Carstens, who grew up in Namaqualand and did research in Steinkopf, found that while the 'While White and non-White Namaqualanders drew decidedly differential 'profits' from state programmes, both were inclined to regard the district as an independent country and regard all strangers and immigrants as foreigners'.<sup>49</sup> Their isolation and extreme hardship had generated a lack of regard for authority 'outside the elementary family, or group of elementary families which trek together'.<sup>50</sup> Namaqualanders were proud of their strong sense of local identity which was demonstrated by the large number of Namaqualanders who were born there, and their lack of desire to move to better economic opportunities elsewhere, while at the same time there was little in-migration. Observers were impressed that even poverty-stricken farm-owners refused to sell-up, and that many of the farms were still in the hands of the original owners or their descendants. There were also tales of local farmers purchasing farms to prevent those from neighbouring districts from moving in. This *weltanschauung* handicapped governance as farmers were loath to inform on the misdeeds and criminal acts of their neighbours.

Hunting was not simply a past-time but rationalised as preserving scarce grazing for livestock.<sup>51</sup> Concerned about the slaughter of game during the 1899–1902 War, the Cape got its first game reserve in 1903, when 102,000 ha was set aside for oryx and ostriches in eastern Namaqualand, which in 1909 increased to 141,280 ha. But no funds were provided for it and only five beacons marked its 128 km boundary. Poaching was so rife that only 50 oryx were left when it was de-proclaimed in 1919 and made available for farming.<sup>52</sup> Sangiro found that much of this poaching was deliberate as neighbouring farmers believed, correctly, that if the area was denuded of the game, it would be made available for grazing.<sup>53</sup>

What Kotzé called the 'moral decline' of Namaqualanders, he attributed to the discovery of diamonds in 1925 which unleashed a rush by speculators to purchase farms at extravagant prices, which farmers then used to purchase items like automobiles – only to discover a few years later that they were bankrupt. Namaqualanders believed that the diamonds belonged to them and not the state and thus thought it was unjust that they did not benefit from the discovery. While illicit diamond buying was punishable, they did not believe it to be unethical nor a crime as diamonds were viewed as created by God, and

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48 Scott 2009: p. x

49 Carstens 1966: p.15

50 Carstens 1966: p.13

51 Sangiro 1954: pp. 26; 61

52 Pringle 1982: p. 69–70

53 Sangiro 1954: p. 61

this was simply a means to obtain what they felt was theirs. These activities were simply referred to as ‘Having some luck’.<sup>54</sup>

All three Stellenbosch scholars claimed that they were hospitably received by Namaqualanders, despite being suspected of ulterior motives. But while the researchers and government officials might have been treated hospitably, their questions still received evasive responses. Kotzé was struck by how vague his informants were about the size of their farms and livestock and how much they paid in taxes, probably, he surmised, because they owed back taxes. Magistrates and stock inspectors frequently reported to their departments that some applicants were dishonest, giving misleading inventories of their possessions, while in other cases applicants would move livestock to a neighbour and upon his application being successful would ‘buy’ them back.<sup>55</sup> Additionally, repayment of government loans had a high default rate. This attitude had long historical roots according to Heese, going back to the 18th Century when *dwarstrekery* (contrariness) was evident.<sup>56</sup> Nell shows how from at least 1820, trekboers consistently petitioned against the sale of Crown land that was being used as grazing. Not only did they feel that the prices were prohibitive but, given the aridity and inconsistent and spotty rainfall, large areas were needed simply to survive. Prioritising the need to obtain revenue, the state generally ignored these petitions. Later, projects aimed at improving agriculture, such as promoting merino breeding and measures to prevent scab, crashed on the bedrock of vernacular knowledge and trekboer resistance.<sup>57</sup>

Experts, including the blue-ribbon Carnegie Commission on Poor Whites, saw Namaqualanders as living largely in dire poverty, a situation attributed to their ‘backwardness’, and in dire need of assistance from the state and the private sector, and, largely, the church. The quick fix for ‘backwardness’ was education and certainly in this regard, measured by conventional statistics, the district lagged considerably behind – despite various efforts like having itinerant mobile teachers – to the extent that into the thirties Coloureds on the Reserves were generally better educated than the trekboers. In his survey of farmers, Kotzé found that 29% had never been to school, 36% had some schooling and only 24% had completed six years. Eventually more than 62% of all school-going children were accommodated in no-cost hostels.<sup>58</sup> But even this was met with resistance, as farmers believed they would lose parental rights and more importantly, child labour. So important was child labour that efforts were made to have schools close during ploughing and harvesting season, and children were removed from school as soon as the rains fell. Evasion was the name of the game: when it was made compulsory to send children to school if they lived within a three-mile radius of the school, parents would hide their children or, if more distant, create pseudo-Bush Schools and claim that they were engaged in ‘home schooling’. Some parents would ‘rent out’ children to affluent farmers in exchange for squatting rights.<sup>59</sup> When there were more schoolchildren than the hos-

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54 Kotzé 1942: pp. 231–233

55 Kotzé 1942: p. 340

56 Heese 1942: pp. 42–48

57 Nell 1998

58 Kotzé 1942: pp. 360–361

59 Heese 1942: pp. 391–417

tels could accommodate, town-folk were paid a subsidy to house them during the school terms.

Education was an important component of a huge state intervention effort riding fortuitously on the coattails of the discovery of diamonds on the coast, stretching from Alexander Bay to the !Garib. The government proclaimed the area a state digging site in 1928, and used it as a major source of employment, exclusively for 'poor whites' from the Springbok and neighbouring Van Rhynsdorp area.<sup>60</sup> In addition, between 1924 and 1939 the state spent nearly £200,000 on support and rations for poor whites while another £207,392 went to agricultural subsidies and a further £111,665 on special emergency funding.<sup>61</sup> Initiated in 1924 in the wake of the closing of the copper mines and a devastating drought, relief consisted largely of hiring road construction workers, but following good rains in 1925 many farmers decided it was better to continue doing roadwork and left the farming to their wives and children.<sup>62</sup> A telling indicator of vulnerability was that during the 1935 drought, one in five household heads in Namaqualand received food rations.<sup>63</sup>

Emblematic of relief efforts was the Rural Rehabilitation and Housing Scheme, which in the thirties sought to improve the homes of *bywoners* by offering them £50 to purchase corrugated iron. Unfortunately, there were few *bywoners* as most farmers were too poor to host them, and those that were, were mostly relatives.<sup>64</sup> When the scheme was expanded, farmers rapidly learnt how to manipulate the system by shaping the inventory of their possessions so that it fell within the prescribed limits. So serious did this become that the state was forced to reclaim numerous subsidies. Farmers argued that they did not see why they should contribute to these improvements and reportedly removed their corrugated iron roofs and replaced them with grass or reeds, to qualify for new corrugated roofing which would then be sold or used on outbuildings.<sup>65</sup>

In completing his survey, Kotzé observed that many farmers thought they were completing an application for a government loan and when told that it was not, asked him to submit it to the magistrate as an application anyway. He concluded that Namaqualanders suffered from a huge dependency syndrome: they had been helped so much that they now saw it as a right and demanded that they be assisted if they were suffering. He quoted an old lady: 'if the dear Lord will not provide we can always ask the Magistrate for a little food.' This short-sighted fatalism was especially applicable to farmers who did not plan ahead for the rain season but preferred to wait for the rain before planting, overlooking the obvious fact that given the erratic rainfall, Namaqualanders would see pre-rain planting as a wasteful risk.<sup>66</sup>

Kotzé went further and suggested that the 'spirit of independence' was not encouraged in the school hostels – as children saw that their parents expected the Government

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60 Heese 1942: p. 447

61 Heese 1942: p. 456

62 Kotzé 1942: p. 341

63 Kotzé 1942: p. 346

64 Kotzé 1942: p. 179

65 Kotzé 1942: pp. 189–190

66 Kotzé 1942: p. 353

to provide land, livestock, relief work and rations – and that parents were abdicating their responsibilities to their children. Indeed, some parents even wanted the state to subsidise them for feeding their children during school vacations.<sup>67</sup> All in all, he dismissed the state's poverty alleviation efforts as an uncoordinated patchwork of projects which did nothing but foster dependence. However, if seen from a Namaqualander perspective, which defined outsiders and government as belonging to a different moral universe and ripe for exploitation, this stigma of 'backwardness' carries a certain panache. As Scott would say: Namaqualanders had 'assembled a fairly comprehensive cultural portfolio of techniques for evading state incorporation while availing themselves of the economic and cultural opportunities its proximity presented'.<sup>68</sup> Their success in exploiting the Government rested upon what I term the *Švejk* Strategy.

In Jaroslav Hašek's classic anti-war novel, *The Good Soldier Švejk*, the anti-hero, Josef Švejk, a 'dealer in second-hand dogs,' decides to do his bit for the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the First World War, but his 'misadventures' due to his incompetence is of such a nature that his superiors are stuck in a limbo of uncertainty: was he genuinely stupid or acting simply to milk the system? The brutal truth seems to be that farming was never really sustainable. Rossouw, a long-term Namaqualander, noted that in 1898 farmers had to seek temporary work on the gold mines and that he had seen prominent farmers forced to undertake demeaning relief roadwork during at least two different droughts.<sup>69</sup> For all his sympathetic insights this is something van der Merwe overlooked.

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67 Kotzé 1942: p. 377

68 Scott 2009: p. 329

69 Rossouw 1973: p.7. So crippling was the drought of 1895–7, followed by the *Rinderpest* epidemic, that the Dutch Reformed Church started the Kakamas irrigation colony on the !Garib to assist destitute farmers.

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# Permeable Borders: Configurations of whiteness and Boer Commercial Ranching in Southern Namibia

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*Janie Swanepoel*

## Introduction

The Boers that migrated across the Orange River, from South Africa to Namibia, present a point of departure for this study, exploring the contradictions and legacies of South Africa's colonial project in Namibia.<sup>1</sup> South Africa was granted the mandate of Namibia by the League of Nations in 1920, after the latter defeated the German troops – protecting the German colonisation that began in 1884 – in 1915. From its inception, however, the mandate was politically engineered by South Africa to serve settler and imperial interests, rather than the interests of the indigenous populations, as it was intended.<sup>2</sup> Yet detailed attention to Namibian settlers and their relationship with the 'metropole' on cultural, institutional and economic terms has been less forthcoming.<sup>3</sup> In Namibian historiography more generally, too little attention has been paid to settlers who are often presented as a homogenous group in ways that overlook social and class differences between them, as well as to showing how such differences evolved over time.

In this chapter I address this shortcoming, by situating the cultivation of a Boer community in southern Namibia within the commercial agriculture narrative during the period of South African rule (1920–1990), which was at the heart of the country's imperial ambitions.<sup>4</sup> In his historical research, Miescher highlights the role the South African state has played in maintaining the northern veterinary border in Namibia.<sup>5</sup> Known as

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1 In most literature, Namibian-Afrikaans farmers are referred to as 'Afrikaners'. I prefer to use the term 'Boers' (literally farmers in Afrikaans) as it enables me to explore the nuances of Boer migration to Namibia, (which preceded the rise of Afrikaner Nationalism) and Boers' subsequent relationship with Afrikaner Nationalism as it spread to Namibia.

2 Wallace 2011

3 The German colonial period in Namibian history was much shorter than the South African colonial period, but attention to German settlers' relations to their metropole have been studied in much more detail. See for example: Steinmetz 2008.

4 For South Africa as 'empire' see: Henrichsen et al. 2015.

5 Miescher 2012a

the 'Red Line', this border delineated the separation of the settler society from the northern African population. He suggests that from a 'South African perspective the Red Line marked the physical limit of the subcontinent claimed to be "white" settler South Africa, and it drew the line against "dark" or inner Africa'.<sup>6</sup> The social construction of a border that would proclaim control over land and function to protect notions of 'whiteness' has also been made in relation to the South African Border War, which took place on the borderlands between Namibia and Angola.<sup>7</sup> Yet, the SA/Namibian border has received scant attention in terms of how it speaks to configurations of whiteness.

By focussing on Boer commercial agriculture in the regions north of the Orange River, I illustrate instances through which this border came to matter, in spite of the intention to extend South Africa's settler colonial project to Namibia, in ways that should have – at least for South African settlers – dissolved any notion of a national border.<sup>8</sup> These include the processes through which Boer communities came to localise a sense of belonging to Namibian soil, in ways that that intersected with a more inclusive settler Southwestern identity shaped (in part) against South Africa. In addition to this, while an open border for white migration to Namibia was encouraged, the permeability of the border for livestock trade seemed less straightforward. This shows the ambiguousness of the political border between South Africa and Namibia, which contours the Orange River, and is henceforth referred to as the SA/Namibian border. I consider the border as at once open and closed – an ambivalent quality with structuring power in terms of the development of commercial agriculture and its settler identity politics.

Yet, it is important to observe that while borders are commonly perceived as instruments of division, enabling – for example – the development of local identities within the frame of the nation (as this chapter argues), the SA/Namibian border has also been characterised by ongoing transcendence and affiliation. For instance, a communal farmer from the !Gamaseb conservancy near Karasburg observed that he was farming on both sides of the river, with the help of extended family members. For him, this was a natural arrangement established by his father. Additionally, a commercial farmer from the border town Ariamsvlei told me that the South African farmers on the immediate other side of the border prefer to attend religious services and cultural days in Namibia, as this is where they felt they belonged. In fact, most of southern Namibia's inhabitants have relatives living across the river and visits are frequent.

This chapter, therefore, does not aim to provide a full account of settlers' relations with South Africa as it relates to the ambiguity of borders, but instead touches on some of the complexities of South Africa's settler expansion into Namibia – many of which remain in place as legacies of this period in history. Before turning to these, I first provide a brief history of Boer settlement in southern Namibia – a process during which the ir-

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6 Miescher 2012b: p. 669

7 Conway 2008

8 South Africa's attempts to officially incorporate Namibia into its territory as a 'fifth province' were never internationally recognised. Namibia's status as a separate legal entity during the South African period thus remained in place, even if whites were not required to present a passport when passing through the border.

reducible requirement of finding suitable land for settlement proved difficult, given its arid ecology.

## The political spatiality and organisation of settler agriculture in Namibia

Some Boer families had already started to settle in southern and central Namibia from as early as the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, before formal German colonisation began.<sup>9</sup> Early Boer migrations into Namibia were transient, and almost exclusively depended on the approval of African leaders. After settling in Namibia, most Boers returned to regions south of the border in South Africa, only to resettle in Namibia at a later stage.<sup>10</sup> Visits to South Africa for christenings, marriages, and other religious congregations were commonplace. Most Boers came from farming districts in the northern, semi-arid farming regions, which lie south of the Orange River, that could not accommodate the second generation of their families. As with earlier Boer migrations in search of greener grass, many Boers imagined Namibia to be the 'promised land' that had to be civilised, developed, and tamed, in line with a staunch Calvinist-ideology.<sup>11</sup>

While some Boers came to the colony with substantial stock and capital, most were desperately poor and had little resilience when faced with the challenges they experienced, such as theft; recurrent, extended droughts; and animal diseases. Many lived a pastoralist existence and were known as migrant ox-wagon 'trekkers', as they moved between water and grazing – avoiding areas identified with stock theft or African hostility. With German rule, Boer settlement became concentrated in the south, but they remained politically marginal, often still returning to South Africa for long periods. The German administration had mixed ideas about Boer presence in the territory but, in practice, they exerted little socio-economic weight.<sup>12</sup>

It was only through state-driven settlement policies during South Africa rule that Boers came to dominate Namibia's rural areas in the erstwhile 'Police Zone' – the racial geographical ordering inherited from the German colonial period, that was reinforced during the South African period as the 'Red Line'. The most significant period of Boer settlement occurred from the 1920s to the 1960s, when Namibia was politically used to establish poor South African settlers (mostly Boers) in the freehold area. Miescher argues that the Lardner-Burke Commission of 1946 was particularly influential in shaping land settlement policies for the decades following the Second World War.<sup>13</sup> Aimed at providing

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9 Stals 2009

10 For a rich and detailed account of the Boer families' travels back and forth across the Orange River, see Stals 2009.

11 Stals 2009: p.182

12 Although most Boers settled in southern Namibia, some also occupied central and northern Namibia. For example, in 1885 a group of 46 Trekboers from the Cape Colony settled in Grootfontein, under the leadership of William Worthington Jordan, and aimed to establish the Republic of Upingtonia. The attempt received considerable local resistance and failed. See Miescher 2012a. Nonetheless, Boers still outnumbered German settlers in Grootfontein in 1897.

13 Miescher 2012a

social security to ‘Europeans’ in the territory and [following] the precept of “a farm for every settler” the recommendations of the Commission resulted in the expansion of the ‘Police Zone’ and accommodation of more settlers on farms within it.<sup>14</sup> In 1946, half of the settler population constituted of farmers,<sup>15</sup> and by 1960, 88% of the freehold land in southern Namibia had been occupied by settlers.<sup>16</sup>

The South African land settlement scheme for incoming settlers not only provided land on more than favourable terms, but also subsidised the infrastructure needed to make the water-scarce lands usable for agricultural purposes. Extensive subsidisation, extension services, floor prices, and marketing support created an environment narrowly focussed on the development of monoculture livestock production for white settlers.<sup>17</sup> In other words, the state played an important role in creating and enabling the notion of a ‘proper’ Boer, that was rooted in private landownership and monoculture livestock production. Yet, under the thin veneer of independence, was a heavy dependence on state support and subsidisation.

Thus, given the limitations of the arid ecology and the impoverished state of most settlers, the development of commercial agriculture depended on state support. This, alongside the allocation of land, meant that economic transformation occurred. Most settlers were able to make a relative success of their enterprises, which evolved from mixed-farming enterprises that were barely making ends meet, to viable commercial monoculture production after the 1940s. Subsequently, beef production in the central and northern regions grew exponentially, reaching a peak in the 1960s.<sup>18</sup> Large-scale cattle farming, however, is not suited to the south – due to the arid climate – and sheep farming for mutton and pelt production came to dominate these parts.<sup>19</sup>

In southern Namibia, settlers were allocated farms on land previously taken from Africans during the German colonial period. These were typically around 10 000 hectares in size.<sup>20</sup> Africans in the ‘Police Zone’ were clustered in communal areas, where they had to navigate overgrazed lands and were subject to taxation, although this was not without room for some manoeuvring. For example, some Africans traded their labour for grazing rights on settler farms.<sup>21</sup> Nonetheless, the racial geography inherited from the German colonial period was further strengthened with the attempt to coerce Africans into farm labour. In general, with the gradual development of white commercial ranching, the

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14 Miescher 2012a: p. 145

15 Botha 2000: p. 273

16 Werner 2009

17 Schmokel 1985; Lau and Reiner 1993.

18 Rawlinson 1994

19 Pelts are harvested from the newborn lambs of the Karakul sheep breed. Newborn lambs are slaughtered and skinned a few hours after birth before their uniquely soft skins mature into the coarse hair of adult sheep.

20 The German colonial state considered 10,000 hectares to be a viable size for farms in the southern parts of Namibia. It seems like the South African state adopted this estimate, as most farms allocated to whites during the South African period ranged from 9,000 to 15,000 hectares. This estimate, however, should be considered in relation to the specific region examined, as the carrying capacity varies majorly in southern Namibia as you move from the east to the west.

21 Silvester 1994

powerful combination of private property and fencing introduced a radically new spatial politics – to which both indigenous humans, plants and animals had to adapt.

Increasingly, there was an attempt to limit pastoralism in the freehold area (especially the presence of white *bywoners* and *trekkers*) and allocate the space as being specifically for white settlers on individual farms, which theoretically should have translated into economic stability.<sup>22</sup> This was followed by a subsidisation on fencing and other capital infrastructure needed to provide drinking water for stock on what was known as ‘dry farms’. For example, by the 1940s the capacity to accommodate settlers’ four-hooved companions in Namibia’s fragile rural ecology had been exceeded, and it was only through state-support that settlers managed to remain on farms and survive the periodic droughts so typical of the region.<sup>23</sup>

These events combined to produce two very different agricultural sectors in the territory: the commercial sector on freehold land, used for free-ranch monoculture live-stock production; and the communal sector situated in the regions north of the ‘Red Line’, where pastoralism and crop-growing are practiced (largely for subsistence), under traditional forms of land tenure. Both are mostly still intact. Although efforts have been made to rectify this dual agricultural system, it remains one of the most problematic and palpable legacies of the colonial period.

## Farmers’ Associations and localising the Voortrekker myth in southern Namibia

From the 1920s onwards, the SA/Namibian border became one traversed by numerous political and economic structures that aimed at incorporating the territory more tightly into those of South Africa.<sup>24</sup> In response to this imperial impulse, civil organisations too branched out into Namibia. Reflecting the dominant political mood of the time, the *Afrikanerkring* (1927), the *Federasie vir Afrikaanse Kultuur* or FAK (1929)<sup>25</sup> and the Broederbond (1949) cut across the border to promote Afrikaner Nationalism. These organisations – including the Afrikaner newspaper, *Die Suidwester* – promoted the celebration of particular ‘historical markers’ that mythologised Afrikaner history in Namibia. Such markers included the ‘Great Trek of 1836, the Battle of Blood River of 1838 (which was commemorated as Dingaan’s Day), and the South African War of 1899–1902’.<sup>26</sup> For instance, when a group of *trekboers* was accommodated in Namibia in 1929, after an unsuccessful settlement in Angola, Dingaan’s Day was commemorated upon them entering Namibia, to celebrate Afrikaner solidarity, belonging and unity.<sup>27</sup> Additionally, the first Afrikaans ad-

22 *Bywoners* were landless Boer tenants who exchanged their labour to live on farms and to use the land for their own stock.

23 Botha 2005

24 Wallace 2011

25 Federation for Afrikaans Culture.

26 Silvester 2015: p. 279

27 Stals 2008. The state-sponsored settlement of the Angolan Boers (approx. 1900 people) drew criticism from all corners, and increased the hostilities between settlers in Namibia (particularly between German and Boer settlers) – see Botha 2009.

ministrator J.A. Werth in 1926 insisted on using Afrikaans in all official communications, illustrating the infiltration of Afrikaner Nationalism in Namibia.

For Silvester, these ‘commemorative rituals’ had the effect of rewriting ‘Namibia and its settler community into a larger Afrikaner historical narrative’.<sup>28</sup> Botha concurs with this observation, suggesting that in Namibia, Boers were ‘by and large consumers, instead of producers, of cultural products that emanated from across the border’.<sup>29</sup> On the isolated landscapes of southern Namibia, and removed from the capital from which these observations were largely drawn, Boers also came to incorporate the symbols of the Afrikaner Nationalist narrative into their identity, to frame themselves as pioneers in developing the land.<sup>30</sup> Yet, given their location on the periphery, these practices of memorialisation should also be seen as localised acts that situated belonging and community in relation to their immediate political environment. Within this, organised agriculture – largely in the form of farmers’ associations – played an important role in providing the social infrastructure to accommodate a local sense of community and security, that pivoted around notions of whiteness and avoided social interactions with Africans and African institutions.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, it had the added benefit of connecting isolated farmers in the territory with the right ‘institutions of privilege’ on a national level.<sup>32</sup>

Organised agriculture emerged from a context of growing Afrikaner Nationalism and targeted inward-looking Boers (especially those born in the colony) on their isolated farms, who were often considered politically passive. While farmers’ associations had already been established during the German colonial period, after the Second World War the first sustained attempt was made to establish a national network that would align farmers’ associations across the country under one organisation.<sup>33</sup> This led to the establishment of the *Suidwes Afrika Landbou Unie* (South-West African Agricultural Union, or SWALU) in 1947, largely dominated by Boers.

In parallel, South Africa’s first unified agricultural union – the South African Agricultural Union (SAAU) – was formed in 1946. Bernstein writes that it seems as if Boers anticipated that the National Party (NP) would be voted into power in 1948, and in the alignment of bureaucratic powers SAAU ‘came to virtually define the agrarian institutions and policies of the apartheid state until the 1980s’.<sup>34</sup> As in South Africa, ‘the way to harness state power was to be organised’.<sup>35</sup> In fact, it was difficult to ‘discern the bound-

28 Silvester 2015: pp. 279–280

29 Botha 2007: p. 37. In contrast, despite losing power in the colony, German settlers continued to actively preserve a localised German heritage.

30 Swanepoel 2020

31 For a more comprehensive account of the role of organised agriculture in Namibia, see Swanepoel 2020.

32 Elkins and Pederson 2015

33 It should be noted that previous attempts at unifying agricultural organisations did exist prior to establishing SWALU, but these were short-lived. For example, the Agricultural Council of 1923 was open to all white landowners (except those living with ‘native’ women). The Council was followed by the establishment of the Agricultural Chamber of 1936 that was disbanded as inter-settler tensions became heightened during the Second World War, see Swanepoel 2020: p. 84.

34 Bernstein 1996: p. 15

35 Morrel 1996: p. 156

aries' between white organised agriculture and state marketing boards and agencies, 'so permeated were all by NP (and Broederbond) membership and patronage'.<sup>36</sup> Thus, running concurrently with a general trend that equated white settler land ownership with an expected economic standard, SWALU ensured that settlers' concerns regarding land, labour, markets, and financial support were addressed.

In 1949, SWALU officially became connected to SAAU through a constitutional federal agreement.<sup>37</sup> This involved the leadership of both organisations being present in joint meetings, and Namibian settlers repeatedly used this synchronisation to their advantage – especially in terms of trade. In fact, it is probably during these meetings that the SA/Namibian border manifested most concretely, as the leadership discussed issues regarding the export and import of livestock. For example, the ban on the export of Karakul across the border to South Africa (discussed later) soured the first congress.<sup>38</sup>

Like the church (notably the Dutch Reformed Church), organised agriculture in the form of local farmers' associations also played an important role in fostering a localised settler identity.<sup>39</sup> Farmers' associations took on the responsibility of 'preserving' Boer communities, as if they had always been there, obscuring the rigid colonial apparatus that would come to ensure the racialised order of rural Namibia was kept in place. Removed from the capital, it was farmers' associations that organised local 'commemorative rituals' – such as Dingaan's Day and the Great Trek.<sup>40</sup> For example, on 16 December 1949, around 100 people assembled next to the Keinab River near Karasburg to celebrate Dingaan's Day – a considerable amount of people for a sparsely populated region. The photos of this celebration were displayed alongside other social events and family portraits on the memorial wall of the Keinab Farmer's Association building.<sup>41</sup>

I suggest that in places such as southern Namibia, where Boers had already been settled for decades, such commemorative rituals might have positioned Boer communities' ancestral roots, in terms of heritage, in places across the Orange River. Boer family trees and culture crisscrossed the SA/Namibian border, and Namibian Boers incorporated South African rituals into their everyday life. Namibian Boers, for example, also paid a lot of money to attend the games of South Africa's national rugby team, the Springboks. In 1930, during the Dingaan's Day celebrations in Windhoek, a play organised by the *Afrikanerkring* featured a backdrop of the Karoo and 18<sup>th</sup> century Boer culture.<sup>42</sup>

36 Bernstein 1996: p. 16. For example, at the 1951 SWALU congress there was a debate regarding whether members of the Legislative Assembly or the House of Assembly should be allowed a leadership position in the organisation, indicating the synchronisation of interests between white organised agriculture and political power.

37 Erasmus 1997; Gous 1998.

38 Erasmus 1997: p. 78

39 The parallel organisation – the *Vroue Landbou Vereniging* (VLV, women's farmers' organisation) – played an equally important role in this function. Modelled on colonial gendered ideologies, the VLV supported the business from the domestic realm.

40 Erasmus 1997. Minutes of meetings show that a surprising amount of time was afforded to cultural and social matters during farmers' meetings.

41 To accommodate their social function, most farmers' associations erected small buildings or halls, and many featured a built-in 'kroeg' (bar).

42 Stals 2008

However, locally, performative events such as the Dingaans' Day celebrations on the Keinab River were also designed to smooth over the heterogeneity of the Boer community.<sup>43</sup> The German community in southern Namibia was small, compared to the central parts. More often German farmers assimilated into Boer culture. Within this, Afrikaner Nationalism – embedded in the Dutch Reformed Church – became one of the many anchors that served to validate whiteness and the unequal racial relations on commercial farms north of the Orange River.<sup>44</sup> The role of farmers' associations (and by extension) organised agriculture, however, should not be overestimated, as ethnic, cultural, political and class differences from time to time eroded the functions of such organisations.<sup>45</sup>

Nonetheless, the local function of farmers' associations in asserting a shared Boer identity also echoed more broadly, as SWALU scrambled to flatten the ethnic and social differences in the settler farming community, in order to create a homogenous class of white farmers that enabled it to serve as the 'mouthpiece' of the entire settler farming community. In this, the relative success of commercial agriculture in the 1940s, and the inter-settler cooperation it required, motivated the construction of a shared 'Southwester' identity. In the next section I consider this movement in relation to the success of the pelt industry.

### **Karakul sheep: 'The black diamonds of the Desert'**<sup>46</sup>

In many ways, the farming of Karakul sheep can be considered a 'living history' of settler colonialism in southern Namibia.<sup>47</sup> Initially spearheaded by German settlers – and for a long time controlled by German business acumen – Boers conceded to the value of pelt production after a harrowing drought in the late 1920s. By the end of the 1930s, Karakul sheep surpassed the number of meat- and wool-producing sheep, the country was exporting close to a million pelts to international markets, and the pelt industry 'ranked as the largest single contributor to the territory's value of exports'.<sup>48</sup>

The arrival of Karakul sheep involved a plethora of agricultural infrastructure and practices that ecologically and politically hardened the restrictions on the mobilities pastoralists and poorer farmers typically depend on in arid regions. However, for the growing settler population, pelt production offered a way into making land settled relatively

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43 The Secretary of the Windhoek Dingaans' Day festival in 1929 complained that people left the festivities early 'to go and see whether the three inches of rain that fell had filled the dams!' – giving us an indication of Boers' priorities. Stals 2008: pp. 99–100.

44 Like the church, such organisations were also highly gendered and inscribed local communities with particular moral and social norms. Milton 1997: p. 200.

45 In the northern parts, farmers' associations struggled to keep German and Boers associated to one organisation. For example, in the Waterberg region, organised agriculture was said to follow the pattern of a 'railway track' – as German and Boer settlers each had their own association running in parallel. Erasmus 1997: p. 65.

46 Bravenboer 2007

47 Haraway 2008; Swanepoel 2020.

48 Krogh 1955: p. 101. For the history of labour in settler pelt production, see Moore 2021 and Silvester 1994.

profitable – for some land that bordered the desert seemed otherwise quite useless. Pelt production gave the struggling settlers the boost they needed. In fact, settlers' access to the global fur trade pushed, within one generation, desperately poor families into a period of relative wealth. Locally, in southern Namibia, this enabled the establishment of a settler community based on monoculture pelt production on freehold land acquired through the state land settlement scheme. It also enabled the settler community to differentiate itself from the African population, and indeed in many ways stymied African farming potential.<sup>49</sup>

However, even if the success of the pelt producing industry – on land otherwise severely constrained to commercial production – justified the white settlement scheme in a discourse of development, neither settler nor sheep easily adapted to pelt production. Instead, significant biological and political intervention was required to establish and stabilise the commercialisation of pelt production. The rise of the Karakul industry depended on producing the right kind of pelt and the development of a supply chain.<sup>50</sup> In this, the state improved promotion and marketing channels for pelt production; invested in experimental agricultural farms focussed on Karakul (e.g., Neudamm); offered pelt preparation guidance courses; and, especially, supported the Karakul breeding industry.<sup>51</sup> Crucially, the industry was to be protected from both native Africans and neighbouring states,<sup>52</sup> and especially from the settlers in South Africa.

Even as early as 1920, critics warned against the cost of South Africa's white settlement scheme in Namibia that aimed to solve the colony's 'poor rural white problem', and to establish a political constituency in the territory (e.g., the dumping of poor whites).<sup>53</sup> The state was therefore desperate to find an industry that could provide returns on its enormous spending in the colony.<sup>54</sup> Perhaps, for this reason, it heeded (amongst others) the Karakul Breeder's Association's call – ironically largely consisting of German settlers – to ban the export of Karakul breeding material to areas outside of the mandated territory, through Ordinance 11 of 1929 launched on 17 September that year.<sup>55</sup> The ban was

49 Silvester 1994; Swanepoel 2020.

50 Franklin 2007

51 Swanepoel 2020; Bravenboer 2007.

52 Even though settlers avoided selling Karakul breeding material to African farmers in the communal areas, African farmers did eventually manage to access commercial pelt production to a limited degree. While settlers apparently feared an increase in livestock theft, it was probably competition that denied Africans their access. Moore shows that besides South Africa, the SWA Administration also received requests to obtain Karakul breeding stock from Bechuanaland and Angola, as well as from areas further afield, such as the French colonial administration in Chad. Moore 2021.

53 Botha 2000

54 For an overview of the excessive spending on settler agriculture see Botha 2000; Schmokel 1985.

55 This Ordinance was preceded by earlier restrictions from 1925 on exporting Karakul breeding stock that were considered as having too many loopholes. In 1930, the 1929 Ordinance was further strengthened to include punishment for all accomplices involved in the illegal export of Karakul to South Africa. See Viljoen 2008. Moore writes that the 'law was applicable to any sheep with any documented or observed karakul ancestry; [in other words] this was not merely about pure-bred stud stock'. Moore 2021: p. 97.

motivated by the limited availability of purebred Karakul rams that hampered the growing pelt industry, as well as suppressing any competition in neighbouring countries.

Farmers built their Karakul herds through crossbreeding experiments with either the indigenous fat-tailed sheep or the Blackhead Persian, but still needed sufficient Karakul genes to produce pelts. Given the lack of breeding material in the territory to initiate an industry, it was feared that stronger farmers south of the border would deprive the struggling Namibian settlers of breeding material, as well as flood the market with pelts and compromise pelt prices.<sup>56</sup> Monitoring the crossing of Karakul sheep into South Africa (as well as Angola) was quite difficult, and a lucrative smuggling trade in Karakul breeding material ensued, but transgressors were heavily punished when found: 'unlawful export ... was punishable with a £100 fine or six months' imprisonment'.<sup>57</sup>

Farmers on the other side of the Orange River share the same ecological conditions as those in southern Namibia. Naturally, the Nama Karoo Biome precedes political borders and constitutes an expansive region that includes most of southern Namibia and northern South Africa. Thus, given the similar rangeland conditions, it is understandable that farmers south of the Orange River also wanted to capitalise on the Karakul. South African farmers were deeply unhappy about the ban and made various attempts to access Karakul, including trying to reclaim Karakul breeding stock that had been returned to Namibia from the Grootfontein experimental farm in South Africa in 1928.<sup>58</sup> In 1936, the South African Secretary of Agriculture placed further pressure on the SWA Administration to lift the export ban, lamenting the fact that SWA settlers could freely access meat markets in South Africa, but because of 'selfish' reasons, were keeping South Africans from the pelt industry.<sup>59</sup>

Namibian settlers might have had access to South African meat markets, but this trade relationship was on very unequal footing.<sup>60</sup> The SWA Administration nonetheless responded negatively to the pressure, further tightening the border for exports by raising the fine for unlawful exports from £100 to £500. The Union government had the power to repeal the ordinance and open the border for exports, but it occupied a rather awkward position between pacifying the growing reservations against the settlement scheme – that had been unable to provide returns (especially after assisting settling Angolan trekkers in Namibia in 1928) – and satisfying its own settler community. Ironically,

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56 Krogh 1955

57 Bravenboer 2007: p. 97, Moore 2021

58 Bravenboer 2007: p. 97

59 Viljoen 2008: p. 92

60 Rawlinson 1994. Meat production in Namibia has always been dependent on South African markets. Throughout the South African period, the local administration appointed various commissions to find alternative markets for Namibian meat, but this proved difficult, and producers remained dependent on the markets across the southern SA/Namibian border. Not only were Namibian producers at a disadvantage in terms of the transportation costs of getting meat across the border (either on the 'hoof' or semi-processed), but they were also subject to trade agreements and quota systems that were unstable, even when they benefited from floor prices. This is one of the major legacies of South African rule. Yet since independence, various Namibian agents have come into play to promote or prevent Namibian hooves crossing the Orange River.

during droughts, exemptions were made, and Namibian Boers could access emergency grazing in South Africa, even with their Karakul sheep.<sup>61</sup>

It was only after the Namibian Karakul industry was fully underway in the 1940s, and the shortage of Karakul rams had been satisfied, that purebred Karakul rams were exported to South Africa: first by the state from 1945, and then from 1957 by private breeders.<sup>62</sup> Moore adds a global perspective by suggesting that the ban was lifted because 'Pretoria itself passed an export ban on Karakul sheep, effectively creating a single veterinary space comprising Namibia and South Africa, each with legislation to prevent the sale of karakuls to Angola, Bechuanaland and further abroad'.<sup>63</sup> Perhaps, not incidentally, this was also the time in which Namibia became more intricately integrated into South Africa's governing systems. The institutions and organisations tasked with promoting pelt production and Karakul breeding techniques shifted across the borders several times, as South African pelt producing-related institutions amalgamated into Namibian ones, only to later become independent again. For example, in 1940 South Africa attempted to exercise greater control over the Karakul industry by recalling the ordinance through which the Karakul Breeding Association preserved its independence. This points to the institutional tensions South Africa experienced in trying to incorporate Namibia into its territory as a 'fifth province'.

After opening the border for the export of Karakul to South Africa, the number of Karakul rose exponentially there (but remained marginal to Namibia).<sup>64</sup> South African pelts became marketed under the Namibian trademark SWAPL that changed to Swakara in 1966.<sup>65</sup> South African producers thus benefitted from decades of lobbying and campaigning by Namibian farmers and businessmen that carved a niche for Swakara in the global fur trade. Karakul, however, remained symbolic of the arid landscapes of Namibia, and in the next section I consider how Swakara constituted a reference point to unite the

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61 For example, Viljoen estimates that as many as 250 000 Karakul sheep crossed the Orange River into South Africa in 1945 and 1946. Viljoen 2008: p. 117. This exemption on the ban of moving Karakul across the Orange River was subject to a permit obtained from the Head of Veterinary Services in Windhoek, and demanded that all Karakul return to Namibia if grazing opportunities improved.

62 Bravenboer 2007: p. 114

63 Moore 2021: p. 99

64 In 1957, there were 1.5 million Karakul in South Africa, and in Namibia there were over 3.5 million: Bravenboer 2007; Rawlinson 1994. It is doubtful that Karakul farming extended further than the Northern Cape of South Africa. Dwarfed by the wool- and meat-producing industries of the other regions in South Africa, producers there never received the same support their counterparts in Namibia enjoyed. This – combined with the short period in which the pelt industry could grow from the lift of the ban on exports of Karakul to South Africa in 1957 to the industry collapse in the late 1980s – meant that South African pelt production remained marginal to Namibia.

65 South African pelts were probably marketed under the Swakara brand to benefit from the efforts the Karakul industry in Namibia made to establish a niche in the global pelt trade. Although this also meant that South Africa could also not develop a competing brand, marketing SA pelts under Swakara did risk reducing the overall exclusive quality proclaimed by the Swakara brand.

divided settler community, constituted largely by German, English, and Afrikaans speakers situated in both rural and urban areas.<sup>66</sup>

## Swakara Nation

The first Karakul rams that arrived in Namibia came from various parts of the world, but once in the colony, the sheep became subject to intensive breeding experiments that led to the development of the Swakara pelt. The Karakul sheep thus became symbolically, genetically, and socially indigenous to Namibia. Emplaced locally in this way, to farm Karakul translated into legitimate belonging and differentiated settlers from both South Africa and local Africans. Being involved in the glitzy international trade of high-end fashion furs (and being paid in pounds as some farmers fondly remembered) provided 'a way for Namibia to successfully distinguish itself from its dominating South African neighbour'<sup>67</sup>. The Karakul's own imperial journey to Namibia and its subsequent natural adaptation to the rocky arid landscapes resonated with the naturalised presence of the settlers in the colony. It was the success of the Karakul's adaptation to the land in rendering profits in international trade that resonated with settlers' own identities and their place on the Namibian landscape.

However, the Karakul's hairy overcoat is not really that attractive, when compared to the beautiful patterns of the pelts that made its way into fashion articles, and served as semiotic signs – on seal stamps, magazines, and posters – to signal the successful settlement of the newly 'imagined' settler nation. For example, in both 1970 and 1971 the front page of the *SWA Annual* featured a model showcasing a fashion article made from Karakul pelt. This was considered the 'golden era'<sup>68</sup> of pelt production and both images are striking examples of how Swakara configured whiteness and came to be incorporated into the performance of a modern settler identity particular to Namibia.

On the 1970s cover, a model re-enacts the figure of the "The White Lady of Brandberg" from the indigenous rock art found in the Brandberg Mountains of the Erongo Region.<sup>69</sup>

66 For an overview of the divisions in the settler community of Namibia in the period before independence, see Botha 2007.

67 Gordon 2003: p. 133. Gordon shows that beer has been an important symbol (and beer-drinking an important embodied everyday practice) to showcase Namibian identity.

68 Bravenboer 2007: p. 200. Combined, Swakara pelts exported from Namibia and South Africa exceeded 5 million during this period.

69 The whiteness of the Brandberg rock art figure has resulted in wide speculation. The French archaeologist Henri Breuil was influential in propagating the female gender of the figure and by suggesting that 'she' was Cretan. Dubow 2019: p. 40. This 'fanciful' interpretation was consistent with the archaeological discourse of the mid-twentieth century, that tended to support the 'long-held view that the finest examples of prehistoric creativity [in Africa] must be attributable to external, exotic influences'. Dubow 2019: p. 40. Even though Breuil's interpretation has since been questioned (including the figure's female gender), the figure's mythical associations persist. Volker Grellman, who was a Karakul furrier, became inspired to model Swakara on the Brandberg lady, by sitting around a fire and wondering about the meaning of her whiteness. Did she 'accompany the Phoenicians in their fabled voyage around

Posing as the 'lady' from Brandberg, the model wears white pants, carries a bow and arrows in her left hand and looks at her right hand, which holds an offering. She wears a black Swakara tunic, ostrich eggshell jewellery, and the backdrop is the Rose Quartz mine at Rossing. The photo probably appealed to its settler audience by asserting whiteness in relation to the other iconic images of the territory conceived as 'premodern' – that is, rock art and 'Bushmen' paraphernalia – alongside the Swakara.<sup>70</sup> The majority of Namibia's Black audience is obscured, as well as the processes through which settler colonialism marginalised indigenous populations from both their land and access to markets, re-recruiting them onto farms to herd Karakul sheep.

On the 1971 cover of the magazine, the model wears a Swakara jacket, loosely holds a camera and stands next to a large *Welwitschia* – an iconic plant from the Namibian desert, often referred to as a 'living fossil'.<sup>71</sup> In the background, a small aeroplane and a large truck are parked in the otherwise empty desert landscape. This photograph signals the success of the pelt industry made indigenous – and even primordial – when coupled with the nation's prehistoric plant and desert landscape. In the context of the success of the pelt industry, the aeroplane, truck and camera symbolise modernity, progress and the pioneering, adventurist spirit of the settler, especially in relation to the 'unfolding telos of racial advance and the rational mapping of measurable space'.<sup>72</sup> Together these photographs of the early 1970s invite us to consider the opportunity Swakara presented for settler identification, in spite of the incessant ethnic divisions of the settler community.<sup>73</sup> In other words, '[settlers'] common experiences as conquerors, developers, and leaders in the territory fuelled the assertion of their identity as "Southwesters" – as settlers who had been rewarded for their (self-projected) progressive and modernizing role in history'.<sup>74</sup>

Karakul was made indigenous to Namibia as Swakara provided an 'anchor' to group settlers differentiated in class and sociality, especially in relation to South Africa.<sup>75</sup> Swakara thus presents the relation between capitalism brought about by the expansion of international markets into colonial Africa and the construal of national identities. Swakara, as a commodity, thus also reproduced the effects of capitalism symbolically and materially in the settler colony – as others have also pointed how settlers have forged a new national identity through commodities.<sup>76</sup> For example, considering wool production in Australia, Franklin suggests that sheep have been integral to the 'founding

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Africa? Or did she land from one of the early Portuguese vessels ...' Grellman contemplated. SWA Annual 1970: p. 152.

70 Miescher et al. 2008

71 The *Welwitschia* plant has since become part of independent Namibia's coat of arms indicating how national symbols are re-appropriated in the post-colonial era.

72 McClintock 1995: p. 277

73 Botha 2007

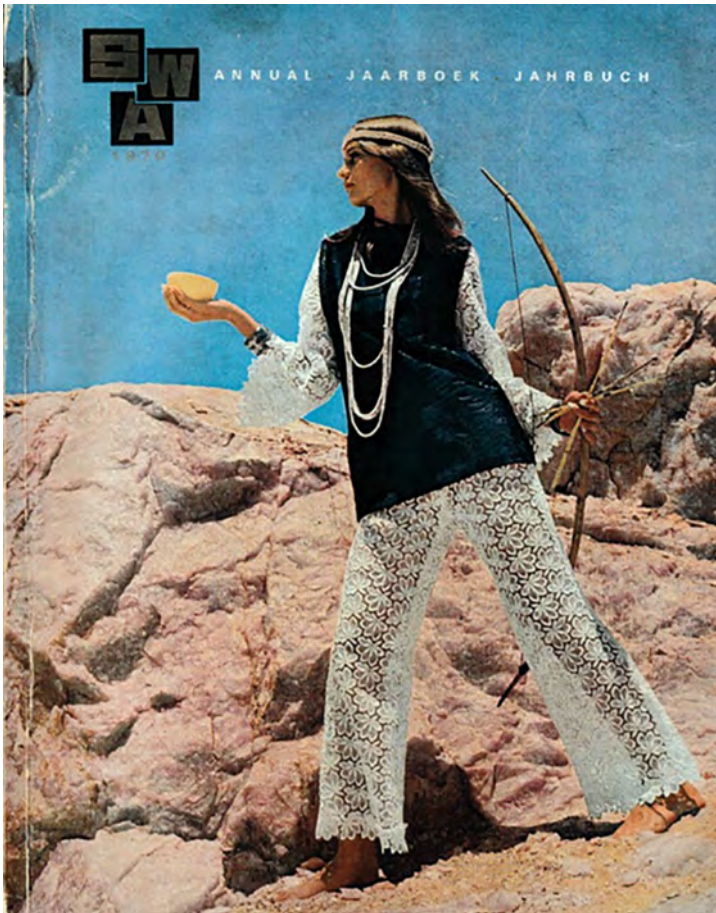
74 Silvester 2015: p. 273

75 Gordon 2003

76 A distinction should be made here regarding commodities produced and commodities consumed and their interrelated aspects. For in Namibia, clothing items made from Swakara pelts were rarely consumed by the public, and almost exclusively exported to international fur markets.

mythology' of the new settler nation.<sup>77</sup> Shukin notes that in the context of settler colonialism, the identification with a commodity – such as Swakara fur – symbolises a nation born, rather than socially and politically constructed in a highly unequal environment.<sup>78</sup>

*Fig. 1: Lady in Brandberg (SWA Annual 1970, photographer: Rolf Schroeder).*



In Namibia, this was realised through multiple mechanisms, including: the racialised agricultural landscape settler colonialism established; settler cooperation in the Swakara trade (although not without friction); a sheep that adapted perfectly to the Namibian landscape; a lucrative (but short-lived and erratic) supply chain in exotic furs that penetrated the colony; and the ambiguity of the SA/Namibia border. The border enabled the exclusion of South African producers from pelt production but provided the financial and human capital for developing the industry in Namibia. As Gordon

77 Franklin 2007: p. 135

78 Shukin 2009

shows, in 'the Namibian case, because of long historical domination by South Africa, nationalism was defined primarily in terms of opposition towards its former occupier', which ironically also served South Africa's intention to protect white hegemony in the territory.<sup>79</sup>

*Fig. 2: Model with Welwitschia (SWA Annual 1971, photographer: unknown).*



Due to both local and global circumstances, the Karakul boom slowly started to disintegrate from the late 1970s. Most farmers turned to meat production, and Karakul farming suffered tremendously. Since independence, the Karakul industry continues to struggle to keep momentum, even though the postcolonial state has targeted Swakara production as a strategic market to uplift previously 'disadvantaged' farmers in arid regions. In this vein, in 2007 – the centenary of Karakul in Namibia – a statue was raised on the main

79 Gordon 2003: p. 120

road of Keetmanshoop, a city once considered the capital of pelt production. The statue features a Nama man carrying a Karakul lamb next to a Karakul ram. Co-funded by the state and the Swakara Board of Namibia, it embodies different meanings in tension that also point to broader debates around land management and imagining the future of this arid part of Namibia.

In the postcolonial space, the statue recognises the role of indigenous labour in building the history of Karakul production in southern Namibia, while at the same time aims to open pelt production to all races. Yet, talking about the statue, a Boer noted that the Nama represented ('in fact') not a farmer, but a herder.<sup>80</sup> In this remark, Boers claim ownership of the heritage of Karakul farming and preserve a history of 'legitimate' white privilege. Karakul heritage has also been incorporated in other postcolonial attempts to reinvigorate the South, such as the Karakul historical paraphernalia being displayed at a state-sponsored refurbishment of a hotel in Karasburg. Yet, such displays of the past do little to disrupt the symbolic and economic power Boers gained through the history of pelt production.

*Fig. 3: Karakul Statue in Keetmanshoop (author's photograph).*



80 According to the sculptor, the figure represented a herder and symbolised the industry in a romantic and realistic way. Salvoldi, C. Personal Communication, 14 October 2016.

## Conclusion

By focussing on the discursive and material traffic across the Orange River that delineates the SA/Namibian border, I hope to illustrate some of the nuances in the configurations of whiteness in Namibia during the South African period, especially in relation to South African imperialism (however incomplete). In representing the settler farming community in southern Namibia, and following the political model in South Africa, organised agriculture was locally appropriated to negotiate better trade deals with South Africa and to protect the Karakul industry. Moreover, in southern Namibia, local farmers' associations to which SWALU belonged played an important role in fostering, for Boers, a localised sense of belonging and identity.

I suggested that South Africa enabled the development of commercial agriculture in Namibia, radically changing the use of space and its local ecologies. However, the pelt industry served as an example of the contradictions in South Africa's plan for settler colonialism in Namibia, as well as how this industry provided an important marker to 'anchor' a settler identity. Furthermore, the intersections between the imperial history of pelt production and the indigenisation of the Swakara pelt provided a useful entanglement to illustrate the ways in which settlers came to see their capitalist projects as validating their rightful claim to Namibia's arid landscapes. This became especially pertinent in a context of growing anti-colonial nationalism and international pressure against the racial ethos of South African control.

Patrick Wolfe has famously pointed out that settler colonialism is a 'structure rather than an event'<sup>81</sup>. Thus, more relevant to the current issues facing postcolonial Namibia, the processes through which settlers asserted a local identity should be seen as an ongoing process of appealing to a notion of rightful belonging. Since Namibian independence in 1990, the SA/Namibian border has hardened. This has meant that those Boers still occupying most of the freehold land in Namibia had to rework their identities in the frame of the nation. Yet, since independence, SWALU has done little to reconcile with its colonial past and has renamed as the Namibian Agricultural Union (NAU), while still largely representing a white settler constituency in the commercial freehold area. Locally, farmers' associations have been gaining momentum in recycling the Afrikaner tropes that served to justify belonging in Namibia in the past, in order to reclaim a place in the post-colonial political space. The legacies of South Africa's rule in Namibia are therefore not only visible both spatially and economically, but also in the discourses and institutions aimed at keeping settler colonialism in its place.

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81 Wolfe 2006: p. 390

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# Swimming Upstream: From 'Poor-Whites' to 'Coloureds' along South Africa's Lower Orange River

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*Bernard C. Moore*

## Introduction

The water from the Orange River provides a lifeline to the arid regions of South Africa's Northern Cape and southern Namibia's Karas Region. For centuries, this perennial river has been a locus point for transhumance pastoralism and small-scale farming alike. During the twentieth century, South Africa's colonial and apartheid governments focused heavily on using the Orange River's water as a basis for planned settlement policies, first of so-called 'poor-whites', and then of 'Coloureds'. If consolidating control over the peripheral parts of the empire meant facilitating permanent settlement of loyal constituents, then the Orange River was key to controlling this arid region.

Unlike the upper reaches of the Orange River – such as Kakamas, Keimoes, Upington, etc. – where land is flatter, soil quality is higher, and irrigation is easier – the same cannot be said of the Lower Orange River, where Namakwaland meets Namibia. Here is a stark, rough landscape, where unforgiving mountains abut right up to the river waters, leaving little space for irrigation development without expensive land flattening and contouring operations. Road networks have historically been weak, in part due to the peripheral nature of this region, but also due to the landscape as well. Even in spots more forgiving to irrigation works, stark differences between high-water floods and low-water droughts could damage infrastructure and destroy crops.

Colonial planners and citizens alike were puzzled by the presence of perennial water, yet they were unable to easily capture it for economic and/or political gain. Some, such as the Catholic Bishop at Keetmanshoop – who was in charge of Namibia's Homsrivier Mission Station at the banks of the Orange – reflected that: "There may soon come the time when arrangements are made that the billions of gallons of the Orange River water running useless into the Ocean could be used for cultivation. Thousands of poor people without work could make a living."<sup>1</sup> The Bishop was not the only commentator who be-

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1 Western Cape Archives & Records Service, Cape Archives Buro (KAB) Archives of the Department of Agricultural Credit & Land Tenure (ACLT) 26 File 3588 (vol. 4): Bishop Kleeman, RC Mission Keetmanshoop to Secretary for Lands – 16 June 1934.

lieved this, as from the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910, the South African government placed distinct emphasis on using the Orange River waters to secure this troublesome riverine border and meet political goals. This often led to conflict with indigenous Nama, Herero, and Coloured residents, who had long used the river for their own purposes and ascribed cultural and ancestral importance to the nearby lands.

This paper considers political and economic transformations along the south bank of the Lower Orange River, from the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910 until the end of apartheid in 1994; emphasis is placed on the lands stretching from Pella in the east to Vioolsdrift in the west. Over the course of the twentieth century, economic and policy priorities concerning river planning and river settlement changed dramatically, both concerning the beneficiaries of these schemes – be they so-called ‘poor-whites’ or ‘Coloureds’ – as well as the types of irrigation projects to be pursued – be they private smallholding/homesteading arrangements to grow vegetables or fodder or else large-scale, export-driven, cash crop plantations. Ultimately, these considerations were bound to evolutions in colonial and apartheid ideology and legislation.

It is argued that over this period, Orange River irrigation and settlement policies gradually shifted from a system of racially-exclusive welfare-oriented planning based on smallholding towards a deeply neoliberal model based on large-scale export fruit production, particularly of dates and grapes. Whites were able to transition from smallholding production of lucerne and vegetables into cash crops (or else get bought out by larger companies), meanwhile the consistently insecure land tenure of Coloureds in this area meant that they found themselves trapped in smallholding, as neoliberal shifts in late-apartheid agricultural policies meant that state investment into improving small-scale or communal agriculture would only be approved if economic returns could be expected. So-called ‘poor whites’ were allowed to operate at a loss until they were no longer poor; meanwhile these colonial and apartheid-era subsidies were never extended towards Coloureds.<sup>2</sup> While the majority of these lands are now occupied by Africans in the post-apartheid era, structural inequalities remain, and little has been done to bridge these economic gaps. Ultimately, transformations which began in the late-apartheid years continue up to the present.

## From Syndicates to ‘Poor Whites’, 1910–1940

With the formation of the Union of South Africa in May 1910, the new government very quickly took steps to survey and sell off farmland on the periphery of the self-governing dominion. This decision was taken, in part, to ease pressures coming from Anglo-Boer War veterans. Furthermore, the speed at which highly remote arid farmland along the Lower Orange River was surveyed implies that geopolitical goals were also central; the Union sought to formalise the occupation of its boundary with German South West

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2 A complete picture of these transformations would necessitate presenting the South Bank (Republic of South Africa, or RSA) and the North Bank (Namibia) in tandem, but this would render the article well above the desirable length. So, the Namibian material will be presented in a separate article in the future.

Africa (SWA). At the behest of their German neighbours, the Cape Colony increasingly cancelled the grazing rights held by Nama along the south bank of the Orange River, on grounds that some of these Nama were refugees fleeing the German Genocide.<sup>3</sup>

While the Richtersveld, Steinkopf, and Pella reserves were already demarcated and recognised under the Mission Stations and Communal Reserves Act of 1909 – which legally granted residence to ‘Coloureds’ in these areas – most of the lands neighbouring and in-between were unsurveyed state lands, with grazing being rented out to White or Coloured farmers on an ad-hoc basis. In February 1912, seven farms bordering the Orange River – located in-between Pella and Steinkopf – were officially offered for sale by the Union government: Goodhouse, Abbasas, Houniams, Witbank, Garganab, as well as Marten and Krapohl Islands (located in the flow of the Orange River).<sup>4</sup> Within a few years, Kabis, Ramansdrift, and Guadom would also be surveyed, along with Hartebeesrivier, Hoogoor, and Kambreek-Zandfontein (see Figure 1).

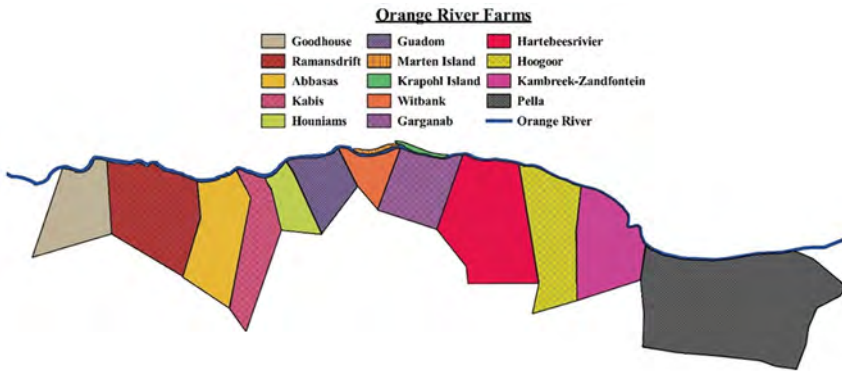
Goodhouse, Witbank, Garganab, and Marten & Krapohl Islands were swiftly purchased by the Oudtshoorn Land Development Co. Ltd., a syndicate made up of South African and English investors and managed by a German-born South African speculator, Charles (Carl) Weidner.<sup>5</sup> These farms were recognised as those with the best potential for irrigation agriculture, and the syndicate expressly mentioned that they sought to grow lucerne and other stock feeds to sell to the German South West Africa market. Inland grazing areas were to be used for ostrich breeding, which was very profitable in South Africa at the time.<sup>6</sup> Weidner was able to scoop up the recently evicted Nama, Damara, Herero, and Coloured lessees, who became his new tenant labour force.<sup>7</sup>

In many ways, Weidner and the Oudtshoorn syndicate were following on the heels of concessionary politics on the German side of the Orange River, where overseas investors purchased the irrigation farms Aussenkjer (to the west) and Stolzenfels (to the east): both immensely profitable corporate farms today. While most syndicate and concession politics in this area during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries implied speculation par excellence, the situation was slightly more complicated. While the Orange River potentially allowed for irrigation agriculture at fairly large scales, the lack of rail infrastructure and poor road networks meant that without either large-scale private investment or governmental infrastructure subsidies, little could be done with these farm holdings on a commercially-viable scale. Only Goodhouse, with its slightly less mountainous terrain, would reach profitability after large-scale land flattening operations allowed for the planting of

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- 3 National Archives of South Africa: Pretoria (NASA) Archives of the Department of Native Affairs (NTS) 7658 File 5/382: Acting Secretary for Native Affairs to Secretary for Lands ‘Unsettled Condition of Southern Portion of German Protectorate: Grazing Permits’ – 4 September 1911.
  - 4 KAB ACLT 25 File 3588 (vol. 1): Department of Lands: Government Notice no 184 – 9 February 1912.
  - 5 KAB ACLT 25 File 3588 (vol. 1): Secretary for Lands, Notice re: Sale of Orange River Farms and Islands – 26 April 1912.
  - 6 KAB ACLT 25 File 3588 (vol. 1): ‘Sale of Land in Namaqualand’, *Cape Times* – 4 May 1912. KAB ACLT 25 File 3588 (vol. 1): ‘An Oudtshoorn Scheme’, *Cape Times* – 12 September 1912.
  - 7 Johnny Damara, Weidner’s foreman, previously had grazing rights on Garganab. See NASA NTS 7658 File 5/382: Civil Commissioner, Namaqualand to Secretary for Lands ‘Cancellation of Exclusive Grazing Rights’ – 3 August 1911.

citrus (Figure 2). Weidner was allegedly exporting 600,000 oranges and lemons annually during the early 1930s.<sup>8</sup>

Fig. 1: Farm Parcels on the Orange River's South Bank (Cartography by the author).



With the outbreak of the First World War, most of the English capital within the Outdshoorn Syndicate pulled out, leaving Weidner (the only South African in the group) as the majority shareholder of a deeply indebted and undercapitalised company. When the war concluded, in 1922 Weidner transferred ownership of the farms to his new fully-South African company, Namaqua Irrigation Estates, Ltd.,<sup>9</sup> which sought to survey, demarcate, and sell off 108 subdivided erven of Witbank, Garganab, and M&K Islands (hereafter referred to collectively as W-G-M&K) to poor whites from the Northern Cape to be future residents of the 'Gariepdale' irrigation settlement.<sup>10</sup>

Constant problems with floods during the mid-1920s – as well as a general lack of working capital – meant that at this stage, Gariepdale would not come to fruition. However, Weidner's schemes along the river to settle poor whites were concurrent with a growing, large-scale push in South Africa to settle whites on government-subsidised irrigation estates. During the late 1910s and early 1920s, unemployment amongst (white) South Africans increased dramatically; this was in part caused by the closure of low-grade gold mines, restrictions on diamond mining, and a glut of WWI veterans seeking work.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, declines in other rural industries – such as ostrich breeding, which declined two-thirds between 1913–1918 – called into question the feasibility of finding well-paying employment on farms.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, between 1911 and 1921, at least 70,000 whites migrated out of rural areas, often seeking work in towns and cities, which caused

8 Birkby 1936: pp. 34–35

9 KAB ACLT 25 File 3588 (vol. 2): Namaqua Irrigation Estates Ltd.: Memorandum of Association – 29 September 1922.

10 KAB ACLT 25 File 3588 (vol. 2): Managing Director, Namaqua Irrigation Estates, Ltd. to Minister for Lands, Pretoria – 20 September 1924.

11 Visser 2018: pp. 40–61

12 Le Roux 2013: p. 42

fear amongst white politicians of possible 'moral degeneration' caused by urban white poverty.<sup>13</sup>

*Fig. 2: Goodhouse farm, photographed by Weidner in June 1918 (NAN ADM 38 File 349 (vol. 1)).*



13 Tempelhoff 2006: pp. 7–8

In the Northern Cape itself, livestock diseases coupled with persistent droughts impoverished large swathes of the white farming community during the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, leading many to either switch to transhumance pastoralism or else to abandon farming completely and move to towns.<sup>14</sup> Similar processes were affecting Black South Africans, as Tswana in the Northern Cape also saw an increase in outmigration from reserves. On a broader scale, between 1929–1933 the confluence of the global Great Depression and immense drought in southern Africa brought issues of white poverty to the forefront, epitomised by the *Carnegie Commission of Investigation into the Poor White Question in South Africa*, which ultimately argued that without governmental intervention into this arena to alleviate white poverty, South Africa's racial hierarchy could dismantle.<sup>15</sup>

During these years, state welfare for whites was greatly expanded. It was often framed as a way to combat racial mixing, such that certain forms of labour (such as roadbuilding and railway maintenance) would be increasingly allocated to whites during times of economic turmoil.<sup>16</sup> Resources were also allocated to state interventions into rural agricultural settlements, particularly towards agglomerations of irrigated smallholdings. Government departments often worked with the Nederduitse Gereformeerde (NG) Kerk's *Algemene Armsorg* charity division to facilitate settling poor whites on irrigation schemes.<sup>17</sup> While many of these poor white irrigation schemes were located in more fertile and rain-heavy regions, there was already a history of using the Lower Orange River for smallholding irrigation, as the Kakamas scheme (downriver from Upington) was developed by the NG Kerk between 1898 and 1913, at which point it was officially recognised by the government as a so-called '*blanke arbeidskolonie*' (labour colony for whites).<sup>18</sup> By 1921, over 3,000 'poor whites' were resident at Kakamas.<sup>19</sup> For the government, irrigation schemes were to also a way to promote 'denser settlement in the rural areas', facilitating influx control, as well as monitoring alcohol consumption.<sup>20</sup>

For these reasons, during the Great Depression, the Minister of Irrigation travelled along the Lower Orange River, planning a number of irrigation settlements for poor whites from the Northern Cape and southern Namibia. This included Buchuberg Dam (upriver from Upington), Beenbreek (in Namibia near Velloorsdrift), and Vioolsdrift/Noordoewer (on either side of the Orange River west of Goodhouse).<sup>21</sup> The dam and weir works would employ a large amount of 'poor whites' in short-term construction service, and then some would be able to take up full-time farming on the irrigation parcels.

Vioolsdrift (on the south bank) was already inhabited – since the early 1920s – by a few dozen poor white settlers, renting the Crown land from the government and engaging in petty irrigation farming with hand-dug furrows. With the coming of economic troubles

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14 Snyman 1989

15 Magubane 2008

16 Seekings 2007

17 Visser and Du Pisani 2012

18 Roos 2011: p. 58

19 Visser and Du Pisani 2012: p. 108

20 Tempelhoff 2006: p. 9

21 Van Vuuren 2012: pp. 117, 195

foreshadowing the Great Depression, the settlers explicitly called on the Union Government to form and fund a so-called '*arbeidskolonie*' to provide a solution to the '*Arm Blanke Kwessie*' (Poor White Dilemma).<sup>22</sup> Between 1929 and 1933, the settlement was expanded significantly with government support; an intake weir was constructed about 10km upstream, and a canal was built running along both banks, measuring over 33km in total.<sup>23</sup> The Noordoewer portion was a completely new settlement, however, and it eventually housed 47 settlers.

While there was some interest during the late 1920s and early 1930s by poor white settlers in Weidner's 'Gariepdale' scheme, the Great Depression meant that Namaqua Irrigation Estates, Ltd. lost most of its Cape Town and London investors, officially being liquidated in March 1932.<sup>24</sup> Weidner personally bought all of its Orange River landholdings, hoping to sell them back to the government for a profit once the budget for more poor white settlements returned. Upon obtaining the deeds of sale, he contacted the NG Kerk, offering to sell to the church his W-G-M&K Scheme to form a work colony, which the church estimated could house as many as 200–250 families.<sup>25</sup> The church hoped that the government would cover the expenditure for the irrigation improvements, while the church would buy the land and oversee the project; however, it appears that the government was not willing to enter into such a partnership, seeking to make poor white settlements either fully-private or fully-government funded.

Weidner failed to sell the farms to the church, and he increasingly fell into debt, as the drought and Great Depression stretched on much longer in the Northern Cape and southern Namibia than in other parts of the world. Even the once-profitable Goodhouse suffered, such that in 1936 he offered the government a package of farms including Goodhouse.<sup>26</sup> By 1937, there was finally the political push in the Northern Cape to obtain additional Orange River farmland to plan an irrigation settlement, and the Department of Irrigation was tasked with evaluating the cost of building the weirs, canals, and pump schemes necessary for a settlement.<sup>27</sup> While it would be possible to purchase all the farms as far as Goodhouse, upon investigation, they recommended that only the upriver farms – Witbank, Garganab, and M&K Islands – be purchased from Weidner, as these contained much more alluvial soil and would be cheaper to irrigate. The farms further upriver (Hartebeesrivier, Hoogoor, and Kambreek-Zandfontein) were in private hands, operating as sheep farms.

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- 22 KAB ACLT 483 File 10797 (vol. 1): 'Petisie Opgetrek deur die Bewoners van Vioolsdrift, "Groot-Rivier" Namakwaland' – 9 October 1924.
- 23 National Archives of Namibia (NAN) Division of Water Affairs (WAT) 91 File WW:77/4: Director of Works, Windhoek to Secretary for SWA 'Vioolsdrift Irrigation Project' – 19 October 1933.
- 24 KAB ACLT 25 File 3588 (vol. 2): Magistrate, Springbok to Sec-L, Pretoria – 14 March 1932.
- 25 KAB ACLT 26 File 3588 (vol. 3): A.D. Luckoff, (NG Kerk) to Minister of Lands – 29 October 1932.
- 26 KAB ACLT 26 File 3588 (vol. 4): C. Weidner to Sec-L – 18 July 1936.
- 27 KAB ACLT 26 File 3588 (vol. 4): 'Proposed Garganab to Hom Irrigation Scheme: South Bank, Orange River: Preliminary Report' – 10 May 1937.

### 'Poor White' or 'Coloured'? Conflicting Priorities, 1940-1960

In August 1937, Weidner finally sold the W-G-M&K scheme to the Government, which potentially opened the door to another poor-white workers' colony. However, there was an increasing recognition that irrigation projects along the Lower Orange River (i.e., along the shared border with Namibia) were becoming far more complicated and expensive than originally envisioned. In 1939, the Chairman of the Land Board recommended that 800–1,000 morgen (700–865ha) of this purchased land (most of the alluvial portions) be brought under irrigation, even though he believed that the scheme would not prove profitable and that it was likely to fail in many of its main goals. He ultimately felt that it was a good idea as a means to provide short-term work for poor whites in Namakwaland, but the combined risks of droughts and floods would likely make it a more extreme version of the Vioolsdrift/Noordoewer scheme, which 'yielded a nil return for all the expenditure involved, which was all written off'.<sup>28</sup>

The large expenses involved, as well as South Africa's entry into the Second World War in late 1939 and mobilisation of troops (many of whom were 'poor whites'), meant that the political will to build the irrigation settlement (both among the government and the beneficiaries) fell by the wayside. During these years as state lands, however, the farms were not unoccupied. When he owned these parcels, Weidner actually did very little farming (irrigation or livestock), and for the most part he leased out the grazing to 'Coloureds' from the Northern Cape and southern Namibia; upon selling the farms to the Department of Lands, he transferred their grazing contracts to the government.<sup>29</sup> The proximity of Pella, Steinkopf, and the Richtersveld Reserves meant that the majority of both permanent tenants and seasonal farm labour either came from or had family in these communal areas. Furthermore, the Bondelswarts Reserve in Namibia was only located about 100km north of the river.

The names of the 'Coloured' tenants resident on Weidner's former properties give testament to the complexity and diversity within the 'Coloured' classification and identity in the Northern Cape.<sup>30</sup> Some family surnames of the residents – such as Julie, Brand, Carelse, and others – were common among self-identifying Coloureds at the time, while other surnames – such as Witbooi, Rooi, and Damara – often were more common amongst Nama and Hereros. Klinghardt, in his ethnographic and historical investigation of Pella, found that the 'Coloured' identity there was diverse, and many registered Coloureds acknowledged numerous sub-identities and ancestries: about 60% of Pella identified primarily as Coloured or Baster, 25% as Herero, and 15% as Nama.<sup>31</sup> Most of the Nama identified as descendants of the Bondelswarts, who alongside the

28 KAB ACLT 27 File 3588 (vol. 5): Acting Chairman of Land Board to Minister of Lands and Irrigation 'Proposed Diversion Scheme to Irrigate Krapohl and Marten Island and Adjoining Land on the Farms Witbank and Garganab on the Orange River' – 28 November 1939.

29 KAB ACLT 27 File 3588 (vol. 5): C. Weidner to Inspector of Lands, Upington (lvL) 're: Garganab, Witbank, and Two Islands' – 31 January 1940.

30 KAB ACLT 269 File 3588/8 (vol. 1): lvL 'Lys van Name van Bewoners van Witbank en Garganab' – 17 November 1947.

31 Klinghardt 2005: pp. 14–15

Herero fled German South West Africa during the Genocide.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, some contemporaneous observers at the time noted the heterogenous African populations on these Orange River farms,<sup>33</sup> and many of these so-called 'Coloureds' were resident on these farms as tenants for more than two decades at least.<sup>34</sup>

In late-1943, the Department of Irrigation commissioned a study to look into how to use the W-G-M&K scheme during the post-War period. When they released their report in May 1944, they stated that the entirety of Weidner's former properties should be used as a Coloured irrigation settlement, and neighbouring farms should be purchased for grazing land for Coloureds as well.<sup>35</sup> It was recommended that preference be given to demobilised Coloured soldiers, and it was estimated that up to 600 families could be settled on the scheme.<sup>36</sup>

Upon publishing the report, they received daily requests from Coloured farmers who wished to trek to the Orange River to construct the irrigation works and get on with farming. Additionally, they also received numerous requests from people with Nama, San, and other surnames who sought settlement on the so-called 'Coloured' scheme, leaving technocrats at the Department of Lands in a quandary as to who can be settled on the scheme.<sup>37</sup> Many government officials did not realise the complexity of the Coloured identity in Namakwaland: namely that there were historical affinities between most groups in the region, and many saw deep connections to these farmlands on the south bank of the Orange River. Indeed, during early-1922, the famous and controversial Griqua political leader A.A.S. le Fleur travelled from Goodhouse up to Pella inspecting each farm, and he actually met with Weidner in hope of purchasing the Oudtshoorn Syndicate's lands to create a sort of Messianic homeland for Coloureds, Basters, Nama, and all who were currently employed or renting grazing on these lands.<sup>38</sup> Divisions between 'Native' and 'Coloured' along the Orange River were not as stark as officials believed.

Agricultural Inspectors from the Uppington office of the Department of Irrigation toured the farms in late 1944. They found that the majority of the Coloured residents were either former tenants of Weidner, or else families evicted from upriver irrigation settlements – such as Keimoes and Rooikop – which were expanded to accommodate returning white soldiers. The Coloured residents were making decent progress with establishing hand-dug furrows and procuring their own cement to build a diversion weir; as

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32 Ibid.: 68

33 KAB ACLT 27 File 3588 (vol. 5): P. Eksteen (Pofadder) to J.G. Olivier 'Bosluis: Basters en Grond' – 10 November 1941.

34 KAB ACLT 27 File 3588 (vol. 5): IvL to Provinsiale Verteenwoordiger, Dept. van Lande, Kaapstad (PV, DvL) 'i/s Weidner Plase' – 5 February 1940.

35 KAB ACLT 27 File 3588 (vol. 5): Irrigation Commission Report 'Krapohl and Marten Islands, Lower Orange River' – 12 May 1944.

36 KAB ACLT 27 File 3588 (vol. 5): Sec-L to Minister of Welfare and Demobilisation – 22 May 1944.

37 KAB ACLT 27 File 3588 (vol. 5): IvL to PV, DvL 'Rapport i/s Witbank/Krapohl/Marten' – 19 June 1944.

38 NASA Archives of the Justice Department (JUS) 106 File 2/1221/11 (vol. 3): Affidavit, Abram Watt – Witbank: 12 June 1922.

the settlement was only a recommendation, rather than a declaration, no government assistance had yet been granted, as opposed to what 'poor-whites' had received.<sup>39</sup> As these farms were now officially state lands, it was technically possible for Coloureds to get tenancy agreements to rent grazing or to use the alluvial lands. Most of those who got the rental contracts were demobilised Coloured soldiers, who constructed the flood channels for small-scale vegetable and lucerne production (see Figure 3).<sup>40</sup>

*Fig. 3: Remnants of some of the 1940s irrigation furrows at Witbank (Photo by the author, 2022).*



During 1943 and 1944, South Africa's Irrigation Commission visited Witbank and other purchased farms on a number of occasions, and the Upington officials were largely impressed by the progress made by demobilised Coloured soldiers and other residents. They recommended in 1944 that the scheme be expanded and officially allocated for Coloureds.<sup>41</sup> In 1946, the Cape Land Board recommended the purchase of the remaining farmland between Witbank and Goodhouse to plan a larger irrigation and grazing scheme for Coloureds.<sup>42</sup> By early-1949, Goodhouse, Ramansdrift, Abbasas, Kabis, Hou-

39 KAB ACLT 5 File 3588 (vol. 6): A.J. Ferreira & S. Damon 'Tour to Witbank: Proposed Coloured Settlement along the Orange River' – 11-13 November 1944.

40 Catherine Cloete, Witbank, January 2022, interview with B.C. Moore. Also see Western Cape Archives & Records Service: 'Tussen Bewaar Plek' (TBK) Division of Coloured Affairs (KUS) 2/139 File 12/8/B2 (vol. 2): P. Loxton (Goodhouse) to Minister David Curry – 17 January 1985.

41 KAB ACLT 5 File 3588 (vol. 6): Ferreira & Damon 'Tour to Witbank...' – 11–13 November 1944.

42 KAB ACLT 5 File 3588 (vol. 6): Cape Land Board 'Memorandum: Disposal of Krapohl & Marten Islands, and the Farms Witbank, Garganab, and Die Spruit' – 24 July 1946.

niums, and Guadom were purchased by the Government, and it was envisioned that the expanded scheme would focus on lucerne, cotton, and to a lesser extent sultana grapes for raisin production. The Secretary for Lands estimated that the 1,607 morgen (1,390ha) scheme could settle more than five hundred Coloured families.<sup>43</sup>

Between 1937 and 1949, virtually all the tenants and residents of the W-G-M&K scheme were Coloureds. However, the farms were technically Crown land, rather than allocated according to the Mission Stations and Communal Reserves Act of 1909, which meant that Coloureds had far less security over their tenancy rights. Amongst whites in Springbok and Pofadder districts – loyal supporters of the National Party (NP) – there was resistance to place the scheme within the 1946 Coloured Settlement Act, or even officially under the control of the Division of Coloured Affairs. Only Goodhouse fell into the latter category, yet even it was being leased out to a white settler, G. de Kock Maree.<sup>44</sup> He would eventually be elected to the Volksraad as representative for Namakwaland, and he allowed all the citrus trees sold by Weidner together with the farm to die of root-rot.<sup>45</sup> To most of the white settlers of Namakwaland, an unproductive Goodhouse was preferable to one operated by non-whites.<sup>46</sup>

By early-1948, there was increasing pressure being placed upon Coloured settlers across the Orange River farms. It was informally reserved for Coloureds, yet nothing was guaranteed by law. Officials in Springbok sought to curb any new settlement by Coloureds on the parcels, despite later acknowledgement by Coloured Affairs that most of these *intrekkers* [incoming residents] had nowhere else to go due to eviction from farms on grounds of mechanisation and decreased labour demands (such as jackal-proof fencing on sheep farms and increased tractor use on Upington plantations).<sup>47</sup> In February 1948, the Magistrate at Springbok was instructed to not issue any further grazing licences on the W-G-M&K scheme.<sup>48</sup> In 1949, the Government began granting grazing to whites on the Orange River properties in much larger numbers.<sup>49</sup>

The Division of Coloured Affairs, however, still sought to keep Goodhouse through W-G-M&K Coloured – deeming expansion of settlements necessary for the estimated 58,000 Coloureds in the Northern Cape. The recommendation for the expanded Coloured irrigation settlement was passed on to the Minister for Lands in Pretoria, who in late-1949 promptly rejected the project. Instead, he declared that these parcels, like many other

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- 43 KAB ACLT 27 File 3588 (vol. 7): Sec-L, 'Memorandum i/s Marten-Krapohl Eilande Besproeiingskema' – 23 September 1949.
- 44 TBK KUS 296 File 139 (vol. 1): Sekretaris van Binnelandse Sake (Sek, B-S) to Sekretaris, Staatsdienskommissie – 22 December 1955.
- 45 TBK KUS 296 File 139 (vol. 1): Senior Landboubeampte 'Verslag: Goodhouse Inspeksie' – 4 April 1956. TBK KUS 296 File 139 (vol. 2): Verantwoordelike Beampte, Landbounavorsingstasie Upington to Sekretaris van Kleurlingsake (Sek-KS) – 24 August 1960.
- 46 TBK KUS 296 File 139 (vol. 1): Kommissaris van Kleurlingsake (Komm-KS) to Sek, B-S 'Petisie en Memorandum: Goodhouse' – 17 May 1956.
- 47 TBK KUS 492 File 4/1/3/B2: Sek-KS 'Memorandum: Beskikbaarstelling van Grond vir Kleurling Nedersetting' – 3 October 1960. See also, Moore 2021a.
- 48 KAB ACLT 27 File 3588 (vol. 7): PV, DvL to Superintendent van Kleurlingnedersettings, Upington (Supt-KN) 'Marten & Krapohl Eilande en die Plaas Witbank' – 18 February 1948.
- 49 KAB ACLT 27 File 3588 (vol. 7): Sec-L 'Aansoek om Weiding op Witbank en Garganab' – 4 April 1949.

irrigation projects upriver, would be allocated to whites.<sup>50</sup> He mandated that all existing grazing/water contracts in the W-G-M&K Scheme held by Coloureds and other 'non-whites' should not be renewed. The Superintendent of Coloured Settlements visited the plots in February 1950, and he reported back that many of the older residents had already vacated the land, with most heading to Pella or the Richtersveld. There was a small influx of 'squatters' who were living amongst those who were legally resident until the conclusion of their last harvest (August 1950), at which stage they would be forced to leave.<sup>51</sup> The Springbok Magistrate was instructed to prevent anyone coming in to settle on the land.

With the rise of South Africa's National Party government after the 1948 General Elections, the government was increasingly divided on how to formulate land policy, especially concerning the settlement of Africans in peripheral areas. It would only come with the publication of the 1955 Tomlinson Report that a comprehensive homeland/reserve policy was made. Some, such as the Minister of Lands, sought to revive state welfare interventions on behalf of whites, and development was viewed as a zero-sum game – land allocated for Coloureds was viewed as land taken from whites. While the interventions were not targeting 'poor whites' anymore – most were not so poor – the viewpoint was analogous.

However, some within Coloured Affairs – and even the NG Kerk – saw the political pressures differently. NG Kerk Ministers from Pofadder and Springbok hoped that with the rise of the like-minded National Party, the reformed churches could take over the mission stations currently operated by the Roman Catholic Church, such as Pella. During the 1940s-1950s, Pella's mission education operations were expanding in the region, with new churches and schools opening throughout communal areas on both sides of the Orange River.<sup>52</sup> NG Kerk representatives from their Pofadder mission branch complained to the Government that Pella and its school should be closed down and transformed into either a government school or an NG Kerk school on grounds that the Roman Danger [*roomse gevaar*] in South Africa is 'a greater threat than the Communist Danger'.<sup>53</sup> They felt that Pella, like most Catholic Missions, was not run as a segregated community, and that Africans – whether within the seminary or outside of it – were permitted to reach the same levels as whites.<sup>54</sup>

The Government could not close down Pella, as it was formally recognised as a mission station farm under the 1909 legislation.<sup>55</sup> However, the NG Kerk at Pofadder called upon the Minister for Lands to keep W-G-M&K as a Coloured Settlement (particularly for Protestants) to counter the 'Roman Danger' and to shore up NP support for the long-

50 KAB ACLT 269 File 3588/8 (vol. 1): Asst. PV, DvL to Supt-KN 'Marten-Krapohl Eilande Besproeiingskema' – 2 November 1949.

51 KAB ACLT 269 File 3588/8 (vol. 1): Supt-KN to PV, DvL 'Marten-Krapohl Eilande Besproeiingskema' – 15 February 1950.

52 Pella R.C. Mission Archives: R. Bientz, O.S.F.S., *Dorsland: Heldhaftige Stryd van Pionier-Sendelinge in Namakwaland* (self-published pamphlet, 1982), p. 19.

53 KAB ACLT 27 File 3588 (vol. 7): M.J. van Schalkwyk (NG Kerk, Pofadder) to PV, DvL – 27 June 1951.

54 See Klinghardt 2005: p. 13. See also, Anderson 2020.

55 KAB ACLT 5 File 3588 (vol. 8): PV, DvL to M.J. van Schalkwyk 'Roomse Kerk Terreine te Pella en Witbanknederstelling' – 25 August 1951.

term.<sup>56</sup> A Coloured settlement appeared to them, the most feasible way to keep out 'communist influences', as well as the expansion of the Roman Catholics, whose policy, according to the NG Kerk 'is equalisation and the mixing of races'.<sup>57</sup>

While the Commissioner for Coloured Affairs was personally in agreement with this,<sup>58</sup> the Department of Lands would not budge regarding their official plans to make it a white settlement. At the same time, little was being done to actually develop the lands for this purpose. As crown lands owned by the state, the farms were being leased out for temporary and/or emergency grazing – mostly to whites, but occasionally to coloureds as well – but the lack of permanency for any of these licences meant that few had the incentive to continue to develop the irrigation infrastructure.<sup>59</sup> This meant that by the mid-1950s, most of the hand-built furrows and weirs were in dire disrepair, and little meaningful irrigation work could be performed. By May 1957, nearly all Coloureds had been removed from the state-purchased Orange River plots, with most irrigation farmers going to Eksteenskui, and stock farmers split between Goodhouse, Steinkopf, Pella, and the Richtersveld.<sup>60</sup>

At the same time, irrigation engineers from the Department of Planning visited the farms running from Witbank to Ramansdrift to finally plan the expansion of irrigation works to facilitate white settlement. They had already conducted a small investigation in December 1957, recommending that the scheme be put on permanent hiatus, as the lack of dams and flood control infrastructure upriver was exacerbating the fluctuation between floods and droughts.<sup>61</sup> In addition, nearly a decade of inactivity rendered most of the previous furrows and channels unusable – however, the farms would continue to be leased to whites for livestock grazing.

## Taming the Orange River: Dams and Development, 1960–1975

Between 1962–1963, the Republic of South Africa's Department of Water Affairs investigated the feasibility of large-scale infrastructural development along the Orange River to better utilise the waters for irrigation, urban household consumption, and hydropower. The entire project would bring over 360,000 morgen (311,000ha) of land under irrigation along the Orange River – most of it upriver from Upington.<sup>62</sup> Some of the proposed

56 KAB ACLT 5 File 3588 (vol. 8): M.J. van Schalkwyk and others to Komm-KS – 19 September 1951.

57 Ibid.

58 KAB ACLT 5 File 3588 (vol. 8): Komm-KS to Minister van Lande – 18 Sept 1951.

59 KAB ACLT 5 File 3588 (vol. 8): Streekvertegenwoordiger, DvL to Sekretaris, NG Kerk Pofadder 'Huur van Staatsgrond op die Plaas Witbank' – 20 June 1957.

60 KAB ACLT 5 File 3588 (vol. 8): IvL 'Jaarverslag: Afdeling Namakwaland en Calvinia' – 22 May 1957. KAB ACLT 5 File 3588 (vol. 8): N. Esterhuysen (NG Kerk Pofadder) to Streekvertegenwoordiger, DvL 'i/s Opsigterskap: Witbank en Garganab' – 12 June 1958.

61 KAB ACLT 5 File 3588 (vol. 8): Eerste Ingenieur, Afdeling Beplanning 'Memorandum: Beskikking oor Sekere Gronde Langs die Oranjerivier: Krapohl & Marten Eilande en Ander Plase' – 9 December 1957.

62 RSA Secretary for Water Affairs, *Report on the Proposed Orange River Development Project (1962–1963)*.

development projects were massive in scale – such as the Gariep Dam (formerly H. Verwoerd Hydroelectric Dam) and the Fish-Sundays Tunnel – bringing the total construction cost for the scheme to minimum R300 million. As well as numerous smaller dams, canals, pump schema, and other infrastructure works downriver, The Orange River Development Project (ORDP) also included – buried deep within its budget – a canal and weir system to irrigate the Witbank-Garganab-M&K Scheme.

Unlike the Depression-era water infrastructure schemes, development schemes of the 1960s were not intended to simply provide work to poor whites but rather to utilise grand scientific and technological prowess to symbolise the compatibility of apartheid with the modern era.<sup>63</sup> As it relates to mid-twentieth-century dam building projects, Dubow has reminded us that these projects assuaged the increasing divisions between *verligte* and *verkrampste* [reformist and reactionary] divisions of white politics at the time, transforming apartheid from a seemingly backward political institution to one compatible with modern scientific, economic and infrastructural development.<sup>64</sup> While the Gariep Dam and the ORDP clearly held symbolic prestige – such that Pretoria's response to Sharpeville was made 'with concrete' – it did indeed regulate water flow along the Orange River to such an extent that larger scale irrigation schemes could be attempted.<sup>65</sup> No longer would irrigation schemes simply be of a 'poor white' homesteader nature. By 1970, the massive Gariep Dam started storing water, and by 1971 it was at 65% capacity.<sup>66</sup>

Furthermore, the ORDP existed within shifting apartheid-era agricultural policies, ones tied less to irrigation development as employment creation or poverty alleviation, but rather to raw profitability as well as stabilisation of other branches of the agricultural sector. The Orange River dams were to decrease the large differences in water height between flood season and dry season, facilitating year-round irrigation, with the focus increasingly on fodder crops – such as lucerne – and cash crops, like dates or grapes. The meteoric rise of the Karakul sheep industry in southern Namibia and the Northern Cape dramatically increased the regional demand for lucerne, as the high price of lambskin pelts on the European market motivated white farmers to exceed the carrying capacity of their farms, necessitating fodder as a supplement to increasingly scarce grazing.<sup>67</sup> It was not uncommon for white Karakul sheep farmers to have a brother or relative farming on irrigation parcels – such as at Noordoewer/Vioolsdrift – to provide lucerne fodder.

One of the most extreme versions of this relationship was that of Gert Niemöller, owner of Kambreek-Zandfontein farm, as well as Hoogoor to the west and Klein Pella to the south. During the 1950s, Niemöller invested the funds which he reaped from his mining operations into Karakul stud breeding on the flatlands of Klein Pella, eventually buying additional grazing space in Kenhardt district to accommodate his 6,000 stud ewes and ~7,000-8,000 other non-graded Karakuls.<sup>68</sup> Niemöller relied almost exclusively on artificial insemination to breed stud rams, hiring veterinary and genetics experts as his

63 Sparks 2012

64 Dubow 2006: pp. 260–261

65 Christie 1984: pp. 167–168

66 Van Vuuren 2012: p. 202

67 On the Karakul industry, consult Moore 2021a, and Bravenboer 2007.

68 Ibid.: 184. Louise Niemöller, Pofadder, January 2022, interview with B.C. Moore.

farm managers in hopes to avoid the risks which inbreeding could have upon pelt characteristics.<sup>69</sup> The industrial nature of Niemöller's insemination operations meant that at any given point, he only used 4–7 rams for the 6,000 ewes.<sup>70</sup> Artificial insemination and oestrus monitoring necessitated two massive sets of kraals, measuring more than 1.8km each in length, and therefore fodder production was essential for Niemöller (see Figure 5).

Fig. 4: Land levelling operations on Niemöller's farms, 1950s (Photo: GNPA, Pofadder).



From the early 1950s, Niemöller began land levelling operations on sections of Kam-breek-Zandfontein, as well as to a lesser extent on Klein Pella, beginning with donkey-and horse-pulls, and later tractors (see Figure 4). Operations began with flood-channel irrigation for lucerne, as well as prosopis trees for making boskos; later – in the 1960s – some drip irrigation was implemented as well (see Figure 6).<sup>71</sup>

69 See Van Niekerk 1972: pp. 142–146.

70 R.G. Niemöller Private Archive, Pofadder (GNPA): L. Mundell, 'Carry on Kraaling', *Farmer's Weekly* (25 July 1973), pp. 14–19.

71 Louise Niemöller, Pofadder, January 2022, interview with B.C. Moore.

*Fig. 5: Delivering grass and lucerne from Niemöller's irrigated parcels on Kambreek-Zandfontein to his Karakul kraals on Klein Pella, 1960s (Photo GNPA, Pofadder).*



*Fig. 6: Niemöller's lucerne on Kambreek-Zandfontein, 1960s (Photo GNPA, Pofadder)*



Niemöller's irrigation operations show the increased emphasis placed by the government and individual farmers on using irrigation as a means to stabilise stock farming in the area; regulating the flow of the Orange River was part of these efforts. It was not only white commercial farmers who were called upon to build a 'fodder bank' to protect livestock from potential future droughts. One of the first main proposals which Coloured Affairs made for Goodhouse farm was to use Weidner's old irrigation furrows to transition from citrus production – now eradicated by disease – to lucerne production for Coloured stock farmers in other Northern Cape reserves. The Department of Agricul-

tural-Technical Services (LTD) estimated that about 450 tonnes of lucerne could be produced on Goodhouse annually.<sup>72</sup>

Ultimately, nothing could come of some of the Goodhouse projects, on grounds that most officials within the LTD and Water Affairs were busy with making soil surveys and planning the upriver dams; Goodhouse was left in limbo and remained leased out to whites.<sup>73</sup> Besides these technical challenges, there were further legal considerations affecting what to do concerning the Orange River state lands. From the late 1950s, there was an increased desire to incorporate Namibia into all Orange River development schemes, partially for pragmatic reasons, and partially to facilitate the incorporation of Namibia as a fifth province of the Republic of South Africa.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, just after the ORDP's development plan was approved, Namibia's Odendaal Commission report was completed, laying the groundwork for a homeland system for South West Africa.<sup>75</sup> While the majority of the Odendaal Report concerned the more populous northern communal areas, it did also propose the purchase of six farms along the Lower Orange River to be allocated to the SWA Coloured Council as an irrigation settlement.<sup>76</sup> From the earliest days of these proposals, staff within Namibia as well as the Northern Cape held the possibility that there could be a trans-riverine Coloured settlement, including the recently-evicted W-G-M&K scheme.<sup>77</sup>

In this context – ongoing investigations by the ORDP and the Odendaal Commission – Coloured Affairs made another formal application to the Cabinet in 1962, asking for W-G-M&K and other Orange River state lands to be returned to Coloured occupancy. The Secretary argued that the relative success of Eksteenskuil further upriver gave credence to the skill of Coloureds to build irrigation works. This time, surprisingly, the Cabinet provisionally agreed, reversing the 1949 decision that the scheme should be reserved for whites.<sup>78</sup> So long as the matter is handled carefully such that the white tenants are not rushed off, the farms could be returned to Coloureds; however, proposals to purchase Niemöller's farms were not approved, as this would be too costly. This was still not put into law, however, as the farms still remained simply state lands, and there were no plans yet to resettle those Coloureds who were evicted a decade before, despite petitions from the former residents themselves.<sup>79</sup>

72 TBK KUS 296 File 139 (vol. 2): LTD, 'Memorandum: Voorgestelde Ontwikkeling van 'n Voerbank op die Plaas Goodhouse' – 16 May 1960.

73 TBK KUS 296 File 139 (vol. 2): Direkteur van Waterwese to Sek-KS 'Voorgestelde Ontwikkeling van 'n Voerbank op die Plaas Goodhouse, Namakwaland' – 26 August 1960.

74 See KAB ACLT 5 File 3588 (vol. 8): Minister van Lande 'Memorandum: Beskikking oor Gronde Langs die Oranjerivier wat vir Besproeiingsdoeleindes Aangekoop is' – 5 February 1958.

75 NAN AP 4/1/13: Report of the Commission of Enquiry into South West African Affairs, 1962–1963 (1964).

76 Ibid.: 109. For more on the failed SWA Orange River Coloured Settlement, see Moore 2021b.

77 NAN Archives of the Local Authorities Board (PLA) 25 File 25/2/2 (vol. 1): Direkteur, Afdeling Waterwese to F.H. Odendaal, Voorsitter, Kommissie vir SWA – 12 June 1963. NAN Executive Committee: Odendaal Liaison (LUKS) 1 File 2: Notule van die Skakelkomitee i/s Besluite oor SWA Aangeleenthede – 3–4 August 1964.

78 TBK KUS 492 File 4/1/3/B2: Sek-KS 'Memorandum: Witbank-Garganab' – 28 August 1962.

79 TBK KUS 492 File 4/1/3/B2: W.A. van Rooyen (Eksteenskuil) to Inspekteur van Lande – 14 March 1964.

Like the case of Goodhouse, the white community in the Northern Cape remained opposed to any further expansion of Coloured settlement. Maree, now a member of the Volksraad and still a lessee of Goodhouse and Ramansdrift, argued that rather than W-G-M&K, more efficient use of the Richtersveld and Steinkopf reserves would suffice. Given the decision of South West Africa to make a Coloured settlement on the north bank – which never actually came to fruition – Coloured Affairs rejected Maree's appeals, on grounds that it was more desirable to have both sides of the river as a unified Coloured settlement.<sup>80</sup> However, it was decided that the transferral of the farms from the Department of Lands to Coloured Affairs would only happen (1) once technicians from the ORDP were able to do soil surveys on the farms, and (2) only in conjunction with the SWA Administration.<sup>81</sup>

These delays meant that W-G-M&K and the neighbouring farms up to Goodhouse remained just as state lands, still not allocated to Coloured Affairs. With that being said, Coloureds began to trek back into Witbank and the neighbouring areas. Catherine Cloete, a long-time resident of Witbank whose family was evicted to Pella in the early 1950s, recalled that her family came back to Witbank in 1968 '*sonder toestemming*' [without permission], as the farms were still being rented out to whites, despite being approved in principle for Coloureds.<sup>82</sup> During the late 1960s and early 1970s, Witbank was primarily a stock farm, and little irrigation works were performed. Many residents earned a living by going across to the Namibian side to assist with the harvests from the Homsrivier Roman Catholic mission farm, which was only ceased in the late 1980s.<sup>83</sup>

The 1960s and early 1970s saw a change in how the Orange River was envisioned by government planners; no longer was riverine irrigation merely a means of poverty alleviation and racial upliftment on a small-holder basis. The flow of the Orange was improved and regulated such that pump-based irrigation was facilitated (though the great floods of 1974 and 1988 would show that complete control was far from attainable); and larger scale operations could be better attempted. Improved road and transport networks – such as the tarring of the N7 and N14 roads – made transition to export and cash crops possible. Niemöller himself experimented with Medjool date production on his farms, eventually importing more than 4,000 seedlings from Arizona in 1978, making Klein Pella farm the largest date producer in the Southern Hemisphere.<sup>84</sup> Nearly the entire harvest remains for overseas export.

80 TBK KUS 492 File 4/1/3/B2: Sek-KS to Minister van Kleurlingsake 'Beskikbaarstelling van die Witbank-Garganab Gronde en Drie Plase Oos daarvan vir Kleurling Nedersetters' – 21 August 1964.

81 TBK KUS 492 File 4/1/3/B2: Minister van Gemeenskapsbou, Openbare Werke & Kleurlingsake to Adjunk-Minister vir Aangeleenthede van SWA – undated, likely September 1964.

82 Catherine Cloete, Witbank, January 2022, interview with B.C. Moore.

83 Katrina Pieters, Homsrivier Farm, Karasburg District, September 2021, interview with B.C. Moore.

84 GNPA: R.G. Niemöller, 'Die Dadelbome van Klein Pella' – undated.

## A 'South African Moshav'? Profitability & Oversight in Neoliberal late-Apartheid: 1975–1994

While the government was more amenable to Coloured settlement on these farms, it was not willing to grant the sort of subsidies which it had for 'poor-white' settlements at Vioolsdrift/Noordoewer, Kakamas, and elsewhere. Although the government was previously willing to aid worker colonies at a loss – to the extent that 'poor whites' were no longer poor – land rights as welfare provision was no longer an option for an increasingly neoliberal economy. Economic sustainability, short- and medium-term financial returns, and resource management was now the order of the day.

In 1963, the South African Parliament passed the Rural Coloured Areas Act, which laid down the procedure for governance of Namakwaland's Coloured Reserves: once gazetted as a '*landelike kleurlinggebied*' (Rural Coloured Area), a given farm or territory would fall under the administration of an elected Coloured council (*Raad*), which would oversee daily affairs. Unlike Homelands, Coloured Areas were never granted self-determination or allowed to govern on a communal basis. By law, all land allocation within Namakwaland's Coloured areas were on a basis of '*ekonomiese eenhede*' (economic units), whereby land – whether irrigated or grazing – was to be subdivided into smallholder parcels and allocated on a usufruct basis to particular upstanding farmers. The size of a given 'economic unit' was calculated by the government based on how much land would be needed to maintain a given 'Coloured Lifestyle'; such that an economic unit for Whites, Blacks, and Coloureds may be three very different amounts.<sup>85</sup>

In the early 1970s, the government began the process of subdividing the Coloured reserves and officially gazetted them as *landelike kleurlinggebiede*. Steinkopf and Goodhouse were gazetted in 1974, and the former was subdivided into 45 economic units over the following few years, such that only about half of Steinkopf's stock farmers actually obtained plots.<sup>86</sup> The rest were left landless, with some given temporary grazing on Goodhouse until further plans could be made. Apart from the Church lands, Pella was surveyed and incorporated in 1976, removing the Catholic Church from decision-making powers and devolving these to an elected council under the oversight of white administrators within the Department of Coloured Affairs.<sup>87</sup>

As for the farms stretching from Abbasas to W-G-M&K, in the mid-1970s these were still simply state lands leased to whites. While there were some Coloureds residing (technically illegally) at Witbank, they had no legal or usufruct rights to any of these farms. In 1974 and 1975, the Coloured Council at Pella made numerous requests to have the farms

85 Concerning (Namibian) debates as to what a Coloured 'economic unit' should entail, see NAN Archives of the Department of Agricultural Credit and Land Tenure (LKG) 51 File 7/3/3/27: Notule: Eerste Vergadering van die Interdepartementele Komitee belas met die Ondersoek na die Stigting van 'n Landelike Gebied vir Kleurlinge – 13 February 1974.

86 TBK KUS 2/139 File 12/8/B2 (vol. 1): Direkteur-Generaal (Kleurlingsake), Departement van Binne-landse Aangeleenthede (DG-KS-DvBA) to DG, Departement van Waterwese, Bosbou en Omgewingsbewing 'Goodhouse, Afdeling Namakwaland: Besproeiing uit die Oranjerivier' – 1 July 1981.

87 NASA URU 6757 Minute no. 235: 'Inclusion of the Rural Coloured Area of Pella in the Rural Coloured Areas Act, 1963' – 3 April 1976.

allocated to their envisioned *gebied* as grazing lands, as the subdivision of Pella into economic units rendered – like Steinkopf – a large number of small-scale farmers landless.<sup>88</sup> While the Department of Planning and Environmental Affairs was in favour of this, they recommended that the once the rental contracts of the whites expired, the farms should be left to sit for at least five years to allow the grazing to regenerate, as many of the white tenants had overstocked the pastures.<sup>89</sup> Despite this, the Department of Agricultural Credit and Land Tenure – who officially controlled the W-G-M&K scheme – allowed the white tenants to remain until 1 January 1981.

In the early 1980s, in response to the subdivision of Steinkopf into economic units, the Raad requested that Coloured Affairs (now a division of the Department of Interior Affairs) finally get moving with planning the long-awaited Goodhouse irrigation scheme. They contracted the agricultural consultants Loxton, Hunting, & Vennote to investigate the feasibility and plan a scheme. Based on work which the consultants studied in Israel and then attempted to implement with the Keiskamma Project in the Transkei, they advocated for a 'South African Moshav System' (see Figure 7) which would be a vertically-integrated production and marketing scheme, focused around a 'central unit' which would serve the small-farmers for sales, water provision, fertiliser, training, and crucially, white oversight.<sup>90</sup> Small-holders would get about 10ha of usufruct rights, and the profits from their parcels would support the central unit; the planners didn't decide if the central unit would operate as a separate for-profit entity or as a cooperatively owned operation. Some of the costs of the scheme would be drawn from the Kleurling Ontwikkeling-Korporasie's share of Namakwaland diamond revenue.<sup>91</sup> The government advocated for lucerne production with rotary pivot spray irrigation as well as avocados with drip irrigation.<sup>92</sup>

Upon receiving the consultants' reports and Coloured Affairs' recommendations, the Steinkopf Raad immediately protested. As a good share of the funds were to come from the *landelike gebied*'s own coffers, they questioned the high costs, arguing that flood irrigation was cheaper to implement, and it had been done this way on all the 'poor-white' settlements before them. Furthermore, they saw the central unit not as a tool for the farmers, but as a means of whites taking over governance of the farm. They wrote: 'You must remember, these Steinkopf people have been here a long time – this is their land – the state has to come here, get them, and give them recognition for what they have,

88 KAB Regional Representative: Community Development (CDC) 574 File 13: Komm-KS to Sek-KS 'Moontlike Beskikbaarstelling van die Witbank-Garganabskema' – 5 September 1975. KAB CDC 574 File 13: Sekretaris van LkGb, Pretoria to Sek-KS – 29 March 1976.

89 KAB CDC 574 File 13: Sekretaris van Beplanning en die Omgewing, Pretoria to Sek-KS 'Moontlike Beskikbaarstelling van die Witbank-Garganabskema en Inlywing daarvan as Landelike Kleurling-gebied' – 16 June 1976.

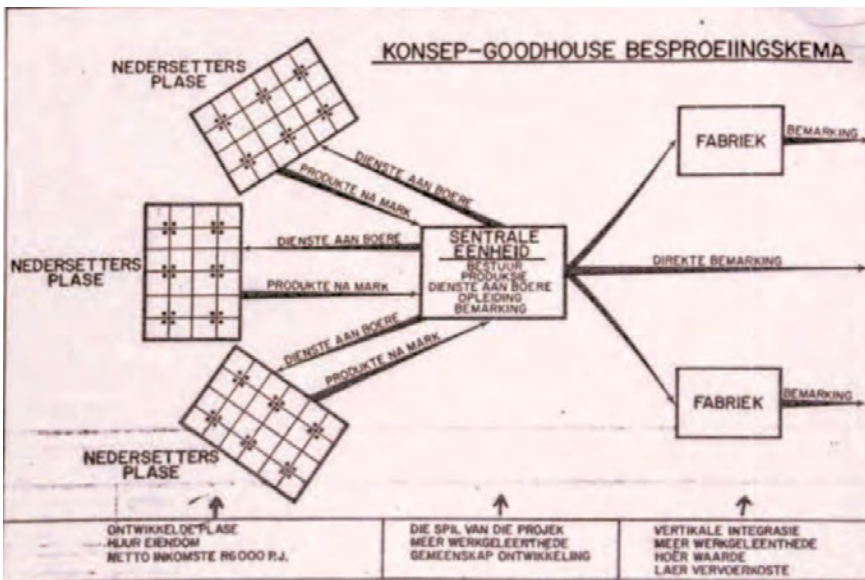
90 TBK KUS 2/139 File 12/8/B2 (vol. 1): Loxton, Hunting, en Vennote to DG-KS-DvBA 'Besproeiingspotensiaal te Goodhouse' – 27 May 1981.

91 TBK KUS 2/139 File 12/8/B2 (vol. 1): DG-KS-DvBA to Sekretaris van die Tesourie – 15 June 1981.

92 TBK KUS 2/139 File 12/8/B2 (vol. 1): DG, Landelike Gebiede en Nedersettings (DG-LGN) 'Memorandum: Kommentaar op die Konsepplan van die Goodhouse Besproeiingskema' – undated, likely December 1981.

rather than just some prize.<sup>93</sup> Indeed, residents of Steinkopf during those years were unhappy with most of what the state had done within their communal areas. The subdivision into economic units had made small-scale farming impossible, while those who had actually obtained the plots still lacked the capital and state support to compete with white stock farmers.<sup>94</sup> They likely viewed this proposed Goodhouse Moshav as a step in the same direction.

Fig. 7: Schematic of the proposed Goodhouse 'Moshav-Stelsel' (Photo: TBK KUS 2/139 File 12/8/B2 [vol. 1]).



Coloured Affairs declared that 'not a drop of water will be made available to Goodhouse or Steinkopf without scientific planning'. The Director-General arrogantly declared that the Raad was made up of 'a few unenlightened people who think that they know more about evapotranspiration, irrigation economics, engineering, water management, land use, and marketing than the specialists who have already had success in Swaziland, Angola, Transkei, Ciskei, Paraguay, and South Africa'. He concluded stating that profitability must be prioritised, and therefore only the most qualified farmers could participate; 'irrigation at Goodhouse is not a welfare undertaking'.<sup>95</sup>

93 TBK KUS 2/139 File 12/8/B2 (vol. 1): Raadsekretaris, Steinkopf to DC, DvBA 'Kommentaar op Memorandum: Voorgenome Besproeiingskema: Goodhouse' – 1 April 1982.

94 Mentioned in: TBK KUS 2/139 File 12/8/B2 (vol. 2): DG, Departement van Plaaslike Bestuur, Behuising, en Landbou 'Memorandum: Steinkopf: Ekonomiese Eenhede' – 6 September 1985.

95 TBK KUS 2/139 File 12/8/B2 (vol. 1): DC-LGN to Voorsitter, Steinkopf Bestuursraad 'Besproeiingsontwikkeling by Goodhouse' – 28 April 1982.

The Steinkopf council was of the impression that with Goodhouse, the Coloureds would finally get their Vioolsdrift or Kakamas. There weren't many 'poor-whites' anymore, but there were still a lot of landless 'poor-Coloureds' in need of state help. But South African agriculture and water policy had passed them by. The Lower Orange River was now a 'State Water Control Area' [*Staatswaterbeheergebied*], which levied much higher water extraction rates than in the worker colony days of the 1930s. These levies were also structured in such a manner to dissuade small-holding, as well as the planting of lesser value vegetables or lucerne; hence the general shift along the Orange River towards export of grapes and dates.<sup>96</sup> The Raad was stuck in a quandary: they would not receive state aid for communal farming on the land; they did not have the capital investment or international connections to run Goodhouse like Niemöller ran his farms; and a 'Moshav System' would give up all elected Coloured oversight of the operations. So, in 1983, the Raad declined the Moshav offer, and they tried to make it on their own on a communal basis.<sup>97</sup>

*Fig. 8: Old irrigation furrows at Goodhouse (Photo by the author, 2022).*



This did not faze the government officials much, as they had recently concluded – without alerting the Steinkopf Raad – that the consultants' report on Goodhouse was overestimating the potential profit from the scheme, so it was quietly scrapped from the budget. All irrigation schemes would have to be approved on a 'merit basis', and Coloured

96 See RSA Government Gazette no. 7912 (13 November 1981).

97 TBK KUS 2/139 File 12/8/B2 (vol. 1): Raadsekretaris, Steinkopf to Hoofdirekteur (Wes-Kaapland), DvBA 'Goodhouse Besproeiingsprojek' – 27 April 1983.

projects would be granted the same priority as ones serving white communities.<sup>98</sup> The Department of Local Authorities – who took over Coloured Affairs – was willing to look into renovating the W-G-M&K furrows from the 1940s alongside some Coloured farmers who wanted to return to Witbank, but the item was constantly scrapped from budgets.<sup>99</sup> This meant that during the mid-1980s, it was up to Coloured residents to fix the furrows and level the land themselves, which was undertaken at a small scale during these years, only to be destroyed by the great flood of 1988.<sup>100</sup> Ultimately, during the 1980s up to the end of apartheid in 1994, the majority of agricultural operations from Witbank up to Goodhouse was small-scale livestock farming, as the capital needed to repair or build the irrigation infrastructure was not available. Coloureds were not able to tap into the sort of subsidies and assistance which ‘poor-whites’ received decades before.

## Conclusion: Surface Waves and Deep Currents

Despite finally getting the lands from Goodhouse to W-G-M&K more or less under their control by the 1980s, Coloureds along the south bank of the Orange River were not able to make full use of the river water which flowed by. While government officials tried to control livestock numbers on Witbank – occasionally removing sheep and goats to other pastures farther away – by 1983 there were no more evictions from the farms under study. Land tenure had become a bit more secure. Yet, the decades-long governmental investigations into irrigation on Goodhouse and Witbank were effectively abandoned during these late-apartheid years. Coloured leaders hoped to have their own sort of ‘poor-Coloured’ small-holder homesteader scheme, like the ‘poor-whites’ had earlier in the century. Unsurprisingly, the apartheid government was not willing to fund such a scheme of racial and community upliftment for Coloureds.

This was not simply a matter of apartheid ideology, however. Deep structural economic changes had occurred along the Orange River during these years. Small-scale vegetable production was not needed as much anymore, as the decline of the Karakul sheep industry in the early 1980s shrunk the resident farm worker population even more than technological changes did decades before. Declining sheep numbers reduced demand for lucerne production, and more commercial irrigation farmers converted their lucerne fields to export cash crops, such as grapes and dates. At Klein Pella, Gert Niemöller received investment capital from the South African state-owned Nywerheidsontwikkelingskorporasie to increase Medjool date production on his farm after 1988, as there was less need for lucerne, eventually selling the whole operation to the multinational corporation Karsten Boerdery.<sup>101</sup> Even at the former ‘poor-white’ irrigation scheme at Vioolsdrift/Noordoewer – where the export of lucerne to Namibian farmers was even more cru-

98 TBK KUS 2/139 File 12/8/B2 (vol. 1): DG, Departement van Omgewingsake to Hoofdirekteur (Wes-Kaapland), DvBA ‘Goodhouse, Namakwaland: Besproeiingskema’ – 19 October 1982.

99 TBK KUS 2/139 File 12/8/B2 (vol. 2): Hoof-Direkteur, Departement van Plaaslike Bestuur, Behuising en Landbou ‘Memorandum: Grond te Witbank’ – 3 May 1985.

100 Catherine Cloete, Witbank, January 2022, interview with B.C. Moore.

101 Louise Niemöller, Pofadder, January 2022, interview with B.C. Moore.

cial than at other locations – table grape production (primarily exported to the European Union) increased from 5ha in 1985 to 167ha in 2013, mostly replacing lucerne fields.<sup>102</sup>

In many ways, the improvement of water and road infrastructure along the Orange River brought a peripheral region into better connection with large metropolitan areas. Road connections allow the export of valuable cash crops to Cape Town and overseas markets. Yet, these interconnections are a two-way street. Fruit and vegetables grown cheaply in the Western Cape could be more easily brought to supermarkets in Springbok and Pofadder, supplementing worker rations and diminishing the need for locally grown produce. If we consider this alongside apartheid-era discussion about small-holder agriculture along the Orange River, we can see how it would be – without large amounts of state intervention – increasingly an anachronism.

By the 1980s, the Orange River was no longer South Africa and Namibia's peripheral frontier, but rather a place closely tied to regional and global markets. While small-holder agriculture – as proposed for Witbank and Goodhouse – could make impacts with vegetables, fodder, and locally sold produce, there is no such thing as a small-scale date or grape producer along the Orange River. With the coming of the new government in 1994, the community at Witbank enlisted the help of the Northern Cape-based Surplus Peoples' Project, who helped raise the funds so that the community could buy Witbank, Garganab, Marten & Krapohl Islands, and Hartebeesrivier farms. They are now owned by the Witbank Gemeenskap and managed by its elected Raad. Yet, despite finally obtaining the title for the land, little can be done by the community to produce the sort of cash crops which Klein Pella and Noordoewer can. These require intense capital investment and international marketing connections which local Coloured communities under apartheid were either not given or were not allowed to make. For these reasons, the hand dug furrows at Witbank have mostly stood still, apart from a small paprika project which the post-apartheid government helped fund; the same could be said for most of Goodhouse (see Figure 8).<sup>103</sup> Most residents are looking for assistance to bring the irrigation works and furrows under production again.

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102 Aussenkjer Plase (Pty) Ltd. 1985, and Orange-Senqu River Commission 2014.

103 Benny Cloete, Goodhouse, January 2022, interview with B.C. Moore.

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## Archival Abbreviations

- KAB** Western Cape Archives & Records Service: Cape Archives Buro
- ACLT** Archives of the Department of Agricultural Credit & Land Tenure
- CDC** Archives of the Regional Representative: Community Development
- TBK** Western Cape Archives & Records Service: 'Tussen Bewaar Plek'
- KUS** Archives of the Division of Coloured Affairs
- NASA** National Archives of South Africa: Pretoria
- JUS** Archives of the Justice Department

- NTS** Archives of the Department of Native Affairs  
**NAN** National Archives of Namibia  
**LKG** Archives of the Department of Agricultural Credit and Land Tenure  
**LUKS** Archives of the Executive Committee: Odendaal Liaison  
**PLA** Archives of the Local Authorities Board  
**WAT** Archives of the Division of Water Affairs  
**GNPA** R.G. Niemöller Private Archive, Pofadder

### **Abbreviations in Footnotes**

- DG-LGN** Direkteur-Generaal, Landelike Gebiede en Nedersettings  
**DG-KS-DvBA** Direkteur-Generaal (Kleurlingsake), Departement van Binnelandse Aangeleenthede  
**IvL** Inspekteur van Lande  
**Komm-KS** Kommissaris van Kleurlingsake  
**Sec-L** Secretary for Lands, Cape Town  
**Sek, B-S** Sekretaris van Binnelandse Sake  
**Sek-KS** Sekretaris van Kleurlingsake  
**Supt-KN** Superintendent van Kleurlingnedersettings  
**PV, DvL** Provinsiale Verteenwoordiger, Dept. van Lande, Kaapstad

## Monika and Willem Basson: Farming and Living along the River

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*Monika Basson (Bernard C. Moore, 2021)*     *Willem Basson (Bernard C. Moore, 2021)*



Willem Basson, 'the third', as he jokingly calls himself, is a well-known person in and around Karasburg and Warmbad, because for many years he has been fighting for his right to stay and farm along the !Garib. He was born in 1963, close to the northern banks of the river on the farm KumKum (known as !Kor||gams in Khoekhoegowab), seven years after his sister Monika and into a family of ten children. By the time Willem was born, the farm was owned by a white farmer, though the portion they were living on was not used by him.

Basson recalls that for many generations, his extended family lived close to the river, on land that today includes the farms Girtis, Homsrivier, KumKum and Hartebeesmund. With ease, he traces his ancestors back to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. His great-grandfather, Willem Basson, lost his parents in a fight with Jager Afrikaner and was taken in by the Bondelswarts community as a child. He later moved to Velloor farm, where he took the surname of its then owner, Jasper Basson. While working on the farm, Willem met Lena van Rhyn, a Damara woman, and they married in Pella, on the southern side of the river. For his grand-grandson Willem Basson 'the third', this marriage in Pella is considered

to be the founding moment of the Basson family. The couple had five sons and many of them lived along the !Garib, close to where Willem's family still lives and has livestock. The graves of Christian and Petrus Basson, who both died in the 1950s, are still there.

Around the time of Willem and his sister Monika's childhood, the relationship between his family and the farm owners changed. Basson's father could still remember that they lived and worked on the farms, often only paid for their labour in kind and in grazing rights, but (as he recalls) in a symbiotic co-existence with the white farmers. In this regard, Willem Basson himself only remembers that they were seen as '*plakkers*' (squatters) on the farms. Nevertheless, he also recalls that the farm owner wanted to take Basson's entire family to his new farm close to Omaruru, but the family refused and instead stayed at different places along the river. They had their own livestock, which they normally grazed along the river, except for the summer months, when they trekked to Warmbad for grazing. For a few years, Monika attended school at the Roman Catholic Mission at Homsrivier, just next to where they lived, and later started working for a priest in Karasburg. Willem, as the youngest son, often stayed with the animals, and ran the family's farm for many decades.

Willem was a small kid when the police constable Chris Coetzee came to visit his parents' plot in 1971. The apartheid government planned to turn some of the river farms into an irrigation scheme for Coloureds, and it was Coetzee's task to find out how to label the people living at the river, according to apartheid's racial categories – i.e., Nama, Coloured, or another designation. While Coetzee was unsure, and later sent the state ethnographer Kuno Budack to further investigate, Willem's father was ready to be classified as Coloured in order to get land under the planned scheme.

However, this was not needed, as the Coloured settlement was never realised. With the political changes in Namibia in the late 1970s, and the unclear effects which the new dams along the !Garib would have on water levels in the area, the plans came to nothing and were eventually dropped. The Basson family stayed on the land along the river, sometimes moving slightly up or down according to the legal situation of the different farms and the river's water levels. Around the same time as Namibia became independent, the Homsrivier Mission land was sold to private investors. This was followed by a gradual buying up of many other farms along and close to the river. Today, many of the farms in the area belong to the owners of a nearby lodge. The farms are now used for offering luxury tourism on the one hand, and on the other hand, to serve friends and relatives of the owners as a place for pleasure and 'conservation'.

In 2015, the owners of the lodge wanted to secure 'unspoiled' access to the river and approached the Namibian courts to order Basson's eviction. This was more complicated than the farm owner had probably anticipated. The court decided that in the view of the Namibian government, the international border at this stretch of the river was the high-water mark on the northern bank. Therefore, the area between the river and its flood marks could not be treated as the private land of an individual landowner in Namibian court. Willem Basson is therefore living and farming on land that falls in-between the two countries, and he was – at least for the moment – saved from being evicted.

However, the farm owner did not give up and tried to take Basson to court again, this time for trespassing. They argue that the Basson family members have no right to trek to the river, because they have to go through private land to do so. Furthermore, they accuse

Basson of illegal farming, spreading alien plants in the river, smuggling, and lastly (but importantly) argue that his family only moved to this land a few years ago. Despite all the accusations against him, Basson remains positive about his future. He knows that many farm owners in the region want him to disappear, but – having been under the threat of removal for decades – has gained his fair share of experience in resisting. ‘One day’, he says, ‘the land we farm on will be official communal land, that we can share and use for the benefit of all.’ Until then, Basson has to make the best out of the fact that he and his family live in a ‘political limbo’, somewhere between Namibia and South Africa.

*Based on interviews conducted by Luregn Lenggenhager and Bernard C. Moore in Warmbad and Karasburg*



# Living along the River



# Onseepkans: Irrigation, Removals and Resistance in the Borderlands of Namibia and South Africa

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*Luregn Lenggenhager*

## Introduction

Onseepkans, a village with an estimated population of 2,500 people, lies at the border between the Northern Cape province of South Africa and southern Namibia. Stretching over several kilometres along the southern bank of the !Garib / Orange River, it consists of three small settlements, called Melkbosrand, Viljoensdraai, and Mission. Today a central feature of Onseepkans is its function as a bridge and border station for crossing between South Africa and Namibia. In the close vicinity of the border post, the typical facilities of a South African rural small town can be found – such as RDP housing, a bottle store, a police station, a snack bar, a camping site and a small guest house. Slightly further away from the main road, there are a few small stores selling canned food and drinks.

Yet, a closer look at the village's built environment reveals particularities that point to the singularity of Onseepkans' past. The material markers, that open a way into understanding the uniqueness of this village are, for instance, the ruins of several dozen farmhouses dotted across many kilometres along the only road, a brand-new pumping station for irrigation fields, the old bright white mission station or the remains of a military station.

Observing them, several questions surface. How did these material markers emerge in this particular landscape? How might their histories shed light on key historical moments in the region, including land dispossession, colonial infrastructure and mid-20th century development initiatives? To understand these questions, I will retrace the history of the small-scale irrigation scheme in Onseepkans in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and set this in its broader historical and geographical context, while linking it to the regional history of people living along the river.

## Farms, missions and the dispossession of land 19<sup>th</sup> century

The settlement of Onseepkans was founded in the 1910s as an outpost of the Catholic Mission at Pella, which lies about 100km further down the !Garib.<sup>1</sup> The mission station in Onseepkans was owned by the Catholic Church, while most of the land around it – the so-called remainder of the ‘Onseepkans and Nias’ farm – was still Crown land, owned by the Union Government. To understand the context in which Onseepkans was established, I will first outline some of the developments in the region in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Martin Legassick described the history of areas around Onseepkans in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century as frontier history: defined by colonialism and mutual acculturation, and shaped by migration, war and revolt.<sup>2</sup> However, as Andrea Rosen Garten argues in her contribution to this volume, it is particularly important to understand the 18<sup>th</sup> century societies in the area as dynamic and entangled, with changing alliances. Central actors in these times were Christian missionaries, whose establishment of mission stations led to more settled agriculture, capitalist trade and of course the spread of Christianity.<sup>3</sup> Before this, the region was predominantly populated by communities who sustained their nomadic and semi-nomadic economy of pastoralism, trade, and – at times – hunting and gathering, without clearly marked borders or even fenced landownership. Instead, they had an extensive and migratory form of land use.<sup>4</sup> Even before the Cape Colony’s official annexation of the area between the Olifants River and the !Garib in 1847, the colonial administration began to firstly allocate land to so-called Baster and Orlaam groups and later white farmers. Initially, these allocations do not appear to have put much pressure on the people living there, at the time, since these so-called loan farms were a rather loosely specified form of usufruct rights.<sup>5</sup> This meant the people living in the area could largely sustain their economies which relied on migratory land use.<sup>6</sup>

This changed when the British annexed the region in 1847 and intensified the colonial grip on the region south of the !Garib, resulting in increasingly enforced racial divisions. Most newly annexed land became Crown land, meaning that it could now be surveyed and sold in freehold to farmers. While, in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, large parts of the area became commercial land for white farmers, the farms close to the river were mostly only surveyed and sold in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>7</sup> Before that, the land was often used

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1 The ‘founding moment’ of the settlement can likely be referred to as when the administrator of the Province of the Cape of Good Hope declared and proclaimed the establishment of a ‘pound’ (a kraal to keep straying livestock) on the farm Onseepkans and Nias in 1917.

2 Legassick 2010: p. 3; Legassick 2016.

3 Legassick 2010: p. 5

4 Penn 2005; Legassick 2016.

5 Meaning a temporary right to the use the property of another or the state, without changing the character of the property. Dye and La Croix 2017: p. 2.

6 At times, such arrangement could still be found in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century – see Gordon in this volume.

7 For the farms downriver from Onseepkans, see Moore in this volume.

as emergency grazing. North of the !Garib, European land seizure started even later.<sup>8</sup> In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, people north of the river mostly relied on a pastoral system with very high mobility and no fixed boundaries between different entities – other than some loosely defined areas, with the influences of local authorities determining this.<sup>9</sup> During this time, European missionaries and traders, and settlers from the Cape became more influential in southern Namibia, increasingly leading to conflicts over the use of land and resources.<sup>10</sup>

Linked to the annexation of land and new racial ordering of landownership, are two changes in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century that became crucial for later social and economic developments of the area around Onseepkans. These are the establishment of Christian missions, and the extension of canal-building for agriculture from the middle of the !Garib downwards. Missionary activities in the area began with the establishment of the London Missionary Society (LMS) station in Warmbad (1806), north of the !Garib, and in Pella (1809), on the South side.<sup>11</sup> Following the first settlement of Christian missionaries was a long and complex history of changing mission societies, attacks on mission stations, resistance, movement and collaboration between diverse groups in the area.<sup>12</sup> Many mission stations tried – often unsuccessfully – to get land titles or at least so-called 'Tickets of Occupation', that defined the land around the missions as reserved for the exclusive use of the African residents.<sup>13</sup> In 1909, the South African state took administrative control of all mission areas along the !Garib through the Cape Mission Stations and Communal Reserves Act 29 of 1909, and the row of acts and amendments following it.

When, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, most of the land along the Lower !Garib became freehold, privately-owned land, it was these mission lands that remained a place where African people were allowed to live and have their own livestock. Subsequently, throughout most of the 20th century, many (former) mission lands became reserves of 'cheap labour' for the surrounding commercial farms and mining industry, as well as a place for the resettlement of forcibly removed people from other parts of South Africa and Namibia.<sup>14</sup> In other words, the mission lands of the Northern Cape and – to a certain degree – Southern Namibia, laid the spatial foundation for the 'coloured reserves' under apartheid.<sup>15</sup> In the case of Onseepkans, as I show below, the state land around the Catholic mission station was not turned into a reserve, but used to establish small-scale irrigation schemes for white farmers, and housing for the workers. It was only through the land and administration reforms of the late 1990s and early 2000s that former mission lands were

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8 Except for some irrigation farms, like Aussenkehr, most of the farms directly north of the river were only surveyed during the South African period. And even then, there was an embargo on selling them for some years, because it was still unclear where the exact course of the border will be.

9 Werner 1993: p. 137

10 Wallace 2011: pp. 46–47

11 Dederling 1997

12 For an overview, see Dederling 1997.

13 Surplus People Project 1995: p. 70; McLachlan 2019.

14 Wisborg and Rhode 2005: p. 411

15 Rhode and Hoffman 2008

integrated into larger municipalities and landownership was often handed over to communal trusts.<sup>16</sup>

### 'Developing the frontier' 1900 -1950

Alongside the establishment of the particular land regime described above, a second crucial development impacted the landscape and life along the Lower !Garib. This was the construction of irrigation fields. From the early 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the South African government and private investors had plans to extend the irrigated farmlands around Upington, Kaimos and Kakamas – all along the !Garib. During this time, Onseepkans consisted of not much more than a small mission station, run by the Catholic mission in Pella, and a few small settlements along the river, mostly inhabited by Khoekhoegowab-speaking herders. The owners of the commercial farmland around Onseepkans were mostly white Afrikaner farmers and, in some cases, private companies.<sup>17</sup>

Irrigated farming has a long history along the Orange and Vaal Rivers, starting in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The British missionary John Mackenzie, for example, mentioned irrigated gardens and channels built by the local inhabitants in the area around the confluence of the Orange and the Vaal Rivers in 1859.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, many people living further downriver remember that their families had long been planting on irrigated fields.<sup>19</sup> Close to Onseepkans, in an area near today's village of Witbank, the earliest indication of irrigated gardens can be traced back to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>20</sup> European settlers developed larger irrigation schemes further upriver, around Upington and later Kakamas, after the colonial government won its wars against the resistance of so-called !Kora groups in 1880.<sup>21</sup> This dismantling of the long lasting resistance of the !Kora groups, living on and around the islands of the !Garib, marked the beginning of a more intense form of colonisation of the areas around Upington and Kakamas. After the wars, the government allocated land along the river to loyal coloured farmers to secure the area, and many of them began to build channels and dams for irrigated agriculture.<sup>22</sup> White officials and missionaries noticed the lush and highly productive areas and began to copy the system of channelled irrigation and applied it on even larger scales. In the colonial historiography, these extensions of the channel system in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, often ascribed to the missionary Christiaan Schroeder, became the starting point of 'development and civilisation' in the area.<sup>23</sup> Gradually, the colonial government took the irrigated lands away from coloured farmers and gave them to white farmers.

16 Wisborg and Rhode 2005

17 See Bernard Moore's contribution to this volume.

18 Mackenzie 1871; Legassick 1996.

19 JJ, Pofadder, 24 November 2018 and CC, Witbank, 28 November 2018 – interviews done by the author.

20 JJ, Pofadder, 24 November 2018, interview done by the author.

21 Legassick 1996

22 Hopkins 1978; Legassick 1996; Visser and Du Pisani 2012.

23 Hopkins 1978; Visser and Du Pisani 2012.

Concurrently, the Dutch Reformed Church was strongly supporting so-called poor white Afrikaners, and built new irrigation schemes for white farmers further down the river, most prominently in Kakamas. To do this, the church created a labour colony in Kakamas for the resettlement of impoverished whites.<sup>24</sup> The scheme worked for over 50 years, with a break during the South African War, and promised white workers a piece of their own land after completing a particular period of work in the labour colony. While the colony in Kakamas remained in the administration of the church, the state gradually became more influential in (what was presented as) 'solving the poor white's problem'.<sup>25</sup> This meant that there was, generally, a growing need for places to accommodate poor white farmers. And in the case of the Kakamas labour colony, this meant that more irrigated land had to be found to accommodate white labourers.

Looking for such land, the government found that the small mission station of Onseepkans was suitable for establishing a new irrigation project. In 1908, the first government plans emerged, setting out to build an earth channel that cut short the bow of the river close to Onseepkans, to irrigate the flood lands between it and the river. The farm had been surveyed as 'Farm 88 Onseepkans', however it was not yet bought by nor allocated to farmers, and potential additional labour to carry out the plans could be found in the nearby mission lands of Pella.

Around the Onseepkans mission, a few white people settled at roughly the same time, and in 1921 they built the mission church. The archives do not indicate when exactly the irrigation system was finally constructed, however, in 1921 the Onseepkans Irrigation Board was established.<sup>26</sup> This board was officially in charge of keeping the irrigation infrastructure working and allocating water to the irrigated plots along the river. The scheme initially consisted of an earth channel running along approximately seven kilometres of the river and capable of irrigating an area of 267 hectares subdivided into 66 single plots of four hectares. Each plot was intended to sustain one white farmer and his family, for whom the layout of the scheme foresaw the construction of a farmhouse at the highest point of every plot. In addition, the scheme allocated grazing rights on municipal land to all irrigation farms, allowing potential occupiers to keep some livestock as an additional source of income.<sup>27</sup> All farmers had to do work on the channel, in a rotating system, to keep it open.<sup>28</sup> The organisation of this crucial task gave the irrigation board the status of a general administrative body in the remote village of Onseepkans. Although it was administratively under the village council of Pofadder and the district administration of Kenhardt, most inhabitants remember the irrigation board as being

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24 Roos 2011

25 Roos 2011: pp. 54–76

26 Government Proclamation 114 'Irrigation District' of 1921. The entire Archive of the Onseepkans Irrigation Board (OIB) is kept in unorganised boxes in a private basement in Onseepkans (here referred to as the Archive of the Onseepkans Irrigation Board (AOIB)). The author had access to some of the material in 2018.

27 AOIB, Kaap Prov. Departement van Waterwese, Kenhardt, Vorgesetelde Kanaal Verbetering, Map from 07.05.1958.

28 For an example of the tasks of the board see: AOIB, Onseepkans Irrigation Board. Notule van die vergadering van die Raad, 03, June 1934.

in charge of all aspects of life – at least for the white population. These includes schooling, infrastructure, grazing rights and health.<sup>29</sup>

The building of the irrigation channel in Onseepkans in the second decade of the 20th century was part of a general effort by the South African government, the church and private white farmers to develop and modernise the area along the Lower !Garib, probably also in connection to the newly gained territories north of the river. Shortly after building the irrigation scheme in Onseepkans, the provincial authorities in Cape Town upgraded the track that linked Onseepkans to Kakamas and Pofadder to a district road for the future development of the Orange River.<sup>30</sup> In this regard, because of the fast-developing irrigation along the river, the Chief Inspector of the District Roads Engineer in Cape Town suggested the building of a new road along the river. He argued that such a road would ease the shipment of agricultural products to the next railhead in Kakamas.<sup>31</sup> He also suggested the road pass by the Ritchie Falls, west of Onseepkans, and the Augabries Falls east of it, because it would be “drawing tourists” to the area.<sup>32</sup> In Onseepkans, the implementation of the irrigation scheme triggered additional developments in infrastructure and administration. The Catholic Church, for instance, extended its church building in 1923 and added a small school next to it a few years later.

Private business soon joined the government officials and the church in their conviction about the prosperous future of the area. Among those who emphatically believed in the business opportunities along the river was, most famously, Carl Weidner, a farmer of German descent who had established the irrigation fields at Goodhouse – one of the farms he was managing for international investors – in 1919.<sup>33</sup> A few kilometres upriver, on the !Garib's north bank, a German farmer began to irrigate parts of his farm around the same time.<sup>34</sup> The growing agricultural production on both sides of the river led to more cross-river transport, particularly once South Africa started to rule the former German colony under a mandate granted by the League of Nations in 1920. In 1921, Gideon Huijsamen – a farmer near Onseepkans – inquired about the licencing process of a ferry between Onseepkans and South West Africa. He argued that there was a growing interest in people

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29 JS, Onseepkans, 23 November 2018; CC, Onseepkans 22 November 2018 – interviews done by the author.

30 National Archives of South Africa (NASA), Cape Town Archive Repository (KAB), PAR 71, 39/14 Kenhardt Division. Proposed Proclamation of Public Roads as Divisional Roads, Road Construction and proclamation of Divisional Road from Pofadder / Kakamas to Onseepkans. 25 January 1930.

31 National Archives of South Africa (NASA), Cape Town Archive Repository (KAB), PAR 71, 39/14 Kenhardt Division. Proposed Proclamation of Public Roads as Divisional Roads, Letter: Chief Inspector of the District Roads Engineer, Cape Town to District Roads Engineer, Calvinia, 10 September 1929.

32 National Archives of South Africa (NASA), Cape Town Archive Repository (KAB), PAR 71, 39/14 Kenhardt Division. Proposed Proclamation of Public Roads as Divisional Roads. 25 January 1930.

33 KAB ACLT 25 File 3588 (vol. 1): Secretary for Lands, Notice re: Sale of Orange River Farms and Islands – 26 April 1912; Green 1948. See also Moore in this volume.

34 WB, Garies, 17 January 2020 – interview by the author.

and goods being able to cross the river at Onseepkans.<sup>35</sup> The archive remains silent about whether Huijsamen finally got the permission to run his ferry services, but the crossing at Onseepkans clearly became possible during this time. This served as a direct link from the railhead in Kakamas in South Africa, to the one in Karasburg in today's Namibia. In 1926, a delegation from Onseepkans asked for new facilities to export and import cattle over the border, which was finally granted one year later.<sup>36</sup> The growing production, trade and mobility is also reflected in the first hotel, shop and fuel station being opened in nearby Pofadder in 1921.<sup>37</sup>

It was during this first wave of investment and 'development' that the irrigation at Onseepkans seems to have been economically successful. Until the Second World War, the small gardens at Onseepkans provided fruits and vegetables for the farmers' families and allowed for some trading with the cattle farmers more inland. For some years in the 1930s, the export of oranges from Onseepkans was documented.<sup>38</sup> During this time the Union Government also began to establish small-scale farming irrigation schemes for poor whites on the north bank of the river – for example on the farm Beenbreek just opposite Onseepkans, or further downriver at Noordoewer. South African journalist Lawrence Green, who visited Onseepkans in the early 1940s, remembered that 'All the tropical fruits grow well there, especially paw-paws and bananas. Wheat and melons are important crops; peas and table-grapes flourish'.<sup>39</sup> From 1938 to 1964, a period of relative economic stability for the white farmers at Onseepkans, a village management board existed.<sup>40</sup> This independent local authority oversaw and administered aspects of life in Onseepkans that were not directly linked to the irrigation plots, such as schooling, health and transport. However, as I will show below, from its inception there were complaints that the farmers were too poor to pay taxes to the local authority. After many discussions, Onseepkans lost its self-governing status. The village management ceased to exist in 1964 and the settlement became directly governed by the Kenhardt council.<sup>41</sup>

## Decline, removals and life on the river: 1940–1990s

Despite constant investment in transport facilities, the imagined boom of irrigation agriculture and tourism never materialised. The high hopes of the South African govern-

35 NASA, KAB, PAS 4/168 Ref: 46/A.59 Kenhardt Divisional Council Ferry Boat Licence over Orange River at Onseepkans, Gideon Huijsamen to the Resident Magistrate, Kenhardt, 15 December 1921.

36 NASA, KAB, AS 4/168 Ref: 46/A.59 Administrateur se Toer No 4/1926. Uit- en invoerport: Onseepkans. 1. May 1926.

37 The same family that opened these facilities later bought the farm Klein Pella at the Orange River, turning it first in a large sheep farm and later into a date plantation.

38 AOIB, Verslag van Handel in Vrugte, 09 December 1936.

39 Green 1948: p. 134

40 NASA, SGD 248, 4/207 Onseepkans Village Management Board 1938–1964, General Series of Regulations as Approved in the Ordinance No 157 of 1936.

41 Government Gazette No 3287, 15 April 1965.

ment 'to transform Bushmanland into a garden'<sup>42</sup> only happened in some small places, for instance at Goodhouse, by Weidner, and later at Klein Pella, where profit made from irrigation schemes allowed owners to invest in extensions and new cash crops, such as dates and grapes. Yet the remote and small irrigation plots in Onseepkans hardly became economically successful. From the very start of the Onseepkans village board in 1938, archival records document that disease and poverty affected the small community of white irrigation farmers and their workers.<sup>43</sup>

Despite the economic decline after the Second World War, the village of Onseepkans was not forgotten by the newly established apartheid government. From as early as the 1950s, discussion began on how to introduce apartheid's segregation laws in the area. The first plans to remove the entire Coloured population from the river banks of the Lower !Garib were made in 1953, by the Committee of the Survey of Coloured Settlements on the Orange River.<sup>44</sup> The committee was in charge of assessing whether there was a 'need' for a Coloured population at the river, and if so, whether they should live where they resided at that moment, or if removals or extensions of the settlements were needed.<sup>45</sup> The first meeting of the commission concluded that more research on the matter was necessary, but that generally all irrigable land along the river should be reserved for future white settlement. The only exception concerned the long-established mission lands around Pella and Steinkopf, as well as the Homs mission, north of the river.<sup>46</sup> Shortly later, in early 1955, the committee decided to remove all Coloured people from the area of Witbank, because firstly it would offer fertile irrigation ground for white farmers, and secondly there were already coloured areas close by, such as Pella and Richtersveld.<sup>47</sup> A former inhabitant of Witbank remembered that they were removed in 1955 and their land was given to South African war veterans.<sup>48</sup> However, archival documents show that the plans to turn Witbank and the river islands close by into irrigation land for whites never materialised. The land was, in effect, just cleared of coloured people and never allocated to whites.<sup>49</sup> Live-stock herders were moved to Pella or further away to the Richtersveld.<sup>50</sup> Some Coloureds who used to have irrigated gardens at the river before this period, seemed to manage to move to the !Garib islands around Keimoes, like Eksteenskui or Bella Vista, where

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42 Green 1948: p. 130

43 TBK, SGD 248, 4/207 Onseepkans Village Management Board 1938–1964. There are constant reports about typhus and other diseases in the coloured locations and amongst white farmers. The Village Board was abolished in 1964 because the white settlement was rapidly losing inhabitants and there was hardly any tax income anymore.

44 NASA, KUS 154/100, F2, Minutes of the Meeting Committee of the Survey of Coloured Settlements on the Orange River, 3 March 1953.

45 NASA, KUS 154/100, F2, Minutes of the Meeting Committee of the Survey of Coloured Settlements on the Orange River, 3 March 1953.

46 NASA, KUS 154/100, F2, Minutes of the Meeting Committee of the Survey of Coloured Settlements on the Orange River, 3 March 1953.

47 NASA, KUS 154/100, F2, Deel II van die verlag van die intedepatementskomitee: Eksteenskui-Kleurlingsnederstelling en Witbank Kleurlingsnederstellingsgebied. 5 Desember 1954.

48 JJ, Pofadder, 24 November 2018, interview done by the author.

49 See Moore in this edited volume.

50 CC, Witbank, 28 November 2018, interview done by the author.

some restarted small irrigation fields while the land on the islands was still designated a coloured area.<sup>51</sup>

The decisions of the Committee of the Survey of Coloured Settlements on the Orange River in the 1950s did not lead to immediate, large-scale relocations in the area of Onseepkans. Rather, people living around Onseepkans were removed several times, on a small-scale. Many people remember a place called 'Tintin', close to where the bridge is located today, as the place where they or their parents were living before the relocations happened. Others seemed to have lived in the immediate proximity of the Catholic mission station, while some lived directly on the land of the white farmers they worked for. However, as usual, there have been many reports of the bad hygiene and health situation in the settlements of the Coloured inhabitants – which the government used as reason for plans to relocate the population.<sup>52</sup> It was only in 1976 that the government decided to concentrate the population within three clearly defined locations, removing people to places closer to the irrigation fields: Melkbosrand, Viljoensdraai and around the Mission station. 'Tintin', where most people were living, was destroyed, and a new school was built on the premises, and the people who were removed had to rebuild their reed houses in new locations. These were mostly women and children, who worked on the irrigated farms, while many men had to work in the mines or on livestock farms further away. While the irrigated plots along the river were privately owned by the white farmers, the area on which the locations were built had been declared municipal land. All of the irrigation farmers had grazing rights on this land, and most families kept goats on it, too. The administration of the grazing rights was in the hands of the Irrigation Board and if accepted by the board, people living in the locations could also get grazing rights on municipal land.

From the 1960s onwards, small-scale irrigation farming production in Onseepkans declined. With the building of better roads from Cape Town in the 1960s, it became cheaper to ship fresh fruits from the Cape to the farmers in the North than to produce them locally at the !Garib.<sup>53</sup> Many of the white irrigation farmers along the river in Onseepkans sold their plots to their neighbours and moved out of the area. Others bought up several of the 4ha plots and began to produce cash crops – mainly grapes – instead of producing for the local market.<sup>54</sup> Although the irrigation scheme in Onseepkans had not been profitable for many decades, the South African government was still strongly supporting the irrigation and livestock farmers in the area. Many farmers explain this support by pointing to the strategic importance of the area, probably as a further line

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51 NASA, KUS 154/100, F2, Deel II van die verlag van die interdepartementele Komitee: Eksteenskuiel-Kleurlingsnederstelling en Witbank Kleurlingnedersettingsgebied. 5 Desember 1954.

52 NASA, KUS 2/272, Ref: 5/2/1/F262, VOL 2/3 and JJ, Pofadder, 24 November 2018, interview done by the author.

53 LN, Pofadder, 24 November 2018; HV, Onseepkans, 22 November 2018, interviews done by the author.

54 CC, Onseepkans 22 November 2018, interview done by the author. This development can also be seen in other places along the river, where the household-based subsistence farming on irrigation schemes turned into more commercialised production. See Moore in this volume.

of defence – in case occupied Namibia could not be held.<sup>55</sup> This fear might also explain the building of two bases for the South African Defence Force's border patrol and an Operating Signals Regiment of the Air Force in 1969.

While in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the South African apartheid government removed most of the coloured population from both banks along the river and relocated them to the so-called reserves in Pella, Steinkopf, Richterveld or to Namaland, on the Namibian side, there have always been people who defied the resettlements. Particularly in the remote and hardly accessible riverbed of the !Garib, around Onseepkans and Witbank, some small-scale livestock farmers managed to stay and run their farms until today – be it on the margins of private farmlands, remains of communal lands or in the administratively unclear border areas.<sup>56</sup>

Particularly north of the !Garib, some space of manoeuvre and resistance for the farmers along the river remained open during apartheid times – and in some cases – up to now. To understand how this came to be, it is worth looking at how the areas on the other side of the river opposite Onseepkans changed over the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The first removals of people classified as Nama living along the river, by Homsdrift, started in the 1950s. In the late 1980s, the mission was closed and sold as private land. In 1946, the South African administration appointed the so-called Lardner-Burke commission to assess the conditions of white settlers within the police zone (everything south of the veterinarian line that divided the northern communal land from the mostly commercial areas in South and Central Namibia) and develop a policy to address the growing need for farmland.<sup>57</sup> The commission suggested an extension of the police zone and the surveying of new farms on the edges of the zone. Poor whites living on farms, so-called *bywoners*, were to live and find employment elsewhere. Additionally, farmers who did not own farms, but only had grazing rights were pushed into either leasing or buying farms or leaving. With these extensions of the farmlands, the remaining Africans were pushed even further out of the productive lands.<sup>58</sup> This expansion continued until the early-1960s, when most of the land in the police zone was privately owned farmland designated for whites. The policy reached its summit in 1962, with the establishment of the Commission of Enquiry into South West Africa Affairs, better known as the Odendaal Commission, leading to the final phase of forced removals and also a shift in colonial settlement policies.<sup>59</sup>

The intensification of racialised land laws during South Africa's occupation of Namibia gradually upended semi-formal communal land agreements from earlier mission times in the far south of the territory. One of southern Africa's last great seizures of land for white settlement was from the so-called Bondelswarts. In order to consolidate the disparate reserves into one centralised homeland, the Bondels Reserve and the much

55 HV, Onseepkans, 22 November 2018; CC, Onseepkans 22 November 2018 – interviews done by the author.

56 Lenggenhager and Rosengarten 2020.

57 Miescher 2012: pp. 138–141

58 Miescher 2012: pp. 138–141

59 Kössler 2000. See also ongoing PhD research of Bernard C. Moore.

smaller reserves around the Homsdrift mission station at the !Garib were to be taken over by white farmers, and the population removed to the newly created Nama homeland. While many residents had no choice but to accept resettlement and eventually employment as cheap labour on white farms, some families resisted removal and went upriver to more remote, rocky territory, where they settled in the secluded sections of the river. These riverine areas have been used by livestock farmers for grazing and living for centuries, however the people never possessed official rights to the land they live on. Nevertheless, some families made use of their thorough knowledge of the local geography and landscape, as well as the sometimes-unclear administrative situation and loose control of these remote border regions, to establish a livelihood outside of the direct control of the two apartheid governments.

### Conclusion: The situation since the 1990s

Floods were a constant feature of life along the river in Onseepkans, and repeatedly destroyed parts of the irrigation channel and other infrastructure. In 1988, one of the largest floods of the 20<sup>th</sup> century destroyed parts of the settlements in Onseepkans and most of the fields and gardens along the river.<sup>60</sup> Many of the white farmers remember this flood as the end of the irrigation scheme.<sup>61</sup> Most of the remaining white farmers left after the flood, leaving the ruins of their homes, which are still a prominent feature of Onseepkans today.

The flood can be seen as the local cumulating point of a longer period of deregulating and restructuring agriculture and farming in (white) Southern Africa in the last years of Apartheid, leading to an accumulation of land into larger, more profitable farms. At the same time, this can be understood as the beginning of what Henry Bernstein analysed as ‘measures to safeguard capitalist farming and agriculture in the “new South Africa” following the abolition of the institutional apparatus of apartheid [that] were anticipated and initiated in the final years of apartheid.’<sup>62</sup> With the political changes in the early 1990s, and in many cases even before, the state withdrew most of the subsidies for farmers in the region. However, as Bernstein described it, white farmers already developed strategies to keep up their share in an increasingly neo-liberal agricultural system in post-apartheid South Africa.

In the case of the white-owned, small-scale irrigation farms along the river, these developments led to changes in landownership and land use. On the one hand, the government bought up some of the plots to redistribute to the former workers. The redistribution process implied that each of these 4ha plots, once designed to sustain one white family, were allocated to a group of six people, and jointly organised through a trust. Some of the new owners leased their plots to other people. Talmar, a large Spanish energy

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60 TK, Onseepkans, 22 November 2018; DD, Onseepkans, 23 November 2018 – interviews done by the author.

61 HV, Onseepkans, 22 November 2018; CC, Onseepkans 22 November 2018 – interviews done by the author.

62 Bernstein 2013: p. 25

company running a solar farm close by, invested in developing grape production on some redistributed plots, promising to pay dividends to the new owners once the grapes were profitable. On the other hand, irrigated plots – that were not redistributed by the government – were bought up by white farm owners from the region and merged, becoming part of larger commercial grape production. Other plots still belong to the Catholic Church and are used by an NGO to produce fresh fruits and vegetables, and to run a community garden. Very few plots are still owned by the original families, and those that remain so are mostly no longer in use.

The area around the small-hold irrigation farms along the river changed, as well, with some livestock farms being redistributed in the 1990s. This includes, for example, the Cabobb farm that is now owned by some families from Onseepkans and Pofadder. Other farms are still owned by white families, some used for tourism, mining or solar production, and others still used for small-stock production. At least on the Namibian side, farms are increasingly bought up by international companies and rich private individuals for their own use and amusement or to turn into private conservation areas. On the municipal land around Onseepkans, the people still have grazing rights, although some owners of the irrigation plots claim that these rights were given to them exclusively.

Life in the three locations in Onseepkans changed remarkably after 1994, when the new government built concrete houses for the people, and again in 2002, when the village finally got electricity. However, the economic situation of most of the inhabitants of Onseepkans remains difficult. Many of the white grape producers in the area still prefer to bring in cheap labour from further away, the governmental jobs at the border and the police station are not recruiting locally, and other jobs are rare, or far away.<sup>63</sup> In 2019, the government – supported by private companies – built a new pumping station for a spray irrigation, replacing the old concrete channel. While it is doubtful that the cash crop systems introduced by the Talmar company, the large grape farmers and partly by the government, will change the inequality in the area, for some people they give new perspectives and possibilities. Others see their future, rather, in the more diverse production of fresh vegetable, fruits and lucerne, on a small scale.

The international border between Namibia and South Africa established in 1990 made trans-border mobility much more difficult. While, for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, people from Onseepkans and other settlements along this stretch of the river had more easily criss-crossed the !Garib in search of work or grazing, or forced by resettlements and dispossession, today crossing the border involves administrative and financial efforts. While most of the people living in Onseepkans still have family living in Southern Namibia, and some Namibians living close to the river still have South African citizenship, there are few exchanges across the border.<sup>64</sup> However, in the case of the families who managed to resist the evictions during colonialism and apartheid, who still live in the immediate borderlands in the river the border, there has been an unexpected outcome. In a court case to remove of one of these families, the Namibian court declared that in the view of the Namibian government, the international border at this stretch

63 HV, Onseepkans, 22 November 2018; CC, Witbank, 28 November 2018 –interviews done by the author.

64 KA, Onseepkans, 23 November 2018 – interviews done by the author.

of the river was the high-water mark on the northern bank, based on historical floods. Therefore, the area between the river and its flood marks could not be treated as the private land of an individual landowner in Namibian court.<sup>65</sup> This decision protected some families from being removed from the land that they used over many generations – however, it also points to entangled and unanswered questions about post-apartheid restorative justice, international boundaries, land ownership, and the environment in the binational area around Onseepkans.

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# Company Hegemony and Social Relations in Oranjemund: The Paterson Job Grading System and the 1970s Town Transformations

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## Introduction

In his 2001 study, Peter Carstens describes Kleinsee as a ‘near archetypical company town’.<sup>1</sup> The diamond mining town in Namaqualand, South Africa, combines almost all the criteria proposed in the long-running academic discussion on the definition of company towns. Carstens describes one particularly notable factor in his analysis – the far-reaching control of the inhabitants and employees, including the white workers, by the company, De Beers Consolidated Mines. He shows that since the beginning of the 1920s, the company in Kleinsee used various practices to control workers for the ideal operation of the mine. An implicit thesis of Carstens’ study is that the perfection of control in Kleinsee was only achieved upon the introduction of the Paterson Job Grading System in the 1970s. The system assigned each resident a defined position within the town’s society, according to their salary level in the company.

This chapter looks at the nearby Namibian town of Oranjemund, on the opposite bank of the Orange River. Many of the considerations about Kleinsee also apply to Oranjemund. Before 2011, when Oranjemund was proclaimed as a municipality, only people employed by the mine were allowed to live in the town. The land and houses were all owned by Consolidated Diamond Mines of South West Africa (CDM), and NAMDEB after 1994.<sup>2</sup> Until 1975, Black and white residents could only leave Oranjemund with prior permission and after passing through an X-ray. With the opening of Oranjemund for its residents in 1975, the mining company moved the compulsory X-ray from the entrance of the town to the entrance of the mine. In the same year, the CDM management introduced the Paterson system to its employees. Carstens suggests that the introduction of the Paterson system was the product of a philosophy based on profit maximization

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1 Carstens 2001: p. 6

2 CDM was a full subsidiary of De Beers. NAMDEB stands for the government of Namibia & De Beers, with both partners owning fifty per cent of the company.

and apartheid differentiation. He places particular emphasis on profit maximisation and questions the notion that the Paterson system was meant 'to improve the lot of all the employees, eliminate racism, and ameliorate the problems of inequality and social differentiation in general.'<sup>3</sup> Thereby Carstens shows that the Paterson system was also used by De Beers in its public relations campaigns, in an attempt to draw a picture of the company as a non-racial oasis.

In this chapter, I will discuss the introduction of the Paterson system in Oranjemund in the 1970s. Within this, my focus is on the time after the large nationwide strikes that took place from late 1971 to early 1972. The strike had less immediate effects on Oranjemund than it had on other towns and mines in Namibia, nevertheless the introduction of the Paterson scheme, and other changes in labour conditions in the 1970s need to be understood as falling within the framework of the aftermath of the strikes.<sup>4</sup> Alison 'Ali' Corbett, the author of a book on the history of Oranjemund and CDM published by NAMDEB, writes of the 1970s as a 'Time of Transition' within the town.<sup>5</sup> Not only was the town opened up and the Paterson system introduced, but working conditions at CDM also improved. Similarly, a process of desegregation took place in Oranjemund. Several Black employees were allowed to settle in Oranjemund permanently with their families. All races were allowed to attend the town's primary school by 1977, relatively early in comparison to other schools in Namibia and South Africa.<sup>6</sup> In the following I will first introduce the idea of Oranjemund as a single company town, where the Paterson system meant a modification of the relationship between the mining company CDM and the different groups of employees. Secondly, I explore the history of the Paterson system, which had its roots in political and pragmatic discussions within the South African mining sector. I will then contrast the anti-discriminatory claims of the system's inventor, Thomas Paterson, with the experiences of the – mainly white – permanent inhabitants of Oranjemund.

Most of the people who have worked and lived in Oranjemund have long left the town and retired to northern Namibia, Cape Town or other places all over the world. This made it difficult to collect the stories of former residents. While some of the memories of the small, white permanent resident community are still cultivated on an Internet forum, I had limited personal access to people who had left the town due to the limiting framework of my research.<sup>7</sup> Academic literature on Oranjemund focuses on diamondiferous soil and there is hardly any work done on Oranjemund's social history.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, many of the non-academic publications on Oranjemund were produced by CDM and NAMDEB. For archival sources, such as a 1978 memorandum from the African Studies Library of the University of Cape Town, or a file found in Peter Katjavivi's archive at the

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3 Carstens 2001: p. 148

4 Bauer 1998

5 Corbett 2002: p. 80

6 Douwes 1986

7 Oranjemundonline, <http://www.oranjemundonline.com> (accessed 20. January 2020). I conducted eight (recorded) interviews during my stays at Oranjemund in 2018. I assured that the names of the interviewees would be anonymised.

8 Of particular importance for my writing was Bauer 1998.

University of Namibia, the context and authorship were often unclear, which made examination more difficult.<sup>9</sup>

## Controlling employees, shaping identities: transforming Oranjemund

In a memorandum dated 6 February 1978, CDM stated that 'the terrain would not in any case support a rural community, and Oranjemund, as a town, has no *raison d'être* other than the mine.'<sup>10</sup> CDM referred to Oranjemund as the

fourth largest town in the country with a population of 8000, almost all of them employees of the company. This thriving community is largely self-supporting and self-sufficient, for despite its isolation it enjoys the amenities and services of a modern town, on a scale and of a standard quite disproportionate to its size.<sup>11</sup>

On the other hand, Oranjemund was presented as an 'oasis of many races and faces'.<sup>12</sup> The projected image of a lively community with an 'Oranjemunder' identity, and the total subordination of the town for the purposes of the mining company in reality, indicate the poles between which Oranjemund has found itself until this day. This Oranjemunder identity was at least until around 1975 promoted as a 'white only' identity and later – at least on paper – included some Black workers with permanent residence in Oranjemund.

As early as 1956, in a brochure published on the history of Oranjemund, CDM promoted Oranjemund as a self-created oasis:

It is one thing to discover an oasis and to make a home there. It is another to create an oasis. But that is what the diamond mining company at the mouth of the Orange River has done. When diamonds were discovered near the river in 1927, the area was one of the most desolate spots to be found anywhere. It was more than 180 miles from the nearest accessible point of civilisation and sea transport could not be used since boats could not survive the rough breakers on the steep beaches.<sup>13</sup>

As a result of the first diamonds found, a precarious desert camp was initially built on the site of what is today Oranjemund, which was expanded with supplies from Kolman-skoppe. In 1940, the mining headquarters of CDM was moved from Lüderitz to Oranjemund. The brochure continues:

Today, in 1956, the town at the river's mouth accommodates 1,600 Europeans and nearly 5,000 Africans. Of these Africans some four-fifths are housed in compounds

9 The document titled 'Memorandum' is signed by 'GMR/RMC/WJS' on the 6<sup>th</sup> February 1978 in Johannesburg. Following the main document, there are a number of appendixes without page numbers.

10 CDM, Memorandum, 6 February 1978: p. 6

11 CDM, Memorandum, 6 February 1978: [Consolidated Diamond Mines: An Oasis of many Races and Faces] (Appendix).

12 CDM, Memorandum, 6 February 1978: [Consolidated Diamond Mines: An Oasis of many Races and Faces] (Appendix).

13 Consolidated Diamond Mines of South West Africa 1956: p. 17

at a considerable distance from the township proper. Virtually all these people are employees of the company. There are 440 houses for European families and single quarters for 250 men and women. The streets are tarred, and lit at night by fluorescent lighting. There are shops, a superb social club, swimming bath, post office and hospitals. Where once there was nothing but sand and scrub and poor succulents, there are, today, trees and hedges and gardens. Truly the desert has [been] made to blossom like the rose – for the roses of Oranjemund are famous.<sup>14</sup>

But why did CDM make the effort to promote Oranjemund as an oasis with its own pioneer narrative, when on the other hand making it clear that even from the company's perspective, the town was a mere means for exploiting the diamondiferous soil?

Carstens argues that in a closed company town, the power of the company must include – in addition to a system of comprehensive order and control – a 'hegemonic ingredient' that is typically characterised by paternalism.<sup>15</sup> Paternalism in this case means an asymmetrical but interdependent relationship between the company and its employees. Both sides held the view that the needs and interests of the employees were met by the company in the best possible manner, or at least in an acceptable manner. In Kleinsee, like in Oranjemund, white employees enjoyed a system of far-reaching care by the company in the style of a planned economy. Carstens provides an example from Kleinsee:

[W]hen people were informed in the early 1990s that in future they would have to buy their own lightbulbs and green garbage bags, people were upset: they felt that the company was letting them down. A year or two earlier, they experienced similar 'trauma' when home deliveries of bread and milk were abruptly discontinued. In both these trivial occurrences, it was not the cost of these items and services that upset people, but the rebuff they felt they had received from their patron and nurturer.<sup>16</sup>

I argue that alongside the provision of material care for the employees, the nurturing of an Oranjemunder 'history and identity' also contributed to the perpetuation of hegemony, at least in the case of the permanently settled white population. For a long time, it was not possible to retire in Oranjemund, and losing your job at the mining company also meant losing your residence permit.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, many skilled employees lived in the

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14 Consolidated Diamond Mines of South West Africa 1956: p. 18. However, the brochure further explains that the oasis only really became possible after the Ernest Oppenheimer Bridge over the Orange River to South Africa was opened in 1951. It is also noteworthy that CDM describes the climate in Southwest Namibia differently in its glossy brochures, depending on time and management strategy.

15 Carstens 2001: p. 4

16 Carstens 2001: p. 234, n. 3

17 The decisive factor was the man's job. Whole families had to leave the town when the man lost his job – even when the woman was employed in the town. This is an issue that is addressed several times on the Oranjemundonline platform. A user writes: 'De beers had decreed that each individual house was designated to a specific position, or job description on the mine, so 17/12th Avenue (my home) was designated to the Electrical department. At the time of my father's untimely death in 1972, after 21 years service, my mother, who worked in the admin department, knew her time was up. So after packing up her personal belongings, sans furniture of course, and with my 11 year old sister in tow, she moved to Kimberley, and

town for several decades. Carstens argues that living in a closed single company town, many hours and administrative permissions away from the neighbouring towns, had a negative impact on the physical and mental health of the residents. He argues, that ‘people subjected to a life (voluntarily or not) in incomplete communities are placed at high risk of falling victim to a number of “pathological” conditions that include high alcohol-consumption rates, depression, a variety of neuroses and psychosomatic illnesses and anxiety states, adjustment problems, cabin fever (...), domestic violence, and especially suicide.’<sup>18</sup> When entering a closed town or, as Carstens calls it, an incomplete community, a ‘psychosocial vacuum’ is created that ‘is never filled.’<sup>19</sup>

Distinguishing recreation clubs and associations alongside a common identity as ‘Oranjemunders’ served the white residents as incomplete, racially defined substitutes for an identity that could be freely chosen. It is hardly surprising that Corbett writes that after the opening of the town in 1975, the clubs were never again as active as before.<sup>20</sup> Previously, however, they were central for the permanent residents in Oranjemund. There were clubs and societies for activities as different as fishing, chess, theatre, football, model building, shooting, golf, athletics, scouting, sailing, war veterans, gardening, or freemasonry.

Particularly by way of the monthly *Oranjemund Newsletter*, these clubs created an identity for all ‘Oranjemunders’. The *Oranjemund Newsletter* was a monthly magazine, produced by CDM from 1956, and delivered for free to all permanent residents. In addition to a small number of entertaining reports and a forum for complaints to the CDM management, the publication mainly included reports from and about the activities of the recreation clubs. Particular emphasis was placed on sports competitions in which a selection of Oranjemund athletes or players competed against a team from another company. The *Newsletter* furthermore ensured that newcomers were quickly integrated into the leisure structures in Oranjemund. In each issue, there was a column titled ‘New Arrivals at C.D.M.’, where a list of new employees was published. These new hires were wished a ‘happy association with C.D.M.’ In addition to their names, readers were also informed about the place of birth and hobbies of the new employees: ‘Club secretaries and fellow employees with similar interests are invited to contact them. Their addresses can be obtained from the Editor by phoning 752.’<sup>21</sup> However, only skilled labourers, who were allowed to reside permanently, were listed in the “New Arrivals” section. As a result, only one Black employee was listed in the cited edition of the *Newsletter*. In other words, only

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my father’s replacement moved in. No emotion, “rules is rules”: Oranjemundonline, <http://www.ornjemundonline.com/Forum/index.php?topic=1913.msg47389#msg47389> (accessed 20 January 2020). Exceptions were possible for women whose husbands had died, but only if accommodation was available. They had to move out of the former house anyway.

18 Carstens 2001: p. 193. For Kleinzee, Carstens also proves this with studies on increased alcohol consumption.

19 Carstens 2001: p. 192

20 Corbett 1989: pp. 55f.

21 Consolidated Diamond Mines of South-West Africa, Oranjemund Newsletter, February 1978: p. 21

an exclusive – in the most cases white – minority of the people coming to Oranjemund was acknowledged by name and thus given access to the ‘Oranjemunder’ identity.<sup>22</sup>

There was also a paternalistic relationship between the company and the workers from the north, i.e., from the former Ovamboland and to a lesser extent the Kavango region. Unfortunately, there are not enough sources available to allow for the reconstruction of the particular forms of this relationship from the perspective of the workers. In CDM’s publications there are some references to the ideological basis of this relationship. An entire chapter from the 1956 CDM brochure is devoted to the ‘Ovambos’. One statement is highlighted: ‘Oranjemund has had an enormous influence in changing and civilising a whole people. The Ovambos today are no longer a backward tribe.’<sup>23</sup> Typically for an apartheid setting, CDM shows that the company presented itself as knowing exactly what the so-called ‘Ovambos’ needed in order to develop:

While at Oranjemund and up the coast, they are accommodated in compounds as bachelors, since their women do not accompany them. They are given a good balanced healthy diet, and they are provided with opportunities for varied kinds of sport and several types of tribal dancing. Cinema shows are given at least once a week. Their taste in this direction runs to cowboy films in which the villain always gets liquidated and virtue is invariably triumphant.<sup>24</sup>

The brochure also reports that a ‘Chief of Ovambo’ was flown to the town on a ‘good-will mission’.<sup>25</sup> Carstens writes that such friendly contacts with the villages from which large parts of the workforce originate are typical of entrepreneurial paternalism in South Africa.<sup>26</sup> Additionally, it is clear that the headmen and chiefs of the sending communities were often collaborators and their roles in controlling migrant labour has been central to upholding the apartheid system. While in 1956 it was still the pure experience of the work in Oranjemund itself that was suggested as ‘civilising’, CDM later boasted that it had provided the Ovambo people with access to education. In *Optima*, a De Beers magazine, a 1978 article on Oranjemund claimed:

In recent years many new opportunities have been opened through a planned promotional programme in which industrial training and education of blacks have a vital part. CDM, in fact, could be regarded as one of the best schools of Ovamboland, although it is so far from its borders. Recognising in the lack of education a serious bar to meaningful job advancement, CDM employs a permanent staff of teachers at Oranjemund to provide adult education, with tutorial coaching, from primary school level up to university entrance. Some ten to 12 percent of Ovambo employees are currently taking advantage of these programmes. As a further step in CDM’s contribution to education for the future, and in itself a tribute to the long, helpful association with Ovamboland, the

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22 It also makes it clear how membership in the community was gendered; by default, no gender is specified in the list. For women, however, ‘Miss’ is also shown in brackets.

23 Consolidated Diamond Mines of South West Africa 1956: p. 23

24 Consolidated Diamond Mines of South West Africa 1956: p. 25

25 Consolidated Diamond Mines of South West Africa 1956: p. 25

26 Carstens 2001: p. 4

company is spending R1 500 000 on a technical institute at Ongwediva, the proposed future capital of the Ovambos.”<sup>27</sup>

The fact that within 22 years, from 1956 to 1978, CDM had downgraded itself from the place of Ovambo’s civilisation to merely being ‘one of the best schools of Ovamboland’, is partially due to the fact that the so-called Odendaal Plan had been adopted, which entailed a change in South African apartheid policy for Namibia and aimed to establish *de jure* independent homelands.<sup>28</sup> In the same article, the Ovambo-speaking people are characterised, according to the homeland idea, as ‘*self-sufficient* men from the great plains a thousand kilometres to the north’.<sup>29</sup> At CDM, the Black migrant labourers also had their own sports clubs – but for a long time, the white and Black leagues were separate.

Until the mid-1970s, CDM was able to separate the two forms of paternalistic relationships, with the white permanent residents and the Black migrant workers, respectively. The relationships not only differed in terms of care, but also in spatial terms, until long after the first Black families moved into Oranjemund. The isolated hostels in the mine and ‘Ovamboland’ in northern Namibia were the nodal points in the relationship between the CDM and the Black workers, and not the closed town of Oranjemund, as might have been supposed. On the Oranjemundonline forum, a user remembers the separation:

With reference to the ‘separate development/class structure’ discussed in the previous ‘lesson’, and the stringent policies instituted by the powers that be, I believe it would be interesting for the present generation to know a bit about the unique ‘Apartheid’ that was practiced in the village from its inception in the mid-thirties. It was only when I was in high school that I realized how complete and controlled the different lifestyles of the ‘European’ and the Owambo (migrant) workers were.<sup>30</sup>

It must be noted that the exclusion of Black workers from the sphere of permanent residents was for a long time a precondition for the stable identity of white residents. But the two spheres also had points of intersection. All permanent residents were entitled to a domestic worker. These were traditionally Ovambo men.<sup>31</sup> The relationship between tenants and domestic workers is another instance of paternalism. Corbett, in her history of Oranjemund, condescendingly writes, ‘Credit must be given to many of the domestic workers who have become involved with Oranjemund families. Their caring attitude towards the children can hardly go unnoticed and many families “adopt” their domestic as one of the family and look forward to his return when he has gone on repatriation.’<sup>32</sup>

27 Williams 1978: p. 105

28 Wallace 2011: pp. 261ff. Under the transitional government under the DTA, Bantustan policy was reinvented and continued, cf. p. 287.

29 Williams 1978: p. 105, emphasis by me.

30 <http://www.oranjemundonline.com/Forum/index.php?topic=1913.msg48677;topicseen#msg48677> (accessed 20 January 2020).

31 In 1988, the inhabitants were given the opportunity to employ ‘coloured’ women. Corbett 1989: p. 75.

32 Corbett 1989: p. 75

## The Paterson job grading system

The core of the structural changes in Oranjemund in the 1970s was the introduction of the Paterson job grading system. CDM writes in an appendix to the 1978 memorandum:

All jobs are graded according to the Paterson method of job evaluation by a job-grading committee. This method, developed by Professor Paterson of Strathclyde University, Scotland, is in operation in many parts of the world and is acclaimed for its simplicity and ease of implementation. Because it is based on decision-making, a factor that is common to all jobs, it ensures a fair and unbiased comparison of jobs, and therefore makes it possible to relate one job with another, objectively, along a common curve. Once a new job is graded, it is slotted into one of eight pay groups, of which each has its own incremental stages or notches. Every six months the employee can move up these notches – and increase his earnings – if his performance appraisal is satisfactory.<sup>33</sup>

Formally, the Paterson system includes six major grades (A to F) with three to five sub-grades each (A1, C3, E5, etc.), where A1 is the lowest grade ('Unskilled Work') and F5 is the highest grade ('Top Management'). What the memorandum fails to mention about the Paterson system, is that the grades were not only decisive for remuneration, but also brought with them a number of other privileges and restrictions. This was particularly drastic for the social order among the Oranjemunder permanent residents.

Job grading systems have their own history. After the Second World War, they had been developed in various countries and had existed in an immature form in the South African mining sector since 1946, when the first formal system was introduced at the Anglo American Corporation (AAC) – the parent company of De Beers and CDM – in 1961, and served primarily to differentiate the jobs of Black underground workers.<sup>34</sup> AAC simultaneously experimented with other systems and came to the conclusion that a unifying, so-called '26-factor system' was better, and introduced this system in all its mines between 1971 and 1973. This refined system was favoured because it promised, *in alia*, to deal with upward pressure on wage scales due to an increase in inflation and growing concern about the very low levels of Black wages.<sup>35</sup> In addition, there were also foreign policy reasons for rising wages, as Jade Davenport explains:

During the mid-1970s, the South Africa mining house became increasingly worried about the extent of their dependence on foreign labour from countries to the north, especially in the context of growing diplomatic and military hostility between the apartheid state and black-governed countries such as Malawi, Zambia, Angola and Mozambique. (...) It was in that context that the Chamber of Mines considered it essential to increase recruitment from within South Africa (...). In order to attract an increased ratio of local labour, especially in the context of stiff competition for workers from the industrial sector, the mines were compelled to substantially increase the rates of wages. A surge of 36 per cent in the cash pay of black mineworkers in 1973 was

33 CDM, Memorandum, 6 February 1978: [Recruitment and Employment] (Appendix).

34 Perold 1985: p. 72

35 Perold 1985: pp. 72ff

followed by even greater advances of 61 per cent and 68 per cent in the two following years.<sup>36</sup>

Furthermore, in the mining sector, Anglo American Corporation (AAC) was considered to be a company that 'tended to corner their own supply of labour by paying approximately 10% above the market rate.'<sup>37</sup> A new job grading system was therefore seen as a solution to the efforts to unify the wage structure for the whole industry. In 1975, AAC introduced the Paterson system and was able to assert itself against its competitors. By 1982, the Paterson system prevailed throughout the mining industry.<sup>38</sup> The new system mitigated the conflicts between industry players and created greater efficiency in employee transfers between companies. The introduction of a unifying system was rigorously opposed by the white South African Mine Workers Union (MWU), whose members benefited from an internal classification by race. After their discontent had been ignored, the MWU saw itself as the big loser. Perold writes:

According to the personnel manager of the Gold Division of AAC, the MWU 'hates Paterson's guts' because black jobs were sometimes graded higher than white jobs, and also because the MWU often did not agree with the wages that were generated by the Paterson system.<sup>39</sup>

Nevertheless, AAC first introduced the Paterson system only for African workers. It was not until the early 1980s that the system was used for white workers.<sup>40</sup> The Paterson system is still in use today, mainly in Namibia, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe.<sup>41</sup>

Thomas Paterson<sup>42</sup> explicitly saw his job grading system as a means of combating discrimination:

The fundamental soundness of this approach is that the method is concerned with the job and its tasks only, and not, in any way, with the aptitudes, attitudes, and motives of the job-holder, whoever he or she may be, of whatever colour, race, creed, size, shape, you name it.<sup>43</sup>

He explicitly took mine workers in Namibia as evidence that the introduction of his system could close the gap between unskilled Black and skilled white employees: '[A] reversed dog-leg and steep curve has been eradicated in Namibia, and is being eradicated

36 Davenport 2013: p. 346

37 Perold 1985: p. 73

38 Perold 1985: p. 74

39 Perold 1985: p. 74

40 James 1992: p. 134

41 According to the 2010 study 'Remuneration trends Report: Southern Africa', conducted by Price Waterhouse Coopers, the Paterson system is used in about 50% of the companies surveyed in Namibia. <https://www.pwc.co.za/en/assets/pdf/remuneration-trends-report.pdf> (accessed 22 January 2020). At NAMDEB, the Human Resources Department was just about to leave the Paterson system at the end of 2018 and introduce a different system at the higher pay grades.

42 In an obituary by his son Erik, Thomas Paterson is remembered as 'Archaeologist, Paleontologist, Geologist, Glaciologist, Geographer, Anthropologist, Ethnologist, Sociologist and world authority on Administration'. See Paterson 1996.

43 Paterson 1972: p. 72

in South Africa.<sup>44</sup> However, an interviewee in Oranjemund told me that the Paterson system did not make much difference. In his words, it was just another way to ‘discriminate the Black workers and keep them down.’<sup>45</sup> Even if Black and white employees were equally qualified, reasons had been found to privilege white employees. He stated that there was still an obvious ‘Black payroll’ and a ‘white payroll’.<sup>46</sup> In the case of expats hired from Europe, ‘sand allowances’ had been created, which were declared as a compensation for the inclement weather.<sup>47</sup> According to the interviewee, the ultimately effective step against discriminatory wages was not made by the Paterson system, but by the admission of the MUN (Mine Workers Union of Namibia) as a negotiating partner for Black workers. Some Black former employees of the mine feel differently about the Paterson system and an interviewee told me the system was ‘very nice’, because it was organised like a ‘ladder’.<sup>48</sup> He himself had started as a recreation officer with a B1 grading in 1979, and trained the company’s sports teams. Over the years he was promoted to human resources assistant (C4) and was one of the first Black employees to move to the ‘white part’ of the town.

A cartoon from the *Oranjemund Newsletter* suggests that during the introduction of the Paterson system in 1975, the widespread view was that the losers were ultimately the white workers. The sexist and racist cartoon shows a room with seven employees. The first one says, ‘The Patterson [sic] system has been introduced and we have to get rid of a lot of deadwood around here!’ The remaining employees, who each represent a certain group within the company, respond in turn why they of all people cannot be dismissed. An older man has been working for very long and is therefore ‘part of the company’, a man in a suit says ‘Can’t be me, I’m in the golf team!’, the woman is ‘the only one who can arrange the flowers’, the African employee defends himself by pointing out that he is needed to make it ‘a multiracial scene’, and another employee is needed to keep the books in order. It is the white worker who declares, ‘Then it must be me cos I’m only a miner and we got nothing going for us except a good production record.’<sup>49</sup> The cartoon also shows, however, that the introduction of the Paterson system meant that an already existing, broad system of categorisations and demarcations was renegotiated. The cartoon raises the question of to what extent CDM management used the Paterson system to reorganise wages, or whether it was also aimed at rationalising the workforce (‘get rid of deadwood’).

In the system of social categorisations that existed before the introduction of the Paterson system, class affiliation had been an important category. According to Corbett, in the first issues of the *Oranjemund Newsletter* after 1956, there were already complaints about social hierarchising in Oranjemund.<sup>50</sup> At that time there were only two clashing

44 Paterson 1981: p. 143

45 I.K., Oranjemund, 27 November 2018, interview done by Tim Rüdiger.

46 I.K., Oranjemund, 27 November 2018, interview done by Tim Rüdiger.

47 I.K., Oranjemund, 27 November 2018, interview done by Tim Rüdiger. The magazine *Frontline* also confirms this: ‘There is a “common wage curve”, but there is also an “inducement allowance” for “skills unavailable in the territory”, which in essence means for whites.’ *Frontline* 1980: p. 25.

48 L.K., Oranjemund, 23 November 2018, interview done by Tim Rüdiger.

49 Corbett 1989: p. 44

50 Corbett 1989: pp. 36f.

groups of permanent white inhabitants in Oranjemund – the ‘daily paid’ and staff members. The Paterson system, in contrast, introduced a much more complex hierarchy. Even today, white interviewees I spoke to, who were previously not among the higher-grade employees of CDM and NAMDEB, independently associate the Paterson system with ‘discrimination’. One interviewee called it evil, while another said that the introduction of the Paterson system was the moment when ‘discrimination was extended to whites.’<sup>51</sup> This statement, which includes a trivialisation of apartheid and living conditions under the migrant labour system, is particularly remarkable. In today’s context, it is also used to deny racial inequalities in post-apartheid Namibia.

Nevertheless, three of the white interviewees did not describe ‘discrimination’ as a formal discrimination by the company. They felt it had been much more about snobbism, i.e., social differentiation between employees in lower and higher grades. However, the phenomenon occurred mainly within the higher grades of the Paterson system. Thus, those who were able to enter a higher position directly, generally after graduating from a university, ‘did not have to work their way up in Oranjemund.’<sup>52</sup> It is particularly remarkable, however, that three interviewees agreed that those who were the worst of all were not the direct employees of the company, but their wives, ‘Women were the ones who asked first about job and grade of somebody else’s husband.’<sup>53</sup> Among the Black employees there were similar phenomena of people who were avoided because of having a higher or lower position. One interviewee, however, said that more relevant than the abstract Paterson grade was whether someone could *actually* exercise power over you. However, tensions could then be defrayed outside of working hours (e.g., through soccer). An interviewee stated that, ‘only if someone secluded himself to his room after work it was irritating.’<sup>54</sup>

In the interviews, present-day Oranjemund residents liked to talk about their past experiences in everyday life, linking them to the Paterson system. It was said, for example, that it was common for a ‘Mrs. Engineer’ to receive a thicker cut of meat at the butcher’s shop than, for example, a ‘Mrs. Foreman’.<sup>55</sup> Another relevant aspect for more recent times is that access to the fitness centre has been regulated through Paterson grading.<sup>56</sup>

Carstens writes that the Paterson system in Kleinsee caused the most envy through the link between employee grades and the distribution of houses:

People are, in fact, labeled as much by their houses as they are by their occupations. It is not so much the obvious differences such as the addition of a swimming pool or the services of a company-paid gardener that rile people; it is more the size of a neighbor’s carpets or the presence or absence of a braaihoek (barbecue hut). Such small items highlight minor status differences that many people are reluctant to accept.<sup>57</sup>

51 M.A., A1 and A2, Oranjemund, 22 November 2018, interview done by Tim Rüdiger.

52 M.A., A1 and A2, Oranjemund, 22 November 2018, interview done by Tim Rüdiger.

53 M.A., A1 and A2, Oranjemund, 22 November 2018, interview done by Tim Rüdiger.

54 I.K., Oranjemund, 27 November 2018, interview done by Tim Rüdiger.

55 R.N. and P.A., Oranjemund, 23 November 2018, interview done by Tim Rüdiger.

56 L.P., Oranjemund, 23 November 2018, interview done by Tim Rüdiger.

57 Carstens 2001: p. 150

It can be assumed that the situation was not completely different in Oranjemund. However, an interviewee who had lived and worked both in Kleinsee and in Oranjemund pointed out that the white part of Oranjemund was socio-economically much more mixed than that of other mining towns: 'In contrast to Kleinsee, there were no luxury houses with trees in particularly central locations in Oranjemund.'<sup>58</sup> The better houses just 'happen to be' in certain roads. It was not until 2016 that the principle of allocating houses according to Paterson grading was abandoned in Oranjemund, allegedly due to pressure from the trade union MUN. Before, not only the type of house, but also the right to a house of one's own in the town was strictly linked to the grading system.<sup>59</sup> This was perceived as an injustice by Black workers in particular. One recalled that there had been many cases where Black family fathers had to live in single accommodation, while white higher-level workers who were single were given four room houses to share 'just with their dog'.<sup>60</sup> A white resident made an opposing assertion. As soon as acquiring a larger house was no longer dependent on an employee's grade, Black men from the north had brought their children to Oranjemund 'only to be able to live in a larger house'.<sup>61</sup> According to the interviewee, because the mothers remained in the north and the children were without supervision, social problems occurred. After NAMDEB had started to demand higher rents from its employees, the fathers in question sent their children back north.

It seems as if the authority necessary for maintaining social peace in Oranjemund was held by the well-respected general manager of CDM. After 1966, according to a user on Oranjemundonline, a new general manager had said:

'tot hier toe en nie verder nie' [up until this point, and no further] (...), and let it be known that everybody in the town was to be treated equally! Chesterfield suites and fridges for all (to be replaced after a certain service period)! A victory for democracy and equality...The natives were vindicated...and peace returned to the village!<sup>62</sup>

Another interviewee said it was again a general manager with exceptionally little social reservations who had softened the worst social hierarchies after the introduction of the Paterson system. However, CDM's hegemony over its employees in Oranjemund and in the hostels was not one directional and could not be arbitrarily instituted in a top-down manner, in accordance with the prevailing company ideology. The adjustments made in the 1970s were partially due to pressure from below.

58 R.N. and P.A., Oranjemund, 23 November 2018, interview done by Tim Rüdiger.

59 According to an interview statement, however, not since the beginning of the Paterson system, but only in the late 1980s. L.K., Oranjemund, 23 November 2018, interview done by Tim Rüdiger.

60 M.U.O., Oranjemund, 27 November 2018.

61 R.N. and P.A., Oranjemund, 23 November 2018, interview done by Tim Rüdiger.

62 The user adds that he is not sure whether the general manager really spoke Afrikaans. This is remarkable because in Oranjemund there was another separation between English-speaking and Afrikaans-speaking inhabitants. Oranjemundonline, <http://www.oranjemundonline.com/Forum/index.php?topic=1913.msg46032#msg46032> (accessed 20 January 2020). On the social ranking of Africans and Englishmen, see Carstens 2001: pp. 165–171.

## Conclusion

Following the strikes of 1971 and 1972, formal working conditions for Black workers in the mine improved. This included higher wages, access to more diverse jobs and career opportunities, training schemes, new negotiation channels, improvements at the hostels, and a pension system. A critical study on working conditions in Namibia, published in 1979, stresses that the conditions at CDM after the general strike were not good *per se*.<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, the study admits that the conditions were comparatively good, not least was CDM regarded as offering the best wages and conditions in the whole mining industry. Pressure from outside Southern Africa certainly further contributed to CDM and other large multinational companies making a special effort to establish and publicly highlight relatively good working conditions. In the 1970s, there were international campaigns targeting multinational corporations that benefited from the South African occupation of Namibia, and the apartheid exercised there. It is clear that in the 1970s, CDM was trying ‘to keep its nose clean in the eyes of whatever government finally takes over in Windhoek.’<sup>64</sup> Again and again, the Paterson system is cited as proof of the supposedly non-racial normality at CDM: ‘The internationally recognised Paterson system of job evaluation and wage setting was recently introduced at CDM. This means *inter alia* that all employees of whatever colour are now on an integrated system of job evaluation.’<sup>65</sup>

The Paterson job grading system is a clear example that changes in corporate policies in a closed single company town affected social balances and relationships within and beyond the town boundaries. The Paterson scheme has been promoted by the company as evidence of overcoming racial discrimination, and while this was of course not the case, it was nevertheless a system to equalise racial privilege enough for the white people to see it as the epitome of discrimination for the white workers.

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63 Cronjé and Cronjé 1979: pp. 54ff. See also CDM, Memorandum, 6 February 1978: pp. 5f. and Appendixes.

64 See *Frontline* 1980: p. 26.

65 CDM, Memorandum, 6 February 1978: p. 5.

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# Understanding the Relationships between the |Ai-|Ais Richtersveld Transfrontier Park (ARTP) and Local Communities of ||Gamaseb Conservancy in Namibia

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## Introduction

Historically, the standard nature conservation approach used in most countries in southern Africa advocated for creating strict national parks and other protected areas, to protect and conserve biodiversity and 'natural resources' while disregarding local communities living within and adjacent to these areas.<sup>1</sup> However, like many parts of the world, southern Africa – and the continent at large – has undergone several reforms regarding wildlife conservation and nature-based tourism development. While these reforms are geared towards addressing the loss of biodiversity, they also aim to promote socio-economic development among the impoverished local communities surrounding protected areas.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, these changes also prompted the global adoption of a more holistic and inclusive approach, designed to include local communities in the management of natural resources and to allow for their active participation in tourism interventions in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>3</sup>

The reform in wildlife conservation approaches resulted in the adoption of the community-based natural resources management (CBNRM) programme, established to give local communities custodianship of and the right to use, benefit and manage natural resources in these spaces. In so doing, it aims to encourage better resources management outcomes, with the full participation of local communities in decision-making activities<sup>4</sup>, subsequently achieving community empowerment.<sup>5</sup> The principle underlying CBNRM is that sustainable resource management is most likely to be achievable if local communities are given incentives to manage and derive benefits from natural re-

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1 Hanks 2003; Roe et al. 2009; Chiutsi and Saarinen 2017.

2 Zunckel 2014

3 Sene-Harper et al. 2018

4 Armitage 2005: p. 206

5 Roe et al. 2009; Moswete et al. 2020.

sources.<sup>6</sup> Through community-based conservation, local communities are increasingly recognised as the primary beneficiary of nature conservation programmes.

In addition to this, the creation of transfrontier conservation parks – initiatives implemented across national borders – were among the inclusive approaches recently embraced by several countries and gained momentum in the construction of 1990s borders.<sup>7</sup> The transfrontier park approach has multiple targets. It aims to both reconcile fragmented natural habitats limited by borders and promote alliances in natural resources management through multisectoral partnerships with different sectors – such as governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), communities, and the private sector. As such, these parks are implemented to and promoted as achieving objectives related to facilitating regional co-operation and biodiversity conservation, stimulating socio-economic development and sub-regional economic growth, and developing trans-border ecotourism.

The transfrontier parks approach and the CBNRM initiative are regarded as pivotal – fulfilling different nations' commitment to natural resources management, achieving economic growth, and contributing to rural development. Seeking to achieve similar objectives and having common goals, these institutions assert that incorporating different conservation approaches and land uses into one large landscape creates a high probability of achieving complementary opportunities for both conservation and the socio-economic development of local communities, through employment and economic opportunities.<sup>8</sup> This is said to consequently contribute to long-term goals of poverty reduction.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, to allow local communities to benefit from transfrontier parks, Namibia is integrating its renowned CBNRM programme into the transfrontier initiatives.<sup>10</sup>

While CBNRM programmes have supposedly contributed to community involvement and benefits in conservation, they are still plagued by weaknesses and challenges inhibiting their success and sustainability.<sup>11</sup> Difficulties relating to social issues, governance and equitable sharing are among the shortcomings facing CBNRM programmes. Equally, the transfrontier parks have become highly contested areas in the southern African region. Some scholars argue that, like the former strict national parks approach, transfrontier parks have resulted in the repeated marginalising of communities.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, in this chapter we seek to understand the interface between the transfrontier park and community-based natural resources management<sup>13</sup> approaches, mainly focusing on the !Ai-!Ais Richtersveld Transfrontier Park (ARTP), referred to as 'transfrontier park' and 'the park', and the !Gamaseb Conservancy. We explore the institutional setup, legal frameworks and existing relations, while analysing challenges and opportunities

6 Ministry of Environment and Tourism 2013; Murphree 2009.

7 Zunckel 2014; Ramutsindela 2004.

8 Munthali 2007

9 Ibid.

10 MET/NACSO 2020

11 Mbaiwa 2015

12 Ferreira 2004; Büscher 2013.

13 The CBNRM programme has varying names. It is sometimes referred to as Community Trusts in Botswana, Conservancies in Namibia, in addition to Wildlife Management Associations, Community Forest Committees, and Fish Management Committees.

for working relationships between the two approaches, in the interest of the sustainable development of local communities. To understand how the park promotes effective community participation, we analyse the relationship between the park and local communities by examining how they are currently participating in the park and the benefits derived from this. We draw our data from qualitative and quantitative interviews with community members, ARTP management, government officials, NGOs and private sector representatives.<sup>14</sup>

## Finding a 'community' for the |Ai-|Ais-Richtersveld Transfrontier Park

The |Ai-|Ais-Richtersveld Transfrontier Park covers a total area of more than 6,000 km<sup>2</sup>, spanning the international borders of Namibia and South Africa. The park was established in 2001 through a formalised Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Namibian and South African governments. In 2003, the Namibian and South African governments formally signed a treaty to manage the park through a joint approach.<sup>15</sup> The signed treaty outlines various issues related to the park, including the objectives, the geographical areas and stakeholders involved in the park's management, and rights.

One of the |Ai-|Ais-Richtersveld Transfrontier Park's objectives is to promote alliances in managing natural and cultural resources. It also aims to promote social and economic tourism benefits through responsible tourism and other partnerships between various stakeholders. For these benefits to be achieved, different tourism stakeholders – such as the Namibian and South African governments, local communities, NGOs, and the private sectors in both countries – need to work together.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, decision-making in the affairs of the park is guided by a principle that promotes 'equitable and effective participation by local communities, where they play a central role and have substantial influence over decisions being made particularly when their communities are recognised as part of institutional structures of the transfrontier park'.<sup>17</sup> In the treaty, 'local communities' or 'communities' are defined as groups of people living in and adjacent to the area of the |Ai-|Ais-Richtersveld Transfrontier Park, bound together by social and economic relations based on shared interests.<sup>18</sup>

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14 We used a mixed-method approach of incorporating qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection. Quantitative data was collected through a survey of 180 households in the !Gamaseb Conservancy, meanwhile, qualitative data through interviews was collected from 15 key informants from the Namibian Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism (MEFT), Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO), tourism establishments, local community leaders and knowledgeable community members. The key informants were sources of information regarding community participation and beneficiation in the ARTP. Data was also derived from sources such as meeting minutes, MoU agreements, and government reports. This data was analysed through thematic content analysis, where similar responses emerging from the interviews were grouped into themes. The results and discussion of this study are based on the key informant interviews, with a few allusions to the household survey.

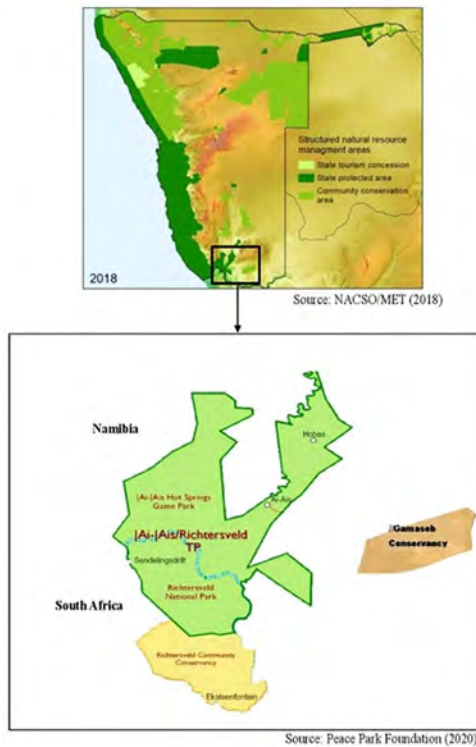
15 Suich et al. n.d; ARTP Treaty 2003.

16 ARTP Treaty 2001: p. 8

17 ARTP Treaty 2001: p. 8; Dawson et al. 2021.

18 Ibid.

Fig. 1: A map of !Ai-!Ais-Richtersveld Transfrontier Park (credit: NACSO/MET, 2018 and Peace Park Foundation, 2020).



There are communities living around the !Ai-!Ais-Richtersveld Transfrontier Park on both sides of the South Africa/Namibia border. On the Namibian side, land demarcated for the park comprises the !Ai-!Ais Hot Springs Game Park, including the Fish River Canyon. The !Ai-!Ais Hot Springs Game Park is surrounded by various land-use initiatives – including communal conservancies, such as the !Gamaseb Conservancy; commercial land; and resettlement farms. It also includes a few urban areas like Karasburg, Rosh Pinah and the large, closed mining area of the Sperrgebiet. The Namibian government mainly (and particularly) involves communities located in communal land in natural resource management. Therefore, the people living closest to the park, living on townland like in Rosh Pinah; migrant workers such as those in Aussenkehr; and private farmers, do not fulfil the general idea or the criteria of a community to be engaged in the transfrontier park.

On the other hand, on the South African side, the !Ai-!Ais Richtersveld Transfrontier Park comprises the Richtersveld National Park. Some local people live next to the Richtersveld National Park in the Richtersveld Community Conservancy. The conservancy includes the four villages of Eksteenfontein, Lekkersing, Sanddrift, and Kuboes. While local communities on both sides of the !Ai-!Ais Richtersveld Transfrontier Park

in Namibia and South Africa were supposed to play a role in its establishment and management processes, in reality different scenarios exist in each country. Our study discovered that the local communities living on the Namibian side adjacent to the !Ai-!Ais Richtersveld Transfrontier Park were not awarded custodianship; neither was a formal agreement entered into with them in order to be recognised as a community – which is one of the key requirements of being considered as stakeholders in the park.

In contrast, we found out that an integrated development and management plan was created for the Richtersveld National Park on the South African side. This plan specified the transfrontier park's core areas, buffer zones, and land allocated for the Richtersveld Conservancy. The Richtersveld community accepted this management proposal in 2004 and elected a permanent management committee. In addition, it was also anticipated that the Richtersveld National Park would contribute to community-based tourism initiatives, such as the development of guesthouses and campsites in Kuboes and Eksteenfontein, and the support of activities such as hiking, 4x4 driving, and cultural tours.<sup>19</sup> However, we did not explore whether these community-based tourism initiatives materialised, as this was not the core area of our study.

The people in Richtersveld had the chance to actively participate in establishing the park and drafting the MoU. Early engagement and consultation with local communities is crucial for effective community involvement. This enables local people to raise their views and concerns and find ways to profit from conservation initiatives, as this is critical for obtaining benefits from tourism and wildlife-based developments.<sup>20</sup> Suich and co-authors note that enabling local communities' representation in governance structures leads to community participation, as more representation leads to more participation, coordinated planning, and the enhanced sustainability of working relations established between the park and local communities.<sup>21</sup> Thus, transfrontier conservation managers can foster collaboration with local communities through building inclusive governance and decision-making structures and processes through which stakeholders at various levels must commit to the actions agreed upon.<sup>22</sup>

Some scholars note that the question of who gets involved or recognised as a community in transfrontier conservation areas has become a site of global and political contestation in the conservation arena. However, transfrontier conservation managers and their proponents did not fully address the issues related to local community involvement in transfrontier conservation parks in our research. In many cases, jurisdictional zones and areas included or not included in the transfrontier conservations parks are not clarified or resolved. In addition, there are no clear guidelines about who decides what activities and territory can be included in a particular transfrontier conservation area and what cannot.<sup>23</sup>

Through the interviews conducted with our informants from different NGOs, parastatals and government officials, we found that during the park's initial development, the

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19 Smuts et al. 2006

20 Muboko 2013

21 Suich et al. 2005

22 Dhliwayo et al. 2009

23 Suich et al. n.d

view of how to involve communities on the Namibian side was discussed. However, the implementation process to involve these communities faced some challenges. For instance, we found that most informants were dissatisfied with the implementation process. They indicated that the Namibian government played a significant role in formalising local community institutions to create opportunities for and allow better collaboration and inclusion in conservation and natural resource management initiatives, including transfrontier parks. As mentioned before, the inclusion of local communities in the transfrontier park is necessary in order to strengthen their economic and social development.<sup>24</sup> However, such opportunities were not capitalised on. For instance, an informant from an NGO – who previously worked in the southern region of Namibia – stressed that despite the local communities living adjacent to the park, most of the community members, particularly from the ǀGamaseb Conservancy, were not involved enough in and had little awareness about what the park entails. This is despite the fact that the ǀGamaseb Conservancy is one of the local community institutions targeted to benefit from the ǀAi-ǀAis-Richtersveld Transfrontier Park.

Our findings revealed that the ǀAi-ǀAis Richtersveld Transfrontier Park was mainly seen as a way to strengthen the relationship between Namibia and South Africa. Therefore, community involvement was not the priority for the Namibian government when the park was established. This view was expressed by many informants. They mentioned that at the inception of the park, the focus was on strengthening relationships between the two countries and issues of community participation were regarded as secondary. Some scholars argue that transfrontier conservation initiatives have underperformed in their plans to adequately involve communities because, from the start, the major driving force was biodiversity conservation. This ultimately minimised the focus on the local communities affected by establishing these transfrontier parks.<sup>25</sup> Thus while, in the case of ǀAi-ǀAis-Richtersveld Transfrontier Park, the memorandum of understanding signed by the Namibian and South African governments references the importance of the inclusion and beneficiation of local communities living in and adjacent the park, it did not define what ‘a community’ is.<sup>26</sup>

### **ǀGamaseb Conservancy – the ARTP’s community?**

The ǀGamaseb Conservancy is located on the Namibian side of the ǀAi-ǀAis-Richtersveld Transfrontier Park. It was gazetted by the government in 2003 and fell under the jurisdiction of the Bondelswarts Traditional Authority.<sup>27</sup> The ǀGamaseb Conservancy is the oldest communal conservancy in the ǀKaras region and is situated approximately 150km west of the ǀAi-ǀAis Hot Springs Game Park.<sup>28</sup> It covers an area of 1,748 km<sup>2</sup>, occupying

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24 Kavita and Saarinen 2016

25 Swatuk 2004

26 ARTP Treaty 2001

27 Nangulah 2003

28 Kotzé and Marauhn 2014

a semi-desert environment made up of sparse savannah and grasslands with an average annual rainfall of only 50–150 mm.<sup>29</sup>

Since the !Gamaseb Conservancy is located on marginal farming land, farmers mainly practice small livestock farming with sheep and goats. The !Gamaseb Conservancy exhibits a strong Nama culture, language and tradition, and retains very close cultural links with the Richtersveld Community Conservancy in South Africa.<sup>30</sup> Although the Nama-speaking population dominates the area, some Oshiwambo speakers and other groups are also found in the area.

Proponents of transfrontier conservation argue that local communities should be involved through representation in legal and management structures and participate in joint decision-making and benefit-sharing from transfrontier conservation areas.<sup>31</sup> However, our findings show that the !Gamaseb Conservancy is not represented in the !Ai-!Ais-Richtersveld Transfrontier Park. For instance, the joint management board of the !Ai-!Ais Richtersveld is comprised of only governmental institutions such as the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism (MEFT) and its public corporation Namibia Wildlife Resorts. The presence of institutions such as the Namibian Association of CB-NRM Support Organisations (NACSO) would enable discussions on community participation and, subsequently, community development goals, as this is part of their mandate.

A former advisor to the Bondelswarts chief, who played a significant role in the initial establishment of the transfrontier park and represented the !Gamaseb community at the Integrated Conservation and Development workshops in South Africa, stated that since some initial discussions about community involvement, there has hardly been any collaboration between the !Gamaseb Conservancy and the park since 2008.

The last meeting we had on the park was in, I think around 2008 in Kuboes, [some of] the community members [from the Conservancy] were involved. The late leader of our tribe [Mr. Joseph] tried to get the Conservancy involved in the park, but after he died, things stopped. His argument was that !Ai-!Ais and the Orange River belong to the Bondelswarts.<sup>32</sup>

Most of the people we interviewed in the !Gamaseb Conservancy, particularly the elders, identified themselves as being of the same ancestral origin as the people on the South African side, divided only by the presence of the Orange River. Some elderly informants indicated that they used to cross the river to visit their relatives on the South African side. Some also recalled that certain areas of the park on the Namibian side were sacred sites that they used as a healing place:

29 MET/NACSO 2020

30 Govender-Van Wyk 2007

31 SADC Secretariat 2017; Zunckel 2014.

32 !Gamaseb Conservancy key informant – former advisor to the chief, 06 December 2018, interview done by Mecthilde Pinto.

The scalding water [!Ai-!Ais] spring used to be a healing place; when someone bathed in them, they got healed.<sup>33</sup>

This is in contrast with some government officials, who argue that the park's demarcated land belongs to the state, because no people live inside the park today. Other officials caution that rock engravings found within the park prove that people lived in the area even long before.<sup>34</sup>

Recent studies show that smooth communication between transfrontier parks and the surrounding communities is central to sharing benefits. In addition, local community awareness of the park's existence and their decision-making involvement is essential for effective management in a transfrontier conservation approach, particularly at the institutional framework level.<sup>35</sup>

Our household survey showed that most households in !Gamaseb Conservancy knew of the !Ai-!Ais Park on the Namibian side. They mainly heard about it through word of mouth from neighbours and relatives, and only very few learned about it through the media, but all were not aware of its purposes concerning their livelihoods. About a quarter of the households visited the park – either for leisure, visiting friends and family, or work-related functions. Our findings also revealed that (26%) of respondents only knew of the name !Ai-!Ais, which means 'burning water' in the Nama local language, but not what it fully entails. Moreover, some heard of the Namibian part of the park !Ai-!Ais but not of the transfrontier park, as one respondent asked:

I know of the name !Ai-!Ais Park, is Richtersveld Transfrontier a new thing?<sup>36</sup>

We also unearthed that some members of a few households participated in official meetings and consultations where issues related to the park were discussed. However, we argue that there was low level of official meetings and consultation to sensitise and inform the communities about the !Ai-!Ais Richtersveld Transfrontier Park. Therefore, this indicates that information dissemination and community consultation have been poor and were not correctly executed.

Despite the !Ai-!Ais Richtersveld Transfrontier park being in operation since 2003, the local communities in !Gamaseb Conservancy have not benefited much from its tourism activities. They have only benefited through a few permanent jobs at the tourism resorts, voluntary work without any incentives, and the annual clean-up campaign where communities are rewarded in kind with T-shirts. While this in-kind reward may be viewed by some as a type of 'benefit', this does not equate to equitable nor effective participation by the local communities. An official from the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism confirmed that:

33 !Gamaseb Conservancy key informant – community member, 06 December 2018, interview done by Mecthilde Pinto, translation by Victoria Thirion.

34 NGO official, Windhoek, August 2019, an interview done by Mecthilde Pinto.

35 Muboko 2013

36 !Gamaseb Conservancy key informant – community member, 06 December 2018, interview done by Mecthilde Pinto, translation by Victoria Thirion.

Currently, no communities are benefiting directly [from the park], only occasionally when we have activities. Furthermore, when we are doing the clean-ups, we use the communities from those conservancies; ||Gamaseb Conservancy is also involved. At the end of the event, we give them t-shirts and other items.<sup>37</sup>

The official further mentioned that they organised clean-up campaigns by sending official letters to various community leaders and liaison officers to ask for help from the communities. This claim was contrary to what the ||Gamaseb Conservancy committee members mentioned to us. They claimed that they have never received any official communication from the government. Instead, they explained that those community members who had previously participated in these clean-up campaigns had done so independently. They might have been informed by their relatives employed at the park. The miscommunication between the park and conservancy committee shows that the lack of engaging and coordinating activities with local communities' structures hinders their successful implementation. Moreover, 'community participation' in the park should be more than simply consultation and instead implies some control over the outcome.

Our findings also show a low level of knowledge about and engagement in the clean-up campaign. Very few community members indicated that they knew of people who participated in it. In addition, some of the people who participated in the clean-up campaign said that they received no proper financial payment, apart from t-shirts and drinks. Therefore, a lack of payment for work makes participation unappealing. As a conservancy member rightfully states:

We are volunteering without getting paid, and we have families to feed or take care of, so you cannot go there.<sup>38</sup>

Before the park, there were already limited economic opportunities for people living in the ||Gamaseb Conservancy. Their primary livelihood activity was livestock farming, which served as an important food security and income source – and remains so. This is supplemented by social grants from the government and other small informal businesses initiated by some members. In addition to these activities, the local community benefited from the Conservancy's wildlife hunting quota and meat distribution allocated by the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism (MEFT). However, the wildlife hunting quota and meat distribution have been inconsistent over the past years. Additionally, governmental reports show that the number of springboks were low due to droughts.<sup>39</sup>

Because of the difficult economic situation, many people in the ||Gamaseb Conservancy looked for alternatives to complement their livelihoods. For example, some people were employed at the neighbouring private farms. However, community members were disappointed because their hopes and expectations of finding employment at the park were not fulfilled. Most of the people in the Conservancy said that none of their household members nor relatives have ever been employed in the park.

37 MEFT official, Rosh Pinah, 03 December 2018, interview done by Mecthilde Pinto.

38 ||Gamaseb Conservancy community member, Karasburg, 19 August 2019, interview done by Mecthilde Pinto, translation by Erlich Nekongo.

39 NACSO 2019; NACSO 2021; MEFT/NACSO 2021.

Our findings also show that a few people employed by the park occupied low-paid positions, primarily as housekeepers, waiters and waitresses. The local people in ǀGamaseb Conservancy are expected to be considered first for employment opportunities in the park. The lack of employment opportunities by the park brought about negative attitudes towards it. The people employed in the park also stressed that its tourism activities are seasonal – therefore resorts and campsites found in the park do not operate throughout the year. During seasons with low tourist arrivals, they are sent to other lodges in Etosha or other parts of the country, which separates them from their families.

## The promise of tourism concessions

For local communities to fully benefit from tourism, communal conservancies in Namibia are granted rights to use natural resources in state land through concessions. Concessions are pieces of land owned by the state and managed by a non-state entity. Communal conservancies or private tour operators may be given rights to manage tourism activities – such as owning lodges, campsites, trophy hunting, and other tourism activities – in a concession. Suppose a concession is awarded to a communal conservancy, the conservancy is then allowed to tender the management of the tourism facilities to a private tourism operator that might have the necessary resources and capacity to manage the facilities designated for a particular concession. Communal conservancies can therefore benefit by getting some of the income generated from the concession, while part of the income goes to the private tour operator and the government. Other tourism benefits derived by communal conservancies from concessions are employment opportunities created for the local people working its tourism facilities.<sup>40</sup>

Our findings indicate that although a tourism concession was granted to the ǀGamaseb Conservancy in 2015, there were various challenges that hindered the local communities from deriving benefits from it. For instance, a long delay was experienced in the process of implementing the concession. This delay was attributed to the MEFT failure to finalise the concession agreements and institute the directives on how the concession was to be utilised. At the time of writing, the concession has not materialised and only exists in writing. An informant from the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism stated:

The problem is the concessions are awarded, but they are not signed, even though there are places within the park earmarked for tourism activities to benefit communities, but as I said, nothing is finalised yet.<sup>41</sup>

Our findings indicate that both government and the conservancy institutions' shortcomings have contributed to delays in the concession. The lack of collaboration between institutions affected the implementation of the concession and brought about the emergence of 'blame-games' between different stakeholders. It surfaced from our findings that the

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40 NACSO 2019

41 MEFT official, Rosh Pinah, 03 December 2018, interview done by Mecthilde Pinto.

Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism (MEFT) and !Gamaseb Conservancy did not fully agree on both the terms and building of collaborations.

Furthermore, MEFT stakeholders felt that leadership setbacks within the !Gamaseb Conservancy mostly affected the implementation of this concession. The conservancy and the traditional authority were believed to not be fully functional. Particularly, the conservancy did not have an active committee for about three years, hence there was no structure to oversee the building of collaborations with the park. Furthermore, MEFT indicated that upon the finalisation of the concession contract, stakeholders from the conservancies were unavailable for its signing. This contributed to further contract delays. The interviews with informants from MEFT also revealed that there were limited community development interventions carried out through the park. One of the MEFT officials indicated that the absence of NACSO in the governance structure has resulted in incompatible planning and implementing of activities to involve local conservancies, particularly those activities aimed at bringing benefits for local communities:

There is a disconnection between the CBNRM and the Parks; thus, there should be a link between [these two] so that we can successfully run this park. We can close that gap however there is no communication between CBNRM and the Parks. They do their things from the other side, and we clash regularly. For example, sometimes we discuss things on the park management committee related to local communities, then I tell them they have to refer back to the CBNRM office, while CBNRM [representative] was not even involved in those meetings, and that is the main problem.<sup>42</sup>

We also found that other challenges, such as a lack of capacity and skills among community leadership to enforce and ensure engagement in collaborative planning, and a lack of community interest in attending meetings also affected the !Gamaseb Conservancy in terms of benefiting from tourism activities in the area. In addition, the conservancy management committee had inadequate knowledge regarding the concession awarded to the conservancy. The conservancy members argued that the lack of capacity, a gap in leadership successions and a lack of external institutional support from government ministries, traditional authorities and NGOs, were the reasons for the Conservancy not being able to build effective collaborative structures. In addition, some conservancy committee members mentioned that NGOs reduced their support of the !Gamaseb Conservancy:

This past one or two years, the Namibian Association of CBNRM Support Organisations [NACSO] has been silent, but three years ago, they helped with training in financial management, and other aspects that I also attended was mapping using GPS. However, unfortunately, even at the last annual general meeting, I do not know why NACSO or any of its members were not present due to communications or other things.<sup>43</sup>

The newly elected conservancy leader also stressed that:

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42 Ibid.

43 !Gamaseb Conservancy secretary, Karasburg, 19 August 2019, interview done by Mecthilde Pinto.

Namibia Development Trust withdrew their working relations; they are not involved in any issues of the Conservancy anymore. If I remember correctly, the [last time] they were involved was around 2004.<sup>44</sup>

The non-governmental stakeholder confirmed their withdrawal due to the financial constraints of the support organisations. They said that support organisations have suffered greatly in terms of finances over the past years as donors were not able to sufficiently support NGOs in Namibia due to it being ranked as a middle-income country. Stakeholder sentiments were also that community-based institutions such as conservancies should be strengthened to ensure working collaborations. A stakeholder from Namibia Development Trust asked:

You know different business activities are happening in the Parks. For example, Namibia Wildlife Resorts [NWR] tourism establishments are doing business in the park, and these are government institutions. So why can't NWR have an agreement with the conservancies? Why can't communities have a shareholding arrangement in some of these tourism lodges?<sup>45</sup>

Furthermore, some community members recounted that there was a time when the government allowed them access to the park to perform their Nama cultural dances to tourists. These opportunities have ceased, and the dance group dissolved. Some respondents emphasised that they were involved in sewing shoes and clothing and making various souvenirs to be sold at different tourism establishments in the park. Such privileges were no longer available to the community. Community participation and economic benefits are the forms of empowerment that enhance community involvement in the transfrontier processes and structures. Hence the absence thereof in the |Ai-|Ais-Richtersveld Transfrontier Park shows that transfrontier conservation is yet to reach the potential to involve and empower local communities fully.<sup>46</sup>

## Conclusion

The Namibian side of the |Ai-|Ais-Richtersveld Transfrontier Park reflects complexities in both relationship between stakeholders and its design, creating barriers that prevent the park from successfully integrating the neighbouring communities. This difficulty mainly stems from the boundary of the ARTP not incorporating the neighbouring communities – as e.g. in the case of the Kavango–Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area (KAZA) in north-eastern Namibia. However, the ARTP treaty between South Africa and Namibia intends for this park to contribute to the socio-economic development of local communities. Thus, while the transfrontier conservation approach advocates for com-

44 ||Gamaseb Conservancy chairperson, Karasburg, 20 August 2019, interview done by Mecthilde Pinto.

45 Key informant from NWR staff, |Ai-|Ais Resort, 06 December 2018, interview done by Mecthilde Pinto.

46 Metcalfe 2003

munity participation in governance structures and empowering communities to derive benefits from the park, such promises appear to rather be rhetoric for ARTP.

Another point emerging from this chapter is the interface between the different people-centred and nature-based approaches considered as vehicles for promoting tourism and sustainable livelihoods – in this case, the transfrontier and the CBNRM. The policy framework of the Namibian government has provided an enabling environment for communities to benefit from neighbouring parks through the concession policy. However, limited institutional support and inconsistencies in the leadership structure of the !Gamaseb Conservancy continue to hinder the operationalisation of the awarded concession agreement between this Conservancy and ARTP. If this conservancy succeeds in securing benefits from the ARTP, there is a need to provide vigorous empowerment programmes, capacity building, and institutional support. Many conservancies in Namibia have generated various benefits, including employment for the locals through the concession, with neighbouring communities – provided these conservancies have the necessary support and capacity. In addition, a working relationship between ARTP and the conservancy could develop the park's tourism potential, particularly the rich cultural heritage for ecotourism which will be vital for the sustainable livelihoods of local community members.

Therefore, the critical principle – as stated in the treaty – of promoting equitable and effective participation by local communities is yet to be realised. As there is no equitable nor effective participation by the local communities, they have only limited awareness of the park activities, and if they do, it is mostly about unpaid work for clean-up campaigns.<sup>47</sup> The process has thus resulted in a long period of contestation and a 'blame game' emerging between stakeholders, as local communities cannot participate in the park activities and influence decision-making. The case of !Gamaseb Conservancy shows the desire of a community to benefit from the transfrontier conservation. However, since no foundation for collaboration and engagement was laid at the initial establishment of the park, implementing community involvement has proven to be challenging. Therefore, a well-defined framework and clear directives to facilitate the transfrontier park and the neighbouring communities is required and should be addressed.

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# Settling in the Mining Town: An Account of Women linked to Migrant Workers in Oranjemund, Namibia

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Romie Nghitevelekwa and Martha Akawa

## Introduction

The system of migrant labour practiced in Namibia was designed in such a way that men went away to work for the colonial economy in the south, while women and the rest of the family remained behind, looking after the home. ‘How did you end up living in the mining town of Oranjemund?’ This was our entry question as we sought to explore how the women who were linked to migrant workers came to settle in Oranjemund and establish homes. By ‘linked to’, we are highlighting the fact that during most of colonial and apartheid times, women could only settle in Oranjemund with a male affine, primarily as a husband.<sup>1</sup> Thus the first experience of women settling in Oranjemund is directly linked to their husbands.<sup>2</sup>

Migrant workers, especially those from the former homelands of Owambo and Kavango, were transported to Oranjemund to work at the Consolidated Diamond Mines, or *koShiidiema* as it is referred to in Aawambo-speaking households. The migrant labour system has been extensively documented, ranging from explorations of how the system was repressive and discriminatory, to covering issues of ethnicity, age and most importantly, gender.<sup>3</sup> For much of the 20th century, migrant workers were predominantly men – as women’s mobility was prohibited.<sup>4</sup> This situation changed from the 1970s onwards, with

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1 This chapter covers the period of mining practiced in Namibia from German colonialism up to the South African period. It is important to highlight that although the system was repressive, it kept changing – as influenced by the political environment. The years between the late 1950s and 1980s have been regarded as watershed years for the Namibian contract workers’ political consciousness.

2 Although complicated, women could live and work in central and southern Namibia. In a 1998 study, Wallace looks at the mandatory examination of unmarried women Black women with venereal diseases in Omaruru, Grootfontein, Keetmanshoop and Windhoek. Although she focused on a case study in 1939, this indicates that Black women could live in central and southern Namibia.

3 Likuwa 2021: pp. 39–74

4 Winterfeldt 1998

the relaxation of the South African administration's regulations against the mobility of women. In 1977, the first women linked to migrant workers from northern Namibia came to Oranjemund. These women were chosen to be the first to go and 'experience' Oranjemund – and decide if they would be interested in living there – by a selection process based on their husbands' positions as defined by the Paterson Grading system (PGS).<sup>5</sup>

This chapter provides an account of the lived experiences of the women who first came to Oranjemund in the 1970s. We follow the events that led to their arrival, ask who was allowed to go to the diamond mining town, and recall their life experiences there. Our work is based on interviews with these women, a review of literature on the town, and gender and migrant labour in general.<sup>6</sup> We present the experiences of the women who went to live in Oranjemund through Meme Anna Tshoopara's account, and to highlight specific events, refer to interviews with other women.<sup>7</sup> Meme Anna Tshoopara's account was singled out as she was – after the death of her husband in 1982 – the first woman who was allowed to stay in Oranjemund unconnected to a man. Before that, women were sent back to their homes after the death or dismissal of their husbands.

## Formative years and schooling

Meme Tshoopara was born in 1950 in the village of Iiputu in the Omusati Region of Namibia. Her father was one of the founders of the Catholic Church congregations of Oshikuyu, and built so-called *omatsali giihenguti* (classrooms made from stalks) at Iiputu village. Meme Tshoopara began her formative schooling in the 1960s, and here, she remembers that time:

As a kid I was prescient, I never liked those *omatsali giihenguti*. While others were being taught inside the classes, I used to be outside. I would follow the lessons while I am outside. Still, I was always ahead of others when it came to assessments.<sup>8</sup>

During that time, *aahongi* (loosely translated as missionaries) of the Catholic Church used to come to Iiputu village, and her father told them: 'This girl is perceptive. Please go with her to get her an education'. Thus in 1962, when Meme Anna Tshoopara turned 12 years old, her father sent her to Oshikuku with the *aahongi*, where she stayed at the Catholic mission school until she finished Grade 8. After this, some learners went to Döbra school. Döbra – a settlement just north of Windhoek – was home to a Catholic Mission Station

5 The salary grading system includes five grades, from A-F, where A1 is the lowest and F5 is the highest. See Rüdiger in this volume.

6 The interviews were conducted between February 2020 and August 2021 in Windhoek and Owambo, in northern Namibia. Within these, two of the men who invited their wives to Oranjemund were present and contributed their experiences, especially in terms of events that led to their invitation. In total, we conducted twelve interviews, comprising of eighteen participants (sixteen women and two men). The participants are aged between the early-60s to mid-80s.

7 'Meme' is a term of respect, used to refer to an older woman.

8 Meme Tshoopara, Windhoek, February 2020, interview done by Martha Akawa and Romie Nghitevelekwa.

established in 1924, which included a teacher's training centre and a school. However, Meme Tshoopara was not fortunate enough to be sent to Döbra, as her father did not have enough money. Instead, she went to Oshikuku Catholic Hospital in 1970 to study nursing, leaving for Oshakati Hospital after two years, where she continued her nursing education until 1978. During this time, she married Tate Sebastian Tshoopara.<sup>9</sup>

## The familiarisation visit to Oranjemund in 1977

Meme Tshoopara's husband worked at the Consolidated Diamond Mines (CDM) of Southwest Africa Limited in Oranjemund. In 1977, she was selected with other women to visit Oranjemund, and recounting this experience, said:

Our husbands worked in Oranjemund. We went with women like Meme Martha Kalondo, Meme Saima Kalili, some I do not remember very well. We asked, it is part of Namibia, right? They replied, yes. Then we want to live here. They took us there to see if we wanted to live in Oranjemund. Some of the women thought, who wants to live in a desert? But for some of us, we decided that we wanted to live there.<sup>10</sup>

From the Owambo homeland they were transported by bus for about 300 km to Grootfontein in north-eastern Namibia, where they boarded a plane – or *nelomba lyomushindi gwoshipilangi*, as it is affectionately called in the Oshiwambo language – to Oranjemund. The plane landed in Alexander Bay, a mining town in South Africa, on the southern bank of the Orange River. From Alexander Bay, the women were put on buses and transported into Oranjemund. They shared mixed feelings about that trip, being excited but also anxious, as it was their first time on a plane. One woman remembered:

If there was a video for you to see what we wore that day, you would only laugh. Even how we have dressed our children. Because some people said, you will be nauseous, some will throw up. For some of us that worked in the hospitals we took medicine to help us with nausea. You know the old airplanes were different from today's. You do not feel so many movements these days. You felt everything in those old planes.<sup>11</sup>

The women's familiarisation trip lasted for about three months, after which they returned to their homes in northern Namibia, but with an offer to move to Oranjemund. CDM initially invited 13 women to join their husbands – all of whom worked in different departments of the mine, for example in human resources, metallurgy, or in the medical department. The mining company used the PGS to categorise the workers and their benefits. The higher someone was classified in the grading system, the better were his benefits, such as housing. In interviews with two of the men whose wives were invited to

9 Like Meme, Tate is a term of respect when referring to older men.

10 Meme Tshoopara, Windhoek, February 2020, interview done by Martha Akawa and Romie Nghitevelekwa.

11 Meme Saima Kalili, Onankali, April 2021, interview done by Martha Akawa and Romie Nghitevelekwa.

Oranjemund, they shared that these men all had some sort of middle-management position (categories C1 and C4 of the PGS). Consequently, the invitation of wives to join their husbands in Oranjemund was not meant for general labourers, but only given to the wives of those husbands at professional levels and in high salary categories. The benefits thus 'catered for the upper bands and skilled labourers'.<sup>12</sup> As a result, this differentiation brought tensions between the permanent workers or the workers with professional titles and the those in low level ranks in the mine. The workers allowed to bring their families to Oranjemund were labelled puppets or '*perpement*' (permanent+puppet) by the workers in low ranks. There was general mistrust between these two groups, as workers in high grade positions were mistrusted by those in low ranks 'as they spent a lot of time with the whites'.<sup>13</sup> In addition to this, the mining administration feared that permanent labourers would influence and politicise other workers especially the labourers in the mine. Therefore, permanent workers were also encouraged to not mix or mingle with other migrant workers.

### The influential and political aware migrant workers

The events that led CDM to invite permanent workers' wives to Oranjemund was evidence of how politically aware the Black workers were. The 1971/2 countrywide strike had an impact on Oranjemund, and compelled CDM to relook at labour relations, in addition to the internal challenges and pressure they faced from the Black permanent CDM workers.<sup>14</sup> Although the permanent workers had worked in their respective categories for some years prior to 1977, the benefits that their respective pay grades afforded them were not readily offered to Black workers, as these were reserved for their white colleagues, who were permitted to live with their wives in Oranjemund. Because some of the Black permanent workers worked in the human resources (HR) department, they had access to information about what benefits they were being denied within their pay grade. One of the men, who was working in HR, told us that they wrote letters on behalf of their wives and sent them to their wives, who then posted them to the mining administration, demanding that the authorities allow the women to visit their husbands in Oranjemund. The letters reached senior management – and even the director, Nicholas F. Oppenheimer – creating tensions between management and the permanent workers, who continued to make demands regarding benefits offered only to white workers in the same pay grade. This coincided with the events of the 1971/2 nationwide workers' general strike, where the workers demanded the improvement of their working conditions and the general abolishment of the contract labour system. The strike 'brought the mining industry

12 Nieuwoudt, 2019: p. 9

13 Tate Gideon likua, lipopo, April 2021, interview done by Martha Akawa and Romie Nghitevelekwa.

14 Corbett 2002. However, the other perspective is that the workers in Oranjemund were deemed less keen to join the strike and risk losing their employment. The suspicion of their passive involvement in the strike was based on the fact that they were better paid, and that their compound conditions were way better than other migrant workers in other towns. See C.f Moorsom 1977: pp. 52–87; and Rogers 1972, pp. 3–8.

to a halt and seriously affected farming and commerce, as well as the communications and transport systems, demonstrating the potential of workers to take organised action in defence of their rights'.<sup>15</sup>

While the majority of the workers at CDM did not participate in the strike, it is reported that the strike did spread to CDM, where about 250 workers walked out.<sup>16</sup> Other workers also 'informed management that they were in full sympathies with the strikers'.<sup>17</sup> A combination of the events of the 1971/2 strike and the demands from the workers to have their wives come to Oranjemund contributed to the mining administration allowing and selecting thirteen employees from different departments to bring their families to Oranjemund.

### The professional status of the invited women

The thirteen women invited to Oranjemund included nurses – like Meme Tshoopara – and teachers, as well as women without formal employment or education. Some were integrated into the Oranjemund economic system, where they worked in the hospitals and local school, which were both run by the mining company. For instance, in 1979 Meme Tshoopara got a job at the Oranjemund hospital. However, some of the women were not at ease with the idea of living in Oranjemund, fearing job losses and unemployment, or not being able to get the same jobs as those they used to do in northern Namibia, while others opted to stay in Oranjemund as housewives. Some of the invited women refused the offer to live in Oranjemund asked questions like: 'Who would have cultivated my field? Who would have taken care of our home?' Still, amongst the women who did not move, a number of them nevertheless sent their children to benefit from the better education and health system in the diamond town. All of the women interviewed commended the education, health and non-racial integration system in Oranjemund.

However, some women's husbands refused the offer of inviting them to Oranjemund, even as they met the requirements. This can be made sense of within a patriarchal context of unequal power relations, where all decisions are made without involving women. The women who decided to go to Oranjemund, with the consent of their husbands, arrived between 1978 and the early 1980s.

### From 'the little heaven on earth' to criticism

Meme Tshoopara was one of the women who decided to move to Oranjemund in 1978, and said:

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15 Jauch 2018

16 American Committee on Africa, 'Strike in Namibia', 1972, [http://psimg.jstor.org/fsi/img/pdf/t0/10.5555/al.sff.document.acoa000368\\_final.pdf](http://psimg.jstor.org/fsi/img/pdf/t0/10.5555/al.sff.document.acoa000368_final.pdf).

17 United States. Congress House Committee on Foreign Affairs. Subcommittee on Africa, 'Labour Developments in Namibia', in *U.S. Business Involvement in Southern Africa: Hearings, Ninety-Second Congress, First Session, Part 3*, 1972.

We stayed in the little heaven on earth. Heaven on earth (*Otwa kala nee kokagulu kopevi. Pevi puna egulu*).<sup>18</sup>

Her description of Oranjemund as heaven on earth is shared by other women. She recounted that

We were given houses...A car used to make rounds dropping food at each house. We never used to pay for water, electricity, or gas. This was until the end of the grace period when we started cooking our own food. We got used to Oranjemund, got to know where the shops are. But even so, we found most of the utilities and kitchen utensils in the houses. All we had to do was to buy food and clothes. Our children used to go to school...with white children. We used to go with other women to fetch our children from school.<sup>19</sup>

'Orange oya li oshilongo oshiwana' (*Oranjemund used to be a very nice town*), added another woman.<sup>20</sup> From the beginning, they never cooked themselves, as food was brought to them 'from the Mensa', as the women remembered.<sup>21</sup> There were also domestic workers assigned to the households.<sup>22</sup> These were Aawambo men directly recruited from northern Namibia – within the ambit of the migrant labour system – to carry out household chores including tending to the gardens, doing laundry and cooking for the families in Oranjemund.

Of all the benefits, the women praised the education system the most. The children's education was fully paid for by the mine, and in some cases, the mine even covered the cost of schooling in Cape Town, South Africa.

While the women praised the benefits and the opportunities afforded to them by settling in Oranjemund, there were also voices that were critical of the system. While the women themselves might not have been able to critique a system that enabled them to live to Oranjemund, it is imperative to question the system itself. The PGS pretended to overcome racialised labour conditions, but of course did not consider that Black workers were still oppressed and disadvantaged, and therefore could hardly compete with their white colleagues. According to Corbett, in the 1970s the mining industry was becoming more sophisticated, and tertiary and university qualifications were required, hence the PGS was put in place to grade employees with different skills.<sup>23</sup> This was, however, a systematic and structural exclusion, as higher education was inaccessible to the majority of Black people. Consequently, within this system, a Black man who dropped out of school or had no opportunity to go beyond lower schooling grades cannot compete with a privileged white university graduate who automatically qualifies for a higher position and

18 Meme Tshoopara, Windhoek, February 2020, interview done by Martha Akawa and Romie Nghitevelekwa.

19 Meme Tshoopara, Windhoek, February 2020, interview done by Martha Akawa and Romie Nghitevelekwa.

20 Meme Awala, Oniipa, April 2020. Interview done by Martha Akawa and Romie Nghitevelekwa.

21 Mensa was the term for the communal kitchen.

22 Meme Hileni Mbeeli, Elombe, April 2020, interview done by Martha Akawa and Romie Nghitevelekwa.

23 Corbett 2002: p.78

does not have to work his way up in the company. Additionally, working in management was race- and gender-biased. There were no Black people or women of any race in management, so the PGS catered for white and male management staff only. The frustration was further fuelled by the PGS spilling over to the allocation of benefits, such as housing, the furnishing of homes, and company cars.<sup>24</sup> All of the above was ignored by CDM; the company praised the Paterson Grading system as one that 'integrated all races with a fair job evaluation'.<sup>25</sup> A 1978 memorandum notes that: 'At Consolidated Diamond Mines a man's job is ranked and his pay is set according to a common, non-discriminatory system known as the Paterson System....'<sup>26</sup>

However, the opposite was occurring at CDM, as the majority of the large Black workforce – estimated at 5,300 in 1978 – did not have wide opportunities to climb up the ladder in the workplace.<sup>27</sup> By implication, only a handful could qualify to live with their families, unlike the majority of the white workforce. This could also imply that CDM was following the trend of the South African administration that abolished petty apartheid policies and sought to create a small, elite and localised Black middle-class, only 'appearing' to be move towards a non-racial society.

Demonstrating this, at Oranjemund there was spatial segregation. The Black families that first settled in Oranjemund lived in a section meant solely for them. In 1978, the company started to build a new suburb, a short distance removed from the white town to house Black families in the west, and by 1980, 70 Black families already lived in, or were in the process of moving to, Oranjemund<sup>28</sup>. The Black families felt excluded, and their children were not allowed to visit their friends, even though they went to the same school. According to the PGS, one of the employees, Mr Kalondo, was entitled to a better house and in 1980 he challenged CDM and his was the first Black family allowed to move into a 'white part of the town'.<sup>29</sup>

When the women moved to Oranjemund in 1978, Black people had their own shops and were not allowed to enter shops meant for white people. If a Black person wanted something from the 'whites only' shop, they had to write a note and the product would be brought to them while they waited outside. Additionally, white and Black migrant workers had their own sport clubs and separate leagues.<sup>30</sup> Although Black people were allowed to play various sports, such as soccer, squash, and tennis, the Black men had a designated place to play *owela/uuholo* – a popular game among the local people of Namibia.<sup>31</sup>

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24 Ibid. p. 98

25 Rüdiger 2019

26 Ibid. p. 20

27 Frontline: Helping to change the Face of South Africa (1978–1991) <http://www.coldtype.net/front-line>. Accessed on 25 March 2022.

28 Ibid.

29 See Corbett 2002: p. 91. Meme Martha and Tate Salom Kalondo, Windhoek, July 2020, interview done by Martha Akawa and Romie Nghitevelekwa.

30 Rüdiger 2019: p. 10

31 This is the mancala game played in Southern Africa. In Namibia, it common among the locals and known by different names, including in Oshikwanyama *owela*, in Oshindonga *uuholo*, in Otjiherero *onjune*, in Khoekhogowab //hus, and in Rukwangari *wera*.

While the women welcomed the benefits they had, and the opportunities presented to their families, they were also aware of the segregation in Oranjemund. One of the women interviewed for example described this treatment as:

*Uukoloni wa gwayekwa ondjema. Ta tu gwayekwa ashike omahoka komilungu. Oto lolo ashike ito li.* (This was colonialism smeared with jam. Sugar-coated segregation. You are just made to taste but you are not getting the real deal).<sup>32</sup>

## Women's activities in Oranjemund

During the first year of her stay in Oranjemund, while waiting for a job placement, Meme Tshoopara decided to look for fabrics to start a tailoring business. However, she did not own a sewing machine, and worked with another woman who owned a manual sewing machine, telling us:

I had no tailoring skills, but I learned from my friend, who also lent me her machine. I started sewing children's clothes and sold them to the men in Oranjemund, who sent them to their children in the north. Even when I started working in the hospital, I sewed after work.<sup>33</sup>

The sewing business grew, so much so that Meme Tshoopara invited other women from the north to come to work with them in Oranjemund. While the women invited did not necessarily have husbands in Oranjemund, they were invited on the ticket of Meme Tshoopara through her husband<sup>34</sup>. Other women got sorghum from the north and started making Oshiwambo traditional brew, which they sold to the mine workers. In addition to these kinds of activities, women participated in social and church events, and even political events as political awareness in Oranjemund increased.

Meme Tshoopara and the other women who settled first in Oranjemund took on the role of orientating new women who were arriving in the town. They assisted them in settling down and helped those that became mothers, as they did not have other family networks in Oranjemund. They also gave them financial education, among other forms of assistance offered. These women became a close-knit unit, as their children became friends as well – a relationship network that continues to this day, even after they have left Oranjemund, the research participants shared.

32 Meme Justina Auala, Oniipa, April 2021, interview done by Martha Akawa and Romie Nghitevelekwa.

33 Meme Tshoopara, Windhoek, February 2020, interview done by Martha Akawa and Romie Nghitevelekwa.

34 From the late 1980s, permanent workers had a choice to get a domestic worker assigned to them, or they could opt for a domestic workers' allowance and employ their own. They were then at liberty to employ either men or women. These domestic workers had to therefore be approved by the mine to enter Oranjemund and be linked to a permanent worker to be there. They were issued with permits with expiry dates, and if the permanent worker or the domestic worker lost her/his job or the permit expired and was not renewed by the employer, the domestic worker had to leave immediately.

Meme Tshoopara became politically active as well, alongside many other women. Oranjemund had a strong South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) branch, including an arm of the SWAPO women council, within which Meme Tshoopara served as the Secretary for Information. Despite the initial tension between the Black residents and the contract workers, they managed to convince them that they had to unite. Unlike other parts of the country, Oranjemund was a safer place to practise politics – as a closed town, they were safe from the state police and army harassments. As the political pressure mounted and with a strong trade union branch in Oranjemund, the mine allowed political activities to take place unhindered.<sup>35</sup> Husbands were supportive of their wives' involvement as well, with the women travelling to nearby towns such as Luderitz to mobilise other women.<sup>36</sup>

### Living in Oranjemund without being connected to a man

In 1982, Meme Tshoopara's husband, Sebastian, passed away. At the time, when a man died or lost his job, the woman and her children were no longer allowed to stay in Oranjemund. It did not matter whether the woman was Black or white; employed or unemployed; or whether the children were in school or not – all had to leave. The determining factor was a man's job, and a woman could not remain in Oranjemund without being linked to a man. CDM's policy was that each house was linked to a specific position or job description on the mine, and not to a person, and as a result that particular house would be reallocated to the replacement worker. Exception could only be made if the husband died, and on condition that there was accommodation available.<sup>37</sup>

However, after Meme Tshoopara's husband's funeral in the north, the mining administration called her back to Oranjemund with her children. She recalls this saying:

When I came back, everything was changed to my name. I was the first woman to do that. The winds of change for independence [had] begun to blow. I was the first to be given that opportunity<sup>38</sup>.

Meme Tshoopara made history by becoming the first Black woman to stay in Oranjemund after the death of her husband. She could not explain with certainty why she was called back and assumes that this was due to the winds of change that were sweeping across the country at the time. Other people interviewed attribute her stay to the significant work she was doing in the health sector, especially in the 1980s when AIDS was becoming prevalent. She remembers:

35 The trade union in Namibia is strongly affiliated to SWAPO.

36 Politics is traditionally a men's space. The tone given by women interviewed who were involved in politics tilts towards acknowledging that their husbands allowed and supported their political involvement.

37 <http://www.oranjemundonline.com>, Accessed 26 March 2022.

38 Anne Tshoopara, Windhoek, February 2020, interview done by Martha Akawa and Romie Nghitevelekwa.

We stayed with my children in Oranjemund: Leevi, Ndilimeke and Chops. They continued going to school. I did not stop with my sewing business. I was working and sewing at the same time.<sup>39</sup>

Although CDM was providing all the necessities, Meme Tshoopara found it tough to cope with three children. Consequently, she deemed it necessary to supplement her salary to best provide for her children.

## Conclusion

Despite all these advantages, Oranjemund was a place of colonial labour exploitation. As the participants in this research shared, diamonds were valued more than a human life (*Okawe oke vule omwenyo gwomuntu*). Women that were in the nursing profession experienced this firsthand. A former nurse cited incidents where a patient who was taken to the hospital with illness was first checked by the Diamond Detective security, to determine whether they were smuggling diamonds in their bodies – this included bowel emptying to check stools. Irrespective of how serious their conditions were, nurses were not allowed to assist patients until the inspection was completed. These types of strict and inhumane searches also applied to corpses.

The colonial economy was based on exploiting the workers by buying cheap labour to maximise profit. This was equally embedded in the racialised apartheid system that was the order of the day. The political climate in the country in the 1970s was a time of (some) transitions. The mine came to terms with the fact that the workers were a force to reckon with and were ready to negotiate. While negotiations were not always successful, a Department of Personnel Office was formed to deal with industrial relations issues.

It was within this framework, which allowed for the creation of a small Black middle class and the concept of *okugwayekwa omahoka komilungu*,<sup>40</sup> that Black women settled in Oranjemund.

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40 The literal translation here is: 'Smearing lips with gravy without giving real meat' – referring to promising little things without having to really give something of substance.

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## Anne-Marie IssaBrown Garises: Curator of the Keetmanshoop Museum

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‘There are a lot of stories of the snake that lives in the !Garib river’ says Issa Garises, admitting that even she is sometimes a bit scared when old people come to her museum to tell new versions of the famous folk tale. ‘The snake is safeguarding the diamonds. She constantly moved with the flow of the river,’ an elder told her. The story shows the mystical side of museums, something that is crucial for Garises. She holds a degree in Wildlife Management and Eco-Tourism from the University of Namibia and now works as a curator in the small municipal museum of Keetmanshoop, located in one of the oldest, still-standing buildings in southern Namibia: the mission church of 1894.

Garises says that she understands the urge for some museums to be moved from being within the walls of colonial buildings. Nevertheless, she would not want to take the museum out of the old, mystic church. Rather she wants to re-interpret the narrative: filling up the colonial building with the stories and narratives of Nama people and their fight against colonial oppression. These stories, she says, are ‘enchancing the elderly, local people, who are often combining errands in town with a visit to the museum’. Together with these visitors, Garises changed the museum’s narrative from only glorifying the white history to including the history of the Nama. However, she also stresses that ‘we can’t have the history of the Nama without showing how the colonialist impacted on our history’.

‘What I would like to have, are more objects and artifacts from the Nama people’, explains Garises, so that ‘we can have the colonial and the Nama side, to tell good opposing and entangled stories.’ However, ‘many of our artifacts were looted, and even if we get them to Namibia, it will not be easy to get them to Keetmanshoop,’ as she says ‘often institutions do not trust regional heritage and cultural workers to safeguard artifacts’. To make up for the stolen artefacts, the museum tries to get objects from local people. Old people, in particular, often make donations when they give up their households and move to care homes.

In her daily work, Issa Garises is mostly concerned with three tasks. She is engaging with the Nama Traditional Leaders Association on creating awareness and lobbying for reparations for the genocide of 1904–1908. Secondly, she is inviting school classes from

the region and beyond to the museum – a task that is close to her heart: ‘School kids are always so excited, as it is often the first time they visit a museum.’ And finally, there are the international tourists. Tourists are the largest group of visitors, and often demanding. Garises jokes, that if you tell them the story about the snake, ‘they want to go to see and catch the snake immediately.’ To entertain and educate tourists, Garises sees the future rather in ‘cultural tourism’, where local people can present how they used to live and produce crafts that they can sell. This could also be done outside of the museums, in smaller towns or on lodges.

For the future, Garises hopes that there will be better education for curators and heritage workers, so that once artifacts get repatriated, they can take care of them in the region. Furthermore, she hopes that the ties over the river and the border to South Africa get closer, so that people from both countries can enjoy and present their shared culture. What is most important to her, however, is that people ‘make it a point to visit the museum.’

*Based on an interview done by Luregn Lenggenhager, 8 November 2021, Keetmanshoop*

# Contested Land, Water and Borders



# The Orange River Boundary and the Ongoing Border Dispute Between Namibia and South Africa

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Wanda Rutishauser

## Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the ongoing dispute between Namibia and South Africa over the position of their shared border along the Lower Orange River, which has been an important resource for animals and humans living in its proximity for millennia.<sup>1</sup> With a total length of 2,200 km, the Orange River is the longest river in South Africa, and its basin – which spreads out over Lesotho, South Africa, Botswana and Namibia – covers an astonishing area of 1,000,000 km<sup>2</sup>.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, the river is an indispensable source of water – especially in its lower section, which flows through desert landscapes with very little annual rainfall.<sup>3</sup>

Today, the Orange River forms part of several (inter-)national borders: between Lesotho and South Africa, between the Eastern Cape and the Free State, between the Free State and the Northern Cape, and between South Africa and Namibia. Prior to the formation of today's nation states, it had been (part of) the colonial borders between the Cape Colony and the Orange Free State, between German South West Africa and the Cape Colony, between German South West Africa and the Union of South Africa, between

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- 1 The Orange River – or *Oranjerivier* in Afrikaans – owes its name to Colonel Robert Gordon, who named it after the Dutch House of Oranje in 1779. Alternative names for the river are *Senqu River* in Lesotho, and *Grootrivier* (Afrikaans for 'great river') or *Gariep* (Afrikaans form of *!Garib*, the Khoekhoegowab word for 'river') in South Africa. Conley and van Niekerk 2000: p. 135; Raper et al. 2014: p. 147; Penn 1994: p. 93. Archaeological finds suggest that humans have been living and moving alongside the river, habituating in seasonal or (semi-)permanent settlements close to the riverbank for thousands of years. There are various petroglyphs along the lower Orange River dating back up to 10,000 years, presumably created by ancient San peoples. See Rudner and Rudner 1968; and Morris 2011.
  - 2 For a detailed description of the river see e.g., Kruchem 2012; for an early account of the lower Orange River see Cornell 1921.
  - 3 The average annual rainfall in southern Namibia ranges from <50 mm on the coast, 50–100 mm further inland and 100–150 mm in the south-eastern corner of Namibia. Suhling, Martens and Marais 2009: p. 290.

South West Africa and the Union of South Africa, and between South West Africa and the Republic of South Africa. And since before the arrival of European colonisers in the region, it has separated Little Namaqualand south of the river from Great Namaqualand north of the river.<sup>4</sup>

The exact position of the current border between South Africa and Namibia has been subject to ongoing discussions between the two states for decades. The last officially agreed upon position of the border, which is located at the northern bank of the river, was determined in the Anglo-German Treaty of 1890, an agreement between Great Britain and Germany resolving territorial claims between the two colonial powers in Africa (as well as Heligoland in the North Sea).<sup>5</sup> Despite several negotiations and alleged agreements between Namibia and South Africa, to officially move the border to the middle or *thalweg* of the river, the issue has not been resolved to date.<sup>6</sup>

### The Ambiguity of the Status Quo: Current Situation and Resultant Issues

The international disagreement on the actual position of the border between Namibia and South Africa has existed for more than 30 years. Whereas South Africa insists that the border is on the northern bank of the river, Namibia claims that it lies in the middle of the river. Although there have been several attempts to negotiate and settle the issue, no official agreement has been reached in the three decades since Namibia's independence in 1990. For Namibia, the issue remains as relevant today as it was when it was first brought up. For without a formal agreement on either a median line or *thalweg* boundary, Namibia is virtually deprived of independent access to and influence over the river and its water.

Although there are agreements that regulate and ensure Namibia's access to the river's water, giving Namibians permission to tap the river for irrigational purposes, they do not enjoy equal access to it.<sup>7</sup> The rights to harness the lower Orange River in its entirety lie solely with South Africa – for example, in regard to fishery or the navigation of vessels. Although it might seem that the Namibians are the only party to potentially profit from a renegotiated border agreement, it has been argued that dissolving the dispute would also be beneficial for South Africa. Anton Earle, Daniel Malzbender, Anthony Turton and Emmanuel Manzungu assert that the delineation of the border and resolution of the dispute would ultimately benefit both countries: 'Although South Africa has repeatedly stressed that it will not object to the use of Orange River water by Namibia

4 Penn 1995: p. 24

5 Also called 'the Heligoland-Zanzibar Treaty'. See e.g., Birken 1974; Akweenda 1997.

6 Maletsky 04.1999; Maletsky 07.1999; Meissner 2001: 35. The German term *thalweg* describes a line connecting the deepest points in the river course. Demhardt 1990: p. 357; Akweenda 1997: p. 55.

7 In 1993 it was determined that Namibia is allowed to use up to 0.5 km<sup>3</sup> of the river's water per year. National Planning Commission, 1993, Transitional National Development Plan 1991/92–1993/94. Windhoek. (As denoted in: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 1997, Irrigation Potential in Africa: A Basin Approach. FAO Water and Development Division: p. 77).

and although bilateral cooperation between the two countries is good, a solution to the border disagreement would be beneficial for joint basin management in the future.<sup>8</sup>

Regarding reparations, South Africa's refusal to move the border from the north bank to the middle of the river could be viewed as problematic. Considering the two countries' entangled histories, it seems reasonable for Namibia to expect a certain level of concession from their former occupying power. Irrespective of South Africa's own traumatising past, there is an argument to be made that even though Namibia has been independent for three decades, South Africa still occupies the superior position.<sup>9</sup> Namibia is still highly dependent on South Africa in many regards.<sup>10</sup> Chris Saunders argues that – although often portrayed differently to the public – the relationship between the two countries remains very unequal, with South Africa still being the 'regional hegemon' – both economically and in terms of population figures:

In every aspect except area...Namibia is a small state, with a total population that has always been smaller than that of Cape Town. South Africa's population is well over 20 times that of Namibia. South Africa has a far more developed civil society and many of its key institutions predate apartheid and therefore have a long history. Whereas Namibia has a relatively small economy, based mainly on mining, South Africa's economy – the most industrialised and diverse on the continent – is more than three times the size of the rest of the Southern African regional economies combined.<sup>11</sup>

In fact, South Africa's decision-making often affects Namibia directly. Regarding the Orange River, the Namibian population local to the Lower Orange River is highly dependent on South Africa's water management and allocation upstream. Through the construction of dams and reservoirs in the 1960s and 1970s, large quantities of water are held back in South Africa.<sup>12</sup> In addition to the impacts of climate change and illegal water drainage in the upper part of the river, this has at times led to the severe drying up of the Lower Orange River at certain sections.<sup>13</sup>

Overall, Namibia is excluded from any decision-making regarding the river. Even though there are international institutions and commissions responsible for managing the river and its basin, most notably the Orange-Senqu River Commission (ORASECOM), South Africa owns the biggest share of the river and its basin, and thus also holds the decision-making power. There have been several instances where Namibia has directly suffered from South Africa's decisions regarding the river. According to people living in Noordoewer, there have been urgent requests from the Namibian authorities to release

8 Earle et al. 2005: p. 26

9 It seems that because of South Africa's history, many historians tend not to regard South Africa as a colonial state. For more on this see the JSAS special issue: 'The South African Empire' (2015), *Journal of Southern African Studies* 41(3).

10 Perhaps one of the most notable and obvious examples is the linkage of the Namibian dollar to the South African rand. While it is possible to use both currencies interchangeably in Namibia, it is not possible to pay with Namibian dollars in South Africa.

11 Saunders 2016: p. 347–348

12 The largest of these schemes was the Orange River Development Project. See: Orange River Project 1968.

13 Cloete 2019; Demhardt 1990: p. 359.

parts of the water from the South African dam reservoirs prior to rainy season, in order to avoid severe flooding in the river's lower sections. However, these requests have been thoroughly ignored, which at several instances resulted in grave floods that destroyed houses, crops, and livelihoods – most recently in December 2021/January 2022 and in November/December 2022.<sup>14</sup> In recent years, plans to construct a dam about 6 km upstream of the Noordoewer–Vioolsdrift border have been developed.<sup>15</sup> The proposed water scheme would help regulate water flow and prevent droughts and floods in the lower section of the river, and is therefore highly anticipated by Namibian stakeholders.<sup>16</sup> However, South Africa has recently put a hold on the project and is considering abandoning the plans, claiming that the project would not be profitable enough. As Namibia cannot go forward with the project on its own, the dam will most likely never materialise.

Another aspect that appears to be of interest to both parties is mining. The Orange River Mouth is situated in a region rich in diamond deposits, both on- and offshore. On the Namibian side, this area lies in the Tsau ǁKhaeb (Sperrgebiet) National Park.<sup>17</sup> From 1930 until Namibia's independence in 1990, the mining rights in the Sperrgebiet were solely owned by CDM, a subsidiary of the De Beers Group.<sup>18</sup> In November 1994, the Namibian Government and the De Beers Centenary AG signed a co-ownership deal which transformed CDM into the 50/50 joint venture Namdeb Holdings (PTY) Ltd.<sup>19</sup> Namdeb operates in several mining areas along the Namibian coast and along the Orange River. As there are large diamond deposits in the sea around the Orange River Mouth, they are investing in offshore diamond mining through Debmarine Namibia, a subsidiary of Namdeb Holdings (PTY) Ltd. Since the location of the maritime border between Namibia and South Africa is dependent on the exact position of the border at the mouth, Namdeb – and the Namibian government – might benefit from an official relocation of the border line to the middle of the river. However, it is equally possible that they profit from the current ambiguity of the border position.<sup>20</sup>

The same seems to be the case for other companies operating alongside or on the river. For example, it is striking that there are several river-rafting and canoeing companies operating on the Namibian side of the river, which theoretically should not be possible if the border was on the Namibian bank. However, the companies work closely with the South African border posts. As long as they do not cross over to the South African

14 As the interviewees preferred to stay anonymous, I have only included their initials. A.T., Noordoewer, 09 November 2021, interview done by Wanda Rutishauser; Albertz 2022.

15 Cloete 2018

16 P.E. and K.C., Noordoewer, 10 November 2021, interview done by Wanda Rutishauser.

17 Also known as the Sperrgebiet or Diamond Area 1. It is a restricted territory proclaimed in 1911 by the Germans. The area stretches along the Namibian coast from latitude 26 degrees in the North to the Orange River in the South and extends up to 137 km inland. Corbett 1998: p.14.

18 Initially, there had been several mining companies operating in the region, which have then been consolidated by Ernest Oppenheimer into the Consolidated Diamond Mines of South West Africa (CDM) in 1920. De Beers bought CDM in 1930. Corbett 1989: p. 14.

19 Ndivanga 1994

20 As long as the exact maritime border is not demarcated, Debmarine could potentially also engage in offshore mining in the disputed area, which would be highly problematic if the border were to be unequivocally set at the Namibian bank line.

riverbank, they are allowed to run canoeing trips on the river and have been doing so since the mid-1990s.<sup>21</sup>

## Refiguring the Border Line: Official Negotiations Since the 1990s

During the run-up to Namibia's independence in 1990, the emerging government tried to renegotiate the position of the border. As a strategic move, the newly independent state anchored these territorial claims in its very foundation. The Constitution of the Republic of Namibia states that the Namibian–South African border runs in the middle of the river:

The national territory of Namibia shall consist of the whole of the territory recognised by the international community through the organs of the United Nations as Namibia, including the enclave, harbour and port of Walvis Bay, as well as the off-shore islands of Namibia, and *its southern boundary shall extend to the middle of the Orange River*.<sup>22</sup>

Interestingly, when the Namibian Constitution was written and adopted in early 1990, South Africa had not agreed to any of the suggested territorial changes. At the time, the relocation of the Orange River boundary seemed relatively trivial, compared to the question of Walvis Bay and the Penguin Islands. Walvis Bay is the only natural deep-water harbour along Namibia's coastline and as such has been of great interest and importance, particularly in regard to trade. Britain annexed the territory, as well as the so-called Penguin Islands (a group of small islands scattered along the Namibian coast) in 1878. By the time Germany established their colonial rule in German South West Africa, both Walvis Bay and the Penguin Islands had been incorporated into the British Cape Colony.<sup>23</sup> Germany formally agreed to these South African exclaves by signing the Anglo-German Agreement of 1890 – a decision they would later come to regret. Therefore, the claim anchored in the Namibian Constitution has never had any actual legal foundation. Nevertheless, it was a well-considered political move to raise international awareness and support for the Namibian claim. Sakeus Akweenda (1997) points out the significance of the fact that 'the southern boundary is the only line expressly identified by the Constitution'.<sup>24</sup>

In the early 1990s, the newly formed Namibian government tried to persuade South Africa into officially moving the border to the middle of the Orange River and handing over the exclaves Walvis Bay and the Penguin Islands. One of its main arguments was that it would not be reasonable to base the position of the boundary and control over Walvis Bay and the Penguin Islands on a colonial agreement between the two former colonial powers, Germany and Great Britain. After all, Namibia had been a South African man-

21 A.T., Noordoewer, 09 November 2021, interview done by Wanda Rutishauser; S.G., Noordoewer, 11 November 2021, interview done by Wanda Rutishauser.

22 Namibian Constitution 1990, art. 1 par. 4. Emphasis added.

23 See e.g., Griffiths 1994, and Evans 1990.

24 Akweenda 1997: p. 115

date and de facto colony for much longer than they had ever been under German occupation.<sup>25</sup>

There were several rounds of negotiations regarding Walvis Bay, the Penguin Islands, and the Orange River boundary.<sup>26</sup> It seems that South Africa was much more reluctant to give up their exclaves than to give into moving the border. Allegedly, South Africa agreed to move the border to the middle of the river in 1991, and a joint technical committee was established to work out the details of the new border.<sup>27</sup> At the time, South Africa still had high hopes of keeping their exclaves. Therefore, South Africa's move of seemingly agreeing to give in to Namibia's third territorial claim – the river boundary – might have been just that: a political move. And it seems that, at the time, people really believed that the issue had been resolved.

It was not until the early 2000s that the issue re-emerged in the public sphere. By the late 1990s, the joint technical committee appears to have been dissolved. When questioned by Christof Maletsky of the *Namibian*, Namibian Government officials explained that 'the delay [in resolving the border issue] could be attributed to the Kasikili border dispute with Botswana which was in the International Court of Justice at the Hague in February [1999]' and on which 'most of their energy had been spent [...] in recent years'.<sup>28</sup> What happened with the endeavours of the joint technical committee remains unclear. Presumably, South Africa no longer felt the obligation to go through with the project, after they handed over Walvis Bay and the Penguin Islands in 1994. This also marks the moment in time when South African apartheid officially ended, and the first independent elections were held. Given this, perhaps the issue of redefining the border was simply overlooked in the excitement of the moment. It seems highly improbable that the new South African government was less likely to agree on a fair borderline than the old one.

However, no formal agreement has been signed to date. In 2001, the South African administration reportedly declared that they had no intention of moving the border, by referring to the principle of *uti possidetis* with regard to African borders at the time of independence – as determined by a resolution of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1964.<sup>29</sup> The OAU resolution in question states that all member states 'pledge themselves to respect the borders existing on their achievement of national independence'.<sup>30</sup> When the OAU was replaced by the African Union (AU) in 2002, these principles were again adopted in its constitutive act.<sup>31</sup>

This sudden reluctance to move the border, after a decade of negotiations and joint work, took Namibia by surprise. There was a second round of negotiations in 2004 with a Namibian delegation led by Hidipo Hamutenya, then Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Hifikepunye Pohamba, then Minister of Land, Resettlement and Rehabilitation,

25 Barnard 1994: p. 127

26 See e.g., Evans 1993.

27 Namibia/South Africa: Joint Statement 17. May 1991. Retrieved from: PA-X, Peace Agreement Access Tool [www.peaceagreements.org](http://www.peaceagreements.org).

28 Maletsky 04.1999

29 Turton et al. 2004: p. 385

30 Organization of African Unity (OAU), AHG/Res. 16(I), 21 July 1964. Emphasis added.

31 Organization of African Unity (OAU), Constitutive Act of the African Union, 11. July 2000. Art. IV.

traveling to Cape Town in February 2004.<sup>32</sup> The South African delegation was led by Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, then Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka.<sup>33</sup> However, these negotiations also came to nothing. Legal practitioner Titus Ipumbu, who was part of the Namibian delegation, blames the ‘political atmosphere prior to and after the SWAPO elective Congress of 2004’, and the ‘failure of [the] leaders to take [their] legal advice seriously’, which according to him, ‘started at the level of national preparatory committee and continued in South Africa’.<sup>34</sup>

In recent months it has been revealed that the two governments are in fact still talking about the issue. According to *The Namibian* and the *Windhoek Observer*, a bi-lateral meeting between representatives of the two governments, including the presidents in office, Hage Geingob and Cyril Ramaphosa, was scheduled for 9 to 12 April 2022, but had then been postponed until further notice just days before it was supposed to take place.<sup>35</sup> It is unclear at this stage why the meeting has been delayed, but it has been speculated that it was due to the fact that Namibia wanted to include the Orange River border disagreement in the agenda, which South Africa was allegedly not on board with.<sup>36</sup> According to the Ministry of International Relations and Cooperation, new dates will be communicated to the public at a later stage. If anything, this at least shows that Namibia has not given up on trying to renegotiate the borderline and resolving the dispute. Whether South Africa is ever going to agree to move the border remains to be seen.

## The Making of a Boundary: Colonial Treaties and Proclamations

To understand how the north bank borderline came to be, it is essential to look at the origins of the border function of the river. There have, of course, been people living along the Orange River long before the arrival of the Europeans. In precolonial times, the Lower Orange River and its hinterland was primarily inhabited by Khoekhoen and San societies.<sup>37</sup> Even then, the river did not represent an insurmountable barrier, as people were able to cross it by swimming over or walking through the water at the river’s shallow sections.<sup>38</sup> Prior to the construction of bridges, there had been several pontoons and drifts through which people were able to cross over. The importance of these drifts is reflected in various place names in southern Africa, especially along the Orange River. Interestingly, three of the current crossings are situated at such places: the ferry at Sendelingsdrift, the bridge at Noordoewer-Vioolsdrift, and the bridge at Velloorsdrift-Onseepkans.<sup>39</sup> Even though the river has always been a geographic disjuncture, it has not always been a dividing line

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32 Ipumbu 2014

33 Ibid.

34 Ipumbu 2014; Titus Ipumbu, Windhoek, 07. November 2020.

35 Vatileni 2022; Windhoek Observer 2022.

36 Ibid.

37 For a detailed overview and history of the different groups and societies that inhabited the Lower Orange River in the 18<sup>th</sup> century see Penn 1995.

38 See Cornell 1921; Penn 1994 and Willcox 1986.

39 A popular story amongst local people explains that the name Vioolsdrift is derived from a certain ferryman who used to play the violin for the people crossing the river.

between two territories inhabited by two different groups, but rather functioned as the fertile centre of an otherwise arid landscape.<sup>40</sup>

The Lower Orange River had first been proclaimed a territorial boundary on 17 December 1847 by the Cape Colony, which was part of the British Empire.<sup>41</sup> Sir Harry Smith, the British Governor of the Cape of Good Hope, proclaimed the northern borders of the Cape Colony as commencing at:

the source of the Kraai River; thence down the left bank of the last mentioned River, where it falls into the Orange River, and thence, following the source of the last mentioned River [Orange], along its *left* bank to where it empties itself into the Atlantic Ocean.<sup>42</sup>

The wording ‘on the left bank’ puts the border on the southern bank of the river, thus leaving the river itself and the river islands unclaimed by European powers. At that time, the territory north of the river was not yet occupied by Europeans. But even after the 1847 proclamation of the border, the river did not constitute a closed frontier. As Penn notes, ‘the Orange, though in itself a physical boundary, did not so much constitute a frontier as fall within a frontier zone’.<sup>43</sup> The river boundary did not become an actual official border until four decades later, when the Germans established their colonial rule in present-day Namibia – at least not in the western understanding of what constitutes a border. When Imperial Germany proclaimed German South West Africa as a protectorate in 1884 – which was approved by the Berlin Conference in 1885 – they claimed the area north of the Orange River.

With the proclamation of the Cape Colony’s new neighbour, the two colonial powers felt it was necessary to negotiate the exact borderline between the two territories.<sup>44</sup> They appointed Mr Percy Anderson and Mr Friedrich Krauel to negotiate an agreement to settle various issues relating to the two colonial powers’ interests.<sup>45</sup> The resulting agreement – the Anglo-German Treaty – was signed by both parties on 1 July 1890 in Berlin. This treaty had a fundamental impact on German South West Africa, although its main objective was the exchange of influence over Heligoland and Zanzibar.<sup>46</sup> In regard to German South West Africa, the agreement resulted in the annexation of the so-called Caprivi Strip along the Zambezi River in the north-eastern part of the German territory, and in the demarcation of the southern border on the northern bank of the Orange River.<sup>47</sup>

In regard to Germany’s territories in South West Africa, the results of this treaty turned out to be unfavourable. On the one hand, they failed to get hold of Walvis Bay, the only natural harbour on the entire coastline of the territory, apart from Lüderitz Bay.

40 See Penn 1994; Willcox 1986.

41 Barnard 1994: p. 126

42 Taken from Akweenda 1997: pp. 104–105. Original: Colonial Office 48/279, p. 116; Cape Government Gazette No. 2195 of 23 December 1847. Emphasis added.

43 Penn 1994: p. 21

44 Barnard 1994: p. 126

45 Akweenda 1997: p. 74

46 Which is why the agreement is also known as the Heligoland-Zanzibar Treaty.

47 Nowadays known as the Okavango Strip.

And on the other hand, they agreed to move the Orange River border to the northern bank of the river, as determined in article 3 of the treaty:

In South West Africa the sphere in which the exercise of influence is reserved to Germany is bounded:

To the South at the mouth of the Orange River, and ascending the *North bank* of that river to the point of its intersection by the 20<sup>th</sup> degree of East longitude.<sup>48</sup>

According to Imre Demhardt, this was due to the German imperial negotiators' incompetence.<sup>49</sup> However, it seems highly unlikely that the Germans simply overlooked the fact that the border would be moved to the northern bank. Why they failed to negotiate the position of the border to the thalweg or median line of the river, as is custom for international river boundaries, remains a site of speculation.<sup>50</sup>

When looking at other river boundaries, there seem to be three ways to demarcate them: the border can either be one of the river banks, it can be the river itself, or fall somewhere in the middle of the river.<sup>51</sup> If the borderline is located within the river, there are typically three ways of determining said line: it can either be the median line, the thalweg, or any arbitrary line.<sup>52</sup> The median or middle line is defined as 'a line of equal distance from both banks at the same time of a water level that is determined by mutual consent'.<sup>53</sup> The water level is then usually defined as either the 'mean high water' or 'mean low water'.<sup>54</sup> The alternative option – the thalweg – has been the prominent choice since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>55</sup> It is defined as 'a connecting line between the deepest points in the main current of the river course. Normally applied to navigable rivers only and usually identical with the downstream navigation channel'.<sup>56</sup> Both options have their advantages and disadvantages. As explained by Kristian Gleditsch:

The thalweg will often pass very close to one of the banks, and a division by the middle line would in many places give one State the whole navigable channel, the other State a broad band of useless shallow waters or even sand banks.<sup>57</sup>

An additional problem that affects both models, is the question of how to deal with islands in the river. According to legal practitioner Sakeus Akweenda, the title to 'islands existing or arising within a river which forms an international boundary belongs to the sovereignty of the State on whose side of the thalweg or middle line they are located'.<sup>58</sup>

48 Anglo-German Treaty 1890: Art 3. Emphasis added.

49 Demhardt 1990: p. 358

50 On the different possibilities to demarcate an international river boundary see Boggs 1937; Biger 1988; and Donaldson 2011.

51 See also the similar border dispute between Malawi and Tanzania at Lake Malawi. E.g. Okumu 2010: p. 293–294.

52 Boggs 1937: p. 446

53 Demhardt 1990: p. 357

54 Boggs 1937: p. 451

55 Boggs 1937: p. 451; Gleditsch 1952: p. 18.

56 Demhardt 1990: p. 357

57 Gleditsch 1952: p. 18

58 Akweenda 1997: p. 60

Although both options have their pros and cons, one essential aspect is that in terms of general access to the river's water – e.g., for irrigational purposes – both options provide each riparian state with water rights.

Herein lies the main problem of the shore or bank line. It gives one state full water and mineral rights over the river, while leaving the other state with no access at all. Furthermore, as comprehensible as the term *bank line* sounds in theory, it is rather impractical in practice, as it does not specify which water mark is to be taken as the official line.<sup>59</sup> And therein begin the problems with the Orange River boundary, which from 1890 onwards was a bank line situated at the northern river bank, as agreed upon by Germany and Great Britain in the Anglo-German Treaty. This resulted in a somewhat absurd situation:

[The] arrangement was bound to confuse. While the British and German spheres of influence met each other on the north bank of the Orange River, the Cape boundary was still on the south bank because Proclamation 29 of 1847 had not been superseded. The stream itself, the stream channel and the islands were therefore within British territory but outside the Cape Colony.<sup>60</sup>

But this technicality did not prevent the Cape officials from claiming the territory, as they were the 'local custodians of British authority'.<sup>61</sup> According to Demhardt, the German colonial administration realised their mistake in signing off this border agreement a few years later. In 1906, the Germans tried to salvage at least minimal access to the river, by contesting the interpretation of the exact position of the borderline.<sup>62</sup> However, the British government disputed their attempts.

As Namibia was under South African occupation for the most part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Orange River boundary's border function was largely suspended, as South Africa tried to integrate South West Africa into their territory.<sup>63</sup> Thus, during the 75 years of South African occupation of present-day Namibia, there were no negotiations regarding the position of the border. Whereas during the 19<sup>th</sup> century many efforts were made to create and demarcate this border, for the most part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, South Africa rather tried to connect the two sides – for e.g., through the construction of bridges. All three bridges over the lower Orange River have been constructed during South African rule. The Ernest Oppenheimer Bridge, which connects Oranjemund and Alexander Bay at the river mouth, was built in 1951.<sup>64</sup> The bridge connecting Noordoewer and Vioolsdrift had been in planning since the 1920s and, after long discussions on whether the bridge should be built at its current location or rather at Goodhouse, it was eventually constructed in 1956.<sup>65</sup> The bridge connecting Onseepkans and Velloorsdrift was built in 1959, and the fourth and final river crossing between Namibia and South Africa, the ferry

59 Demhardt 1990: p. 357

60 Barnard 2000: p. 210

61 Ibid.

62 Demhardt 1990: p. 358

63 See Cockram 1976; and Silvester 2015.

64 Corbett 1989: p. 50

65 National Archives of Namibia (NAN), SWAA A376/26 vol. 2. Director of Public Works, Pretoria to the Secretary of South West Africa, Windhoek, 24 October 1956.

at Sendelingsdrift in the !Ai-!Ais/Richtersveld Transfrontier Park, officially started operations in 2007 at the site of an old pontoon that had last been in use in 1988.<sup>66</sup> Until Namibia's independence, the river crossings were completely open. The border posts were only erected in 1990 – first on the Namibian border and later also on the South African side. Before that, locals regularly crossed the river for work or grocery shopping, or to visit friends and family on the other side.<sup>67</sup> With the closing of the border and the establishment of border posts, daily border crossings decreased significantly.

## Conclusion

The Orange River – or any river for that matter – can both be understood as a dividing and uniting entity. On the one hand, it constitutes a distinct physical barrier, separating one shore from the other, and on the other hand it also represents a life-giving resource to all living organisms in its proximity. In a drought-stricken desert landscape such as the Lower Orange River region, it provides otherwise scarce grazing lands and water to the people who inhabit these spaces.

Although the Orange River might already have had a border-like function in certain parts of the river in precolonial times, it only became an actual demarcated frontier zone in 1847. Like most African borders, which have been drawn at random by European imperialists in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the current internationally recognised borderline traces back to an agreement negotiated by two foreign powers over a hundred and thirty years ago. The fact that there have been several occasions in which delegates from both sides met to renegotiate the position of the border, suggests that South Africa at least partly supports the validity of Namibia's claim. While it initially looked like the two parties came to an agreement in the late 1990s, the jointly established technical committee did not lead to any changes. To this day, it remains unclear why the issue has not yet been resolved. Perhaps, at this point, the issue is simply not pressing enough to either one or both parties. There could also be other undisclosed elements that factor into the negotiation. Another possibility is that perhaps the advantages of the ambiguity of the current situation outweigh the desire to resolve the issue. Whatever the underlying reasons, part of the river and its northern bank have been proclaimed official state territory by both Namibia and South Africa for the past thirty years.

It is, however, likely that the issue will become more pressing in the near future. With climate change and the severe impact of river floods and droughts along the Lower Orange River, at least partially caused by upstream water management, South Africa's absolute power of decision over the river has serious implications for the local Namibian population. This might be reflected in Namibia's current attempts to bring South Africa

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66 Cloete 2007

67 According to several locals in Noordoewer, the main grocery store used to be situated in Vioolsdrift on the South African side of the river – so they would do most of their everyday shopping there. With the closing of the border, that was suddenly no longer possible. M.C., Noordoewer, 10 November 2021, interview done by Wanda Rutishauser; I.A., Noordoewer, 10 November 2021, interview done by Wanda Rutishauser.

back to the negotiating table. Perhaps this time, over three decades into Namibia's independence, the two parties can finally come to an agreement and settle the dispute once and for all.

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# Contesting Control over the Namaqualand Landscape through Property

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*Kolosa Ntombini*

## Introduction

This chapter explores how different actors contested control over the Namaqualand portion of the !Garib area.<sup>1</sup> For an extended period, this area was encountered materially through the pastoral way of life of diverse local groups. Farming by trekboers brought some changes, but it is the exploitation of large mineral deposits – namely copper and later diamonds by settlers – that had the greatest effect on this area. While archaeological evidence shows that local African groups mined iron and copper for adornment, the scale of this mining was limited. Therefore, it was through the emergence of formal large-scale mining ventures that this area, which was previously seen as both geographically and economically peripheral, had the potential of being a lucrative site of wealth accumulation. As a result, for the colonial and later apartheid state<sup>2</sup>, securing control over this area became more important. This chapter explores how this was done by looking at three moments in the timeline of this area: namely, the copper boom in the 1850s, the discovery of diamonds in the 1920s, and the Richtersveld land restitution claim between 1998 and 2003. The copper boom and the discovery of diamonds are used as lenses to explore how the state used its hegemony over property to assert and instrumentalise control over land, while the land restitution claim offers a lens to explore how local African residents contested this control in the contemporary moment.

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- 1 I use the Khoekoegowab spelling of the !Garib / Orange River intentionally, to bring into view other narratives of this landscape that are embedded in its naming (see Lenggenhager and Ramutsindela, 2021: p. 4).
  - 2 For analytical purposes I separate these governing regimes of the state but there is an appreciation that they were not necessarily distinct. Indeed scholars (See Moon 2017, McCusker, Moseley and Ramutsindela 2016 and Ramutsindela 2017) argue that this separation was often superficial, as both these governing regimes were underpinned by segregationist principles.

## Contesting control over land through property

Property rights form the basis of everyday life by governing relationships between people and resources – in this case, land.<sup>3</sup> Because of their ubiquitous nature, the racial underpinnings of property rights are often understudied.<sup>4</sup> Critical scholars are increasingly addressing this, by drawing attention to how ideas of property were crucial in naturalising land dispossession during colonialism and remain integral in the continuation of racial property relations post-independence.<sup>5</sup> This chapter locates itself within the ambit of this critical scholarship on racialised property relations. In the case of the Richtersveld, mining played a central role in racialising property relations. This is because mining raised the issue of who may enter into lease agreements with mining companies and derive benefits in the form of rent or royalty payments. This question hinged on who exercises ownership rights over the land. It is the answering of this question that shaped the nature of property relations in this area and had an influence on how ideas of property became racialised. As such, this chapter argues that property was and remains a powerful tool for contesting and instrumentalising control over land. This is because property rationalises land dispossession through the law.<sup>6</sup> To advance this argument, the chapter traces the emergence of contestations over the control of land and minerals in not only the Richtersveld, but the broader Namaqualand area. Rather than being chronological, the chapter zooms in on specific moments in time when important legislative and policy changes occurred.

For the benefit of this discussion, the notion of ownership must be contextualised within broader ideas of property. Scholars have tried to come up with different models that best explain how property rights are expressed as ideas and are manifested in practice. The most popular of these is the ownership or 'Bundle of Rights' model which sees ownership of property as made of up three categories of rights, namely: the right to exclude, the right to transfer (i.e., alienate), and the right to possess and use.<sup>7</sup> Under this model the right of ownership represents an all-inclusive right that has subsets of other rights within it.<sup>8</sup>

## Setting the scene

On 14 October 2003, the Constitutional Court of South Africa delivered the landmark Richtersveld judgment. In this judgment, the court ruled that the Richtersveld community held ownership rights under customary law over a narrow piece of land stretching

3 MacPherson 1978; Hann 1998; Ramutsindela and Sinthumule 2017.

4 Bhandar 2018

5 Ramutsindela 2012: p. 753; Ngcukaitobi 2021: p. xi.

6 Blomley 2003: p. 133

7 Sprankling 2012: pp. 4–6

8 The ownership model has been extensively critiqued for its failure to account for the ways that states restrict people's power over the things, see Underkuffler 1990; Jacobs 1998; Alexander et al. 2008; Rosser 2013. At the same time, scholars concede that the ownership model remains a powerful determining force in both how property is understood and enacted.

for 120 km alongside the !Garib River (subject land), where diamonds have been exploited by the state since their discovery in the 1920s. More importantly, the court confirmed that these ownership rights included rights to the minerals and precious stones found on this land, thus entitling the community to be compensated for the minerals extracted since the 1920s. Following the judgment, the Richtersveld community entered negotiations with the state and Alexkor Limited – the state-owned enterprise in charge of diamond mining. The negotiations would culminate in the three parties signing a Deed of Settlement agreement four years later.<sup>9</sup>

Scholars and politicians alike agree that the court ruling was an astounding victory for the community. Not only did the apex court of the South African judicial system confirm that customary rights are in fact ownership rights, thereby challenging 200 years of mineral law premised on racialised property rights, but the judges also unpacked the contradictions between state legislation and the actions of colonial and apartheid government officials. Thus, through this judgement the Richtersveld community successfully challenged the state's historical control over this land. As mentioned previously, the chapter is not chronological and for the most part the evidence of the court proceedings is used as a starting point. This is because the case progressed through three layers of the court: the High Court, the Supreme Court of Appeals, and the Constitutional Court, thus providing a set of undisputed facts from which to draw analyses. For the arguments from the court proceedings to make sense, it is useful to summarise the Richtersveld and broader Namaqualand context in terms of mining.

## The Copper Boom: contesting control through mineral leases

While there is a long history of mineral exploration in Namaqualand, it was only in the later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that large-scale mining took place.<sup>10</sup> The high transport costs, due to the isolated nature of the area, made mining ventures unprofitable.<sup>11</sup> A breakthrough happened when a narrow-gauge rail line from O'kiep to Port Nolloth was constructed in 1871. Following its construction, copper exports grew significantly.<sup>12</sup> With the growing copper mining industry in the area, there were increased conflicts between local people and the mining companies.<sup>13</sup> I focus on how these conflicts intensified post-1847 for two reasons. First, the region was now under state control, following annexation by the British Cape Colony in 1847; secondly, this period also coincided with the

9 As part of the Deed of Settlement agreement, the Richtersveld community received 190 million ZAR in extraordinary compensation for the diamonds extracted since 1920, various marine and agricultural assets, and a 49% share in the Pooling and Sharing Joint Venture. This joint entity, consisting of Alexkor Limited and the newly established Richtersveld Mining Company, would conduct the mining post land restitution. While this was an enormous victory at the time (in 2007), a closer analysis of this agreement casts doubt – see Ntombini and Ramutsindela (forthcoming).

10 Mutemeri and Peterson 2002: p. 291; Ashton 2018: pp. 150–153.

11 Bregman 2010: p. 30

12 Smalberger 1969

13 Bregman 2010; Ashton 2018.

copper mining boom. The copper boom brought about the question of property through the issue of mining leases. Since mining companies did not know which land would have the greatest amount and quality of copper deposits, they tried to secure leases for large areas of land.<sup>14</sup> For the local people, it meant even more encroachment on their land, which was already under threat from the increased numbers of settlers in the area. The Cape Colony government, as the state, had the responsibility of mediating the concerns of the mining companies and the local African residents, its subjects. At the same time, the state was in the process of defining what its view was on the property rights of the people in the territories it had annexed.

This was particularly so in the context of the north-western frontier which, for the most part, had been undisrupted by the extension of the Cape Colony border. The cosmopolitan nature of the local population profoundly influenced the social, political, and economic character of the region.<sup>15</sup> In some cases, owing to their European ancestry, some individuals amassed significant wealth enabling them to access land.<sup>16</sup> In other cases, local African chiefs secured land grants under the quitrent system – thus enabling them to continue to assert some control over their land.<sup>17</sup> It is not within the scope of this chapter to discuss the intricacies of these arrangements on the ground, however, scholars point out that this period was marked by fluidity and complex power relations regarding land ownership.<sup>18</sup> For the moment, I focus on the legal implications of the annexation. It appears that the Cape Colony government, at this stage, was inclined to protect the land rights of local African residents. This is evident from Section 3 of Ordinance 50 of 1828, which was still in place post-1847:

And whereas doubts have arisen as to the competency of Hottentots and other free Persons of colour to purchase or possess land in this Colony: Be it therefore enacted and declared, That all Grants, Purchases, and Transfers of Land or other Property whatsoever, heretofore made to, or by any Hottentot or other free Person of colour, are and shall be, and the same are hereby declared to be of full force and effect, and that it is, and shall and may be lawful for any Hottentot or other free Person of colour, born, or having obtained Deeds of Burghership in this Colony, to obtain and possess by Grant, Purchase, or other lawful means, any Land and Property therein – any Law, custom, or usage to the contrary notwithstanding.

The Ordinance was significant for two reasons. First, it showed that there was no intention of extinguishing the surface land rights of the people in Namaqualand following annexation; and second, there was equality between local African residents and British subjects concerning the purchase and possession of land in the Cape Colony.<sup>19</sup> As such, in the

14 Bregman 2010: p. 64

15 Penn 2005: p.164; Sharp and West, 1984: p.4.

16 Legassick 2016; Lenggenhager and Ramutsindela 2021: p. 4

17 See Sharp and West 1984: p. 5

18 See Sharp and West 1984; Penn 1995; Legassick 2010; Legassick 2016.

19 South African mining law routinely reserved mineral rights for the Crown/state (see Mostert, 2012). For example, the Mission Stations and Communal Reserves Act No. 29 of 1909, part II, section 25, explicitly prohibited local African people from exercising rights to the minerals and precious stones. Be that as it may, when mining occurred the surface land rights holders

period between 1856 and 1910, there is evidence of various groups<sup>20</sup> entering into mineral lease agreements with mining companies – with the assistance of missionaries.<sup>21</sup> While groups granted mineral leases to mining companies, they did not have secure rights over the lands in question. At the time, the practice was for the Cape Colony government to grant Tickets of Occupation to local African groups, which defined the land which the group beneficially occupied and to a certain extent endorsed their claim to the land.<sup>22</sup> With the help of the missionaries stationed at various regions in Namaqualand, local African groups enquired about their rights over the land and the possibilities of being granted Tickets of Occupation. However, the Cape Colony government remained reluctant to do so for specific mission stations.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, the Cape Colony government, through Colonial Secretary John Montagu, assured these mission stations that the Crown did not intend to disturb their occupancy of the area.<sup>24</sup> But the lack of written documentation from the government confirming their land rights meant that their rights could be rendered invalid at any moment.

This happened as mining prospecting ventures showed increased promise. The colonial state progressively began to override agreements between mining companies and the local African groups. The colonial government's decision to override lease agreements is well discussed by scholars studying this region for its implications for land dispossession, but I argue that it also reveals important insights about the evolution of conceptions of property in the region.<sup>25</sup> To illustrate this, it is useful to analyse each party's actions. The confirmation from the government that their occupation of the land would be protected was reason enough for the local African residents to believe that their land rights – which they interpreted as ownership rights – were secured and protected by the Cape Colony government. As such, leasing the land was an assertion of their ownership rights. From the government's perspective, this was not the case. While the government

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were entitled to be compensated for the loss of surface rights to make way for mining, and this is where recognition of ownership was important.

- 20 Some of these groups were made up of individual persons who acquired wealth owing to their ancestry and banded together, often referred to as 'commandos', see Penn 2005. Others were groups made up of a 'tribe', under the leadership of a Captain and *Raad* (executive council) that lived on or in the vicinity of a mission station, see Richtersveld and Others v Alexkor Limited and Another 2001. Scholars note the difficulty of labelling groupings in the Namaqualand context, because labelling and/or identification was often time and context-specific. See Lenggenhager and Ramutsindela 2021.
- 21 Alexkor Ltd and Another v Richtersveld Community and Others 2003
- 22 For example, Bregman 2010: p. 48 commenting on the Ticket of Occupation granted in 1843 to the Komaggas community, which is part of Namaqualand, writes: 'A Ticket of Occupation was drawn up which meant that this land was theirs indefinitely. However, it did not mean that they *owned* the land but merely had the right to be on it. It would remain the property of the government which would hold the land in trust for the community. For people at Komaggas this must have been a wonderful moment – for the first time they had some form of assurance that their lands would be safeguarded against further imposition.... The major issue would arise in the later years was of ownership versus occupation'.
- 23 Smalberger 1969: p. 64
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 See Smalberger 1969; Bregman 2010: p. 68; Ashton 2018: p. 154.

was willing to recognise that local African people had use and occupation rights, it was not willing to recognise their ownership rights. This is because recognition of ownership rights would have had implications for mining. It would mean that it that local African people were well within their right to enter into lease agreements with mining companies. The government was able to present its interpretation because no Ticket of Occupation to the land had been granted, thus no written and legally binding document outlined what rights to the land were recognised and what rights were not.<sup>26</sup>

The presence of valuable resources in colonies has long been acknowledged as playing a critical role in the evolution and sedimentation of racialised ideas of property.<sup>27</sup> This is particularly so in the context of settler exploration of the rich mineral deposits in South Africa, which played a major role in the country's economic development.<sup>28</sup> While the Cape Colony government initially seemed inclined to respect the land rights of local African groups, as soon as the wealth accumulation potential of the region changed, so did the government's position change. Through the Tickets of Occupation, the state successfully contested control over strategic portions of land in this region. While the copper boom lasted briefly, this successful contestation of the mineral rights would prove useful in entrenching control over the area once diamonds were discovered in the 1920s.

## The Richtersveld struggle for a Ticket of Occupation

To further highlight the role of Tickets of Occupations as tools in instrumentalising the state's control over this landscape, it is worth turning to the Richtersveld as a case study. The Richtersveld offers an important site to explore how the presence of diamonds entrenched state control over minerals. This is because while the Cape Colony government granted Tickets of Occupations to the surrounding mission stations between 1843 and 1925, it remained reluctant to do so for the Richtersveld.<sup>29</sup> I argue that the mineral potential in the form of diamonds played a role in the state's reluctance.

The Richtersveld area is made up of four major settlements, namely: Eksteenfontein, Lekkersing, Kuboes and Sanddrift located in the north-western part of the Northern Cape Province in South Africa (Figure 1). Located south of the !Garib River, the Richtersveld forms part of what was previously referred to as Little Namaqualand.<sup>30</sup> Today the Richtersveld community is diverse; with people of varying ancestry.<sup>31</sup> However, a core part of the population is regarded as descendants of the Hobesen tribe, who were under the leadership of Captain Kupido Witbooi. Organisationally, the Hobesen consisted of several clans, each governed by a chief, who came together under the authority of a Captain and a *Raad* (*Executive Council*) consisting of members from the constituent clans. From the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Witbooi claimed most of Little

26 Richtersveld and Others v Alexkor Limited and Another 2001

27 Bhandar 2018

28 Ashton 2018: p. 152

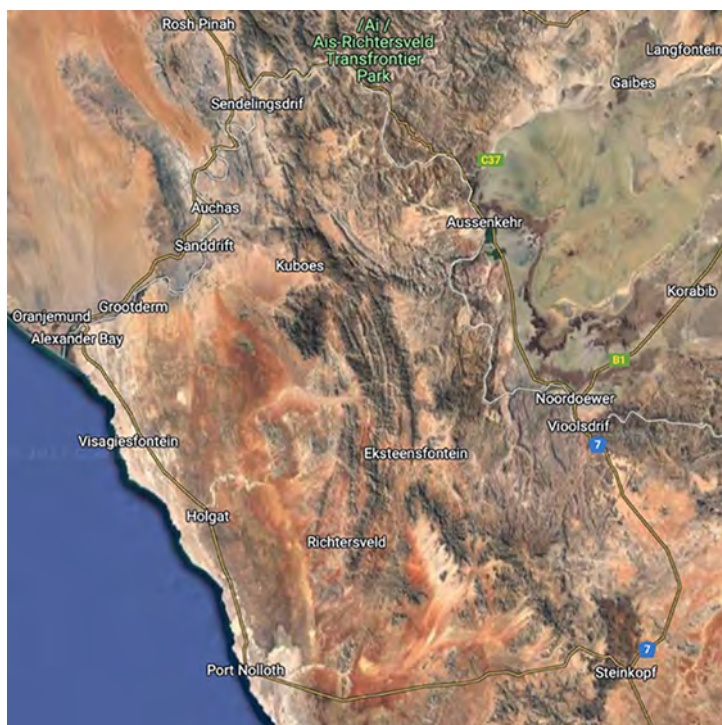
29 Smith 1996: p. 3

30 Boonzaier 1996: p. 308; Richtersveld Community and Others v Alexkor Limited and Another 2001: pp. 12–13.

31 Sharp and West 1984: p. 8

Namaqualand as his territory to govern. Given that the land was vast, Witbooi divided the territory into three sections and appointed two assistant Captains to assist him. The eastern section was governed by Witbooi, while the central section was governed by Abraham Vigiland and the western section was governed by Paul (*Bierkaptien*) Links. It is this western section that was later named the Richtersveld, and today the residents refer to themselves as Richtersvelders.<sup>32</sup> The colonial history of the Richtersveld can be traced to 1844, when the Rhenish Missionary Society established a mission station – subordinate to the Steinkopf as the principal mission station.<sup>33</sup> The mission station drew more people into the area, seeking refuge from settlers further south. This led to the formation of the first Richtersveld settlement, Kuboes, and over time the three remaining settlements were established.<sup>34</sup>

*Fig. 1: The location of the Richtersveld towns. (Source: <https://www.google.com/maps>). The settlement of Lekkering is indicated as 'Richtersveld' on this map.*



32 Richtersveld Community and Others v Alexkor Limited and Another 2003: p. 17; Community member, Kuboes, 20 July 2018, interview done by Kolosa Ntombini.

33 Richtersveld and Others v Alexkor Ltd and Another 2003: p. 18

34 South African History Online, <https://www.sahistory.org.za/place/kuboes-northern-cape>, (accessed 18 April 2021).

Between 1898 and 1930 there were multiple attempts by the *Raad*<sup>35</sup> to have their legal rights over the land secured through a Ticket of Occupation, but with limited success. Interestingly, the views of the government officials involved differed. In 1898, a Mr Moffat from the Native Affairs Office in Cape Town conceded, in a letter to the Superintendent of the Native Affairs, that while there was no Ticket of Occupation, the Richtersvelders could probably prove their claim to share in the land under the condition of continuous occupation since 1847.<sup>36</sup> In cases where local African communities had no Ticket of Occupation, continuous occupation of land over a long period was used to prove a claim to the land – meaning that colonial government could not ignore the Richtersvelders' claim.<sup>37</sup> In 1890, the Second Assistant Surveyor-General, Mr Melvill indicated that the amount of land that the Richtersvelders wanted to claim was too large – arguing that the government would not allow the community to occupy a land so vast.<sup>38</sup> Due to their semi-nomadic lifestyle, the land the Richtersvelders claimed was approximately 600,000 hectares.<sup>39</sup> Melvill also presented a report on the lands occupied by local African residents and missionary societies in Namaqualand, where he suggested that the land earmarked for the Richtersvelders be reduced to approximately 300,000 hectares.<sup>40</sup>

The Richtersvelders objected to Melvill's proposal, and he promised to take up this objection with the government. Melvill failed to do because on 3 August 1909, Reverend Kling wrote to the Colonial Minister of Agriculture referring to this matter and indicated that the community had not received any communication from the colonial government in the 19 years that had passed.<sup>41</sup> On 27 August 1909, Mr A.H. Cornish-Bowden responded to Kling's letter and reiterated the colonial government's position of having no intention of depriving the community of their land. He went on to say:

... and in order to allay any anxiety which you and your people may entertain, I may state that it is proposed at the forthcoming session of Parliament to seek sanction to the formal reservation, by means of a Ticket of Occupation, of the area indicated by the figure bordered blue on the plan attached to Mr Melvill's Report of 1890, though of course there is no compulsion on the Government to reserve the whole of the area so defined...<sup>42</sup>

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- 35 As missionary influence grew in the area, there was a change in the governance. Consequently, by 1909 a missionary official, Reverend H Kling, was now the chairman of the *Raads* of the Steinkopf, Richtersveld and Kalkfontein communities, see Richtersveld and Others v Alexkor Limited and Another 2003: pp. 69–70.
- 36 Richtersveld Community and Others v Alexkor Limited and Another 2003: p. 69
- 37 See Van Breda and Others v Jacobs and Others 1921 AD 30 which explains the requirements of English and Roman-Dutch Law – the two legal systems in place at the time in the Cape Colony – to prove a right under customary law, which entitles communities to exclusive occupation and use over land in the same way as a right of ownership under common law.
- 38 Richtersveld Community and Others v Alexkor Limited and Another 2001: p. 19
- 39 Ibid.: p. 19; Hendricks 2004.
- 40 Richtersveld Community and Others v Alexkor Limited and Another 2001: pp. 13–14
- 41 Richtersveld Community and Others v Alexkor Limited and Another 2003: pp. 69–70
- 42 Ibid.: pp. 71–72

It appears that Cornish-Bowden's assurance that the matter would be dealt in the coming session of Parliament did not come to fruition. It was only 21 years later, in February 1930, that the government issued a Certificate of Reservation<sup>43</sup> for the Richtersveld Reserve, as per section 6 of the Crown Lands Disposal Act No. 15 of 1887.<sup>44</sup> From the record of this select communication between the various government departments and the Richtersvelders, three things are striking. First, legally there was no reason not to grant the Richtersveld people a Ticket of Occupation. Second, the government was delaying giving the Richtersvelders a definitive answer. This is particularly so in the period between 1909 and 1930, in which – as I will show below – important shifts happened that altered the government's position. Third, when the Ticket of Occupation was eventually granted, it was for 300,000 hectares as per Melvill's recommendation, meaning that the Richtersvelders only had half of the land they originally occupied. I argue that the discovery of diamonds played a key role in these changes.

### Discovery of diamonds: entrenching state control

Diamonds were first found in the Namaqualand region, around Kleinsee, in 1925; and then a few years later at the mouth of the !Garib River north of Port Nolloth, where a rich deposit was discovered.<sup>45</sup> Again, I focus on what the discovery of the diamonds did at a legal and political level rather than narrating what occurred on the ground.<sup>46</sup> In the period between 1918 and 1930, there was a distinct change in the tone of the communication between the different government officials. It is important to caveat my analysis of this period by acknowledging the political developments at the national level. In 1910, the Union of South Africa was established which amalgamated the former British Colonies and Afrikaner Republics. Thus, there was a change from a British colonial government to a segregation government which influenced shifts in land policy.<sup>47</sup>

From about 1920, officials in the Ministry of Land Affairs repeatedly inquired with the officials in the Department of Justice and state legal counsel about the legal status of the Richtersveld. In a letter to the Springbok Magistrate dated 18 April 1920, the Minister of Lands wrote the following:

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43 The terms, *Certificate of Reservation* and *Ticket of Occupation*, were used interchangeably in the court documents suggesting that they had the same legal implication.

44 Richtersveld and Others v Alexkor Limited and Another 2003: p. 4

45 Ashton 2018: p. 156

46 Following the discovery of diamonds in these key sites, the state established the State Alluvial Diggings (SAD) by proclamation in 1928 to conduct the mining. The SAD fenced off previously public areas, thus preventing the Richtersvelders from accessing what was their commonage. 61 years later, in 1989, the SAD was transformed into the Alexander Bay Development Corporation. Three years later, in 1992, it was incorporated into a public company, Alexkor Limited.

47 See Ntombini 2021: pp. 67–70; 72–73; 80–90; where I trace the development of land policy showing the shifts from more liberal politics, as espoused by the Cape Colony government, to the harsher Afrikaner position of limiting African people's land rights in the drafting of the Natives Land Act of 1913 and the Natives Trusts and Land Act of 1936. See also McCusker, Moseley and Ramutsindela 2016.

...it is extremely difficult to furnish you with definite information as to the extent and limits of that part of the Richtersveld in regard to which the Government would be prepared to recognise the existence of definite claims to ownership or even residential or surface rights by the so-called Bastards attached to the Richtersveld mission and the Hottentots...under Headman Swartboo Links...

...in regard to Richtersveld the Government's attitude has been an uncertain one so far, inasmuch[sic] as that, although it has undoubtedly been taken for granted that both the Bastards and the Hottentots possess certain surface rights of user and residence, a claim, that they should be recognised as actual owners of the soil, had never been admitted, ...while you should do nothing which would be tantamount to a recognition of any claim on the part of the Bastards and Hottentots to ownership of the Richtersveld, no steps can be taken to interfere when white farmers are charged grazing fees by the Bastards or Hottentots; these people undoubtedly have certain grazing rights in the Richtersveld and, if outsiders desire to participate in the use of the grazing, the payment of a remuneration therefor[sic] seems reasonable, though the practice should not receive your official sanction.<sup>48</sup>

Furthermore, in a report to Parliament in February 1921, the Controller and Auditor General to Parliament referred to a warning by the Secretary of Justice – which indicated that the segregation government could lose control over the Richtersveld by prescription, since it could not be disputed that the Richtersvelders had occupied the land for more than 80 years following annexation. The Controller noted that while this warning from the Department of Justice had prompted suggestions to make legislative changes to prevent this, those suggestions had not been implemented. The report concluded that, 'As rents are at present being collected from Europeans for grazing in the Richtersveld by one Paul Links, a coloured man, it is clearly indicated that rights of ownership are being exercised by the inhabitants.'<sup>49</sup> This extract seems to affirm the government's acceptance of the Richtersvelders' ownership rights. Yet on 6 March 1925, the Secretary of Lands wrote a letter to the Secretary of Justice seeking an opinion on: 'the extent of the rights which the coloured community can claim by virtue of their long possession [of the Richtersveld]'. The solicited opinion was received on 11 April 1925, which confirmed that the Richtersvelders – through their *Raad* – were exercising control over the land. Reference was made to various leases being granted to outsiders as proof of this.<sup>50</sup>

At all stages the government had enough evidence that showed that the Richtersvelders exercised ownership rights over their land. Therefore, the government needed to find another avenue to limit the Richtersvelders' rights. The stalling in granting the Ticket must be viewed in that light. South African mineral legalisation, while complex and with many exceptions, tends to reserve mineral wealth in favour of the state. However, when mining occurs, the holder of the surface land rights is entitled to be compensated for the loss of the surface rights to make way for mining.<sup>51</sup> This was the case for areas where

48 Richtersveld Community and Others v Alexkor Limited and Another 2001: p. 20

49 Richtersveld and Others v Alexkor Limited and Another 2003: p. 77

50 Ibid.: p. 73

51 Mostert 2012

a Ticket of Occupation was granted.<sup>52</sup> While the compensation that the communities would have received might have been minimal, it was still granted. By refusing to grant the Richtersveld community a Ticket of Occupation, the government ensured that the community legally exercised no surface rights. Consequently, they would not be entitled to be consulted to make way for mining nor to receive any compensation.

In thinking through the highly complex manner that the Richtersveld community lost control over land with mineral wealth, there is a tendency to focus on this period of the discovery of diamonds. This is because it was during this period where the state prevented access to land through the erection of fences and declaration of the State Alluvial Diggings. However, I argue that during this period, the state merely instrumentalised systems that had been placed much earlier, during the copper boom. The copper boom had given the state a glimpse of the mineral potential of the landscape, and while the boom was brief, it made the state aware of the need to limit African people's property rights for two main reasons: firstly, to ensure that the state exercised ultimate authority over land, in case other minerals were discovered; and secondly, to limit any compensation payable to them. This is clearly shown in the case of the Richtersveld, whereby the government knew that the community had – since time immemorial – exercised rights to the land, but had successfully managed the community's ability to fully exercise this control through the Ticket of Occupation issue. Through a protracted, highly unequal, and often dubious negotiation process, the state ensured that it was able to entrench its control over the land to facilitate mining.

### **Richtersveld land restitution claim: disputing historical property relations**

The dawn of democracy, in 1994, offered an opportunity for the Richtersveld community to contest the dispossession of the past. This is because, through the land restitution arm of the South African national land reform programme, the community could have their land rights restored. Briefly, the land restitution arm is anchored on the Restitution of Land Rights Act No. 22 of 1994 (Restitution Act), which aims to restore land or provide alternative compensation to those who were disposed of their land, or rights to their land, because of racially discriminatory laws. The Act, amongst other things, set the parameters of what makes a land restitution claim valid. First, the dispossession of the right to land must have occurred after 19 June 1913 and must be because of racially discriminatory laws or practices; second, it must be presented by persons who were a community or part of a community at the time of dispossession or are the decedents of such persons; and lastly, the claim must be lodged no later than 31 December 1998.<sup>53</sup>

Hence the Richtersveld community lodged its land restitution claim in December 1998 at the Land Claims Court against Alexkor and the government. The community desired the court to grant the following order: first, to declare that the Richtersveld people hold public servitude over the subject land which entitles them to its exclusive beneficial occupation and use; and second, that the community was entitled to be compensated

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52 Bregman 2010

53 Restitution of Land Rights Act, No. 22 of 1994, Chapter 1, section 2(1).

for the diamonds extracted on this land since 1920.<sup>54</sup> The outcome of the case was delivered on 22 March 2001. The judge dismissed the community's claim on the basis that the community had failed to show that their dispossession was because of racially discriminatory laws and practices. The judge argued that following the British annexation of Namaqualand in 1847 the subject land had become Crown land and therefore any rights that the community had, were extinguished upon annexation. As such, the judge argued that any rights that the community lost after 1847 were not a result of past racially discriminatory laws meaning that the community's claim failed to meet the parameters of the Restitution Act.<sup>55</sup> The community appealed this judgement at the Supreme Court of Appeal (Supreme Court). In the judgement delivered on 24 March 2003, the Supreme Court ruled that the Land Claims Court erred in its finding that the Richtersveld community's customary rights to the subject had not survived British annexation. The judgement focused on a large range of evidence to reach this conclusion but for the purpose of this chapter, I focus on two: the government's communication with the missionaries and the law of continuity. These pieces of evidence speak to how, through the land restitution claim, the Richtersveld community successfully contested historical and problematic assumptions about property rights under customary law.

First, the judges focused on the communication between Reverend Brecher and the Cape Colony government referred to previously. They showed that while in the initial announcement of annexation the government had indicated that all rights of the indigenous people would be annulled, this was later retracted. Following inquiries by Brecher, the Cape Colony government indicated that it did not intend to interfere with the rights of the people in Namaqualand and went on to consult the traditional leaders before finalising plans for the annexation. This, the judges argued, was the proof that the Richtersvelders' rights to land survived annexation.<sup>56</sup> Second, the judges reminded the court of the law of continuity, which is an accepted view of Anglo-American jurisprudence, in the following extract, '...in the case of both conquest and cession, a mere change in sovereignty does not extinguish the private property rights of the inhabitants of a conquered territory which continue in force unless confiscated by an act of state'.<sup>57</sup> This, and the fact that Ordinance 50 of 1828 (referred to previously, which recognised the local residents of Namaqualand as subjects of the Crown) was not repealed by the annexation in 1847, was further proof that the Richtersvelders' property rights survived annexation. The judges went on to detail the political organisation of the Richtersveld, illustrating that the community recognised the value of the minerals on its land by citing instances where the Richtersvelders exercised ownership rights in relation to minerals. A key example used was an instance in 1910, when the Richtersvelders – through Reverend Kling (subordinate to Reverend Brecher) – granted a mineral lease to a prospector, Henry Wrensch, which also showed that the community viewed its land right as inclusive of the mineral wealth underneath the soil. As such, the judge ruled

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54 Richtersveld Community and Others v Alexkor Limited and Another 2001: p. 5

55 Ibid.: pp. 43–55

56 Richtersveld Community and Others v Alexkor Ltd and Another 2003

57 Richtersveld Community and Others v Alexkor Ltd and Another 2003: p. 53

that the community's customary rights to the subject land were 'akin' to rights under common law ownership.<sup>58</sup>

While ruling that the Richtersvelders right to land survived annexation was important, the issue of whether the dispossession happened after 1913 still needed to be answered – so that the Richtersvelders could be entitled to restitution. Regarding this, the judges traced the series of steps that the government undertook after the discovery of the diamonds in 1925. This included the erection of fences which blocked the communities access to the subject land, the establishment of the State Alluvial Diggings to conduct the mining, and so forth. Analysing the government's actions, the judges concluded that the Richtersvelders continued to exercise exclusive ownership of the subject land until the mid 1920s.<sup>59</sup> This date was significant because it placed the land claim within the time parameter set by the Restitution Act, which is that the dispossession must have happened after 19 June 1913.

Despite this success at the Supreme Court, Alexkor and the Government chose to appeal the judgement at the Constitutional Court. This appeal was unsuccessful, and in fact the Constitutional Court went a step further than the Supreme Court. It ruled that the Richtersveld community's customary rights to land were not just 'akin' to ownership rights, as the Supreme Court had ruled, but that they were in fact ownership rights not only over the land but minerals and precious stones underneath the land.<sup>60</sup> As such the community was entitled to be compensated for the minerals and precious stones that had been extracted from its land since dispossession.

This victory at the Constitutional Court was ground-breaking, not only for the people in the Richtersveld but also for the understanding of property rights on communal land in South Africa. For the people in the Richtersveld, it meant that Alexkor and the government had to negotiate with the community as 'equals' with recognised property rights with regards the future of the diamond mining.<sup>61</sup> At an ideological level the judgement was unusual and profound. In cases where communities have won a land restitution claim in an area where there is mining, only their surface rights are restored. This was the case in the famous Makuleke claim<sup>62</sup>, one of the first land restitution claims to be settled and which formed a key precedent on how to resolve land claims in conservation and mining areas.<sup>63</sup> Underlying this approach is the problematic view that in communal areas, land rights are limited to surface use and occupation rights, and that they do not amount to ownership rights under common law. Through this victory the Richtersvelders successfully thwarted this assumption. While there are varying views on the outcome of these negotiations<sup>64</sup>, the point to be made here is the power of the Richtersveld land restitution claim in re-contesting control over this important area.

58 Richtersveld Community and Others v Alexkor Ltd and Another 2003

59 Richtersveld Community and Others v Alexkor Ltd and Another 2003: p. 64

60 Alexkor Ltd and Another v Richtersveld Community and Others 2003

61 Former Community Leader, Alexander Bay, 18 November 2020, interview done by Kolosa Ntombini.

62 Makuleke Community Re: Pafuri area of Kruger National Park and Environs 1998.

63 Ramutsindela 2002: p. 15

64 See Ntombini and Ramutsindela (forthcoming).

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# Rethinking River Resilience: The Lower !Garib / Orange River

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Sindi-Leigh McBride

## Introduction

In January 2020, I visited the Lower Orange / !Garib River (LOR) in preparation for a workshop convened by the Space in Time research project; my interest piqued by Giorgio Miescher waxing lyrical about a proposed dam at the Vioolsdrift/Noordoewer border between South Africa and Namibia.<sup>1</sup> Swayed by his enthusiasm, I joined the intrepid researchers with my camera in tow, hoping to learn more about the motivations for and prospects of this new dam, one of many on the highly built-up river. On-site, my findings were disheartening. Not only has the planned dam been promised for decades with no sign of progress; but along both borders of the river, awareness of and interest in talking about the dam was disappointing. Additionally, the region around the border area has not been at the centre of much research, complicating the pursuit of a small-scale, historicised approach to the proposed dam without longer-term research. Despite this, my participation in the research trip and subsequent workshop proved invaluable for fostering a unique geographical imagination, germane to rethinking the concept of resilience.

This chapter begins with an explanation of how I use the notion of geographical imagination to first describe my analytical attention to spatiality; the space in question being the understudied LOR region. The river is used as an epistemic environment to situate a rethinking of the concept of resilience. This is done in two ways: first, the proposed dam is approached as both a material object and a boundary concept – something that creates discursive space for (re)interpretation, (re)negotiation, and consensus formation among different domains of discourse.<sup>2</sup> Second, a speculative methodology of ‘conceptual dislocation’ is employed to plunge the concept into the river.<sup>3</sup> In this way, resilience

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1 An initial draft of this chapter was discussed at the *Rethinking Resilience* workshop hosted by Rhodes University between 5–9 October 2020; and a longer version first published in *Social Dynamics* (2022, Vol 48, No. 1, 70–84).

2 Westerink et. al. 2017

3 Jue 2020

is both removed from its usual contexts and juxtaposed with a brief consideration of another critical concept that has influenced environmental studies/humanities over the last decades: the Anthropocene.

Interspersed throughout are photographs, intended as a companion visual essay. Schwartz argues that since ‘photographs participated in the construction of imaginative geographies,’ they also merit attention in historical geography because they support the ‘virtual witnessing’ of landscape across space and time.<sup>4</sup> This first photograph, for instance, was made on 24 January 2020, the final day of the Space in Time workshop in Oranjemund, during a tour of the river mouth and the nearby ruins of Hohenfels – a former police station during the time of the German colonial empire. Like the rest of the images, this photograph stands as a visual record of the LOR’s expansive history, one that can be measured against future changes but that also contributes to conveying ‘an overarching appreciation of the significance of space, place and landscape in the making and meaning of social and cultural life.’<sup>5</sup>

*Fig. 1: Lower Orange River, Oranjemund, (January 2020) 35mm film (Sindi-Leigh McBride private collection).*



### Imagining an imaginary dam

In his analysis of visualised imaginaries of the South African military campaign into German South West Africa in 1914/1915, Miescher discusses the term ‘geographical imagination’ by describing the shift within the discipline of geography from ‘the positivist con-

4 Schwartz 1996: 19

5 Harvey 1990: 418

ception of space as a given, i.e. as an unmediated empirical reality, towards the idea of space as a socially constructed and mediated category of thought.<sup>6</sup> He argues that this facilitates interdisciplinary dialogue by questioning 'how space is seen, perceived, visualized and mediated.'<sup>7</sup> Linton's research on 'modern water' is useful for connecting this geographical imagination to the LOR, offering a way of relating to water by tracing ways of knowing, accounting for, and representing water.<sup>8</sup> Leaning on these two concepts, I approach the LOR as socially constructed to expand how this understudied area is imagined and to juxtapose a historicised, concrete case of the proposed Noordoewer/Vioolsdrift dam within broader globalised discourses of resilience and the Anthropocene. After a brief description of the river and proposed dam, I contextualise both in terms of regional climate vulnerability before moving onto historical issues and opportunities to rethink resilience.

The LOR rises in the highlands of Lesotho and discharges in the Atlantic Ocean at Oranjemund, Namibia. South Africa and Namibia share a 600km border along the lower and western reaches of the river, which falls within the winter rainfall area of southern Africa, forming a floodplain of islands and sandbars, a linear oasis in the arid southern Namib desert. The sole perennial river in the region, the lower part of the river is flanked by especially torrid landscapes as it approaches the coast.<sup>9</sup> Historically, the flow regime of the river has been highly seasonal, characterised by strong variability: very low discharges during the dry winter months, high discharges and flood events during the wet summer months. Over time, this has been drastically changed by urban, industrial, agricultural and hydropower demands, and river regulation has resulted in an artificial hydrological regime characterised by both a lack of flow variability and decreased total water volume.<sup>10</sup> An environmental assessment study by Luger and Brown investigated measures to improve the management of the river system, noting that regulation of the LOR is largely determined by dams in South Africa, resulting in socio-economic and environmental inefficiencies and reduced water security for Namibia.<sup>11</sup> In the river's catchment area, South Africa has 25 dams compared to Namibia's five, each exceeding 12 million m<sup>3</sup> storage capacity. The proposed site for the planned dam is approximately 300 km upstream of the river estuary and about 6km downstream from the border post between Namibia (Noordoewer) and South Africa (Vioolsdrift).

Try to imagine the location: if you stand on the South African side of the river and enter an estimation of the proposed coordinates into Google Maps for a sense of where exactly this dam will be, it will lead you on a rugged dirt road. After passing through both large, lush commercial grape farms and tiny kraals marked by sticks stuck into the hard orange dirt, a rickety metal gate will appear, announcing open waterworks. Swiftly, you will find yourself stranded. This is where the satellite signal disappears and with it, any

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6 Miescher 2012: 24

7 Ibid.

8 Linton 2013

9 For more, see: 'Orange River Mouth'. *Ramsar Sites Information Service*. Accessed at: <https://rsis.amsar.org/ris/744> on 11 January 2021.

10 Putteman and Schepens 2010

11 Luger and Brown 2005

further indication of where this dam will be. However, if you walk a little bit further, the road starts to narrow, soon shouldered by a wide stretch of river and a slender artificial canal. To the left, the river is shallow but fast. To the right, the still canal is very deep. The incongruent symmetry of the channel, neatly corseted in concrete and interspersed with broad-crested weirs, against the craggy rocks with the Richtersveld mountains shimmering in the distance, is a stark reminder of the resilience of this body of water. This photograph of the site reveals no colour change, no difference in the eddies rippling along the river's surface. But below both the image and the water lurks the grim prospect of the planned dam altering its flow, like so many dams further up the river and further back in history.

*Fig. 2: Canal at proposed site of Noordoewer/Vioolsdrift dam (January 2020)  
35mm film (Sindi-Leigh McBride private collection).*



The dam was first recommended in 2004, either as a small balancing dam or a large storage dam just above Vioolsdrift, an outcome of the joint South African and Namibian Lower Orange River Management Study, better known as LORMS.<sup>12</sup> At the time of writing, in October 2021, the most recent publicly available information on the prospects of the dam comes from a presentation by the Department of Water and Sanitation (South Africa) to the African Union Development Agency (AUDU)-NEPAD in May 2021.<sup>13</sup> 69 transboundary infrastructure projects were adopted by Heads of State at the African Union Summit in February 2021, of which 16 are water infrastructure projects. The water sector meetings were intended to provide water sector project owners the opportunity to present on the status of project implementation and to discuss the level of support needed. A report from the meeting detailing the status of the project suggests that research into the construction of the dam is proceeding, with project needs specified as being further feasibility studies and funding for this. My visit to the LOR, a year and half before this meeting, coincided with the 2019 drought. Protracted dry spells are a common feature in the region, but this one was different. On both national and international news platforms, drought reports started as early as April 2019; by May 2019 the drought was declared a national emergency;<sup>14</sup> and by July 2019 it was being reported that 36% of the Namibian population were at risk of hunger and dependence on drought relief support systems.<sup>15</sup> Across the country, the drought was touted as the most severe in the last 90 years: rainfall in Windhoek was the lowest recorded since 1891.<sup>16</sup>

## Vulnerability to climate change

Like many areas characterised by extreme weather, ‘since eternal times this region is subject to the eroding might of the weather.’<sup>17</sup> Nakanyete et. al. explain that drought has been prevalent in the region for a long period of time and Namibia, known as the driest country in Sub-Saharan Africa, has been particularly hard hit, with variations in severity per season and variations in climatic conditions between regions.<sup>18</sup> Namibia is an example of

12 For more on water management at Noordoewer-Vioolsdrift see “South Africa and Namibia ensuring enough irrigation water together” The Water Wheel (pdf) November/ December 2014.

13 See: Report: Webinars on PIDA-PAP II Priority Water Projects (pdf), Held on 6 May and 18 May 2021. AUDU-NEPAD and Global Water Partnership Africa.

14 See: Tjitemisa, Kuzeeko. 2019. President declares state of emergency over drought. New Era, 7 May 2019. Accessed at: <https://neweralive.na/posts/president-declares-state-of-emergency-over-drought> on 11 January 2021.

15 See: Reliefweb (31 July 2019). Namibia: Vulnerability Assessment Committee Results 2019. Accessed at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/namibia/namibia-vulnerability-assessment-committee-results-2019> on 11 January 2021.

16 See: “Namibia’s devastating drought: Our strategy so far”, New Era, 07 June 2019. Accessed at: <https://neweralive.na/posts/namibias-devastating-drought-our-strategy-so-far> on 11 January 2021.

17 Demhardt 1990: p. 356

18 Nakanyete 2020

a country dominated by drylands, with intensifying aridity and drought conditions testament to rising temperatures and rainfall variability. As climate change intersects with and augments existing structural vulnerabilities, a corollary is that the natural characteristics of drylands, like those found in the Northern Cape and Namibia, further threaten vulnerable communities.

In the borderland region of the LOR – perhaps better described as the thirstlands – both South Africa and Namibia are haunted by severe poverty.<sup>19</sup> Spear et. al. show how vulnerability to climate change is exacerbated by underlying structural factors, including histories of inappropriate economic policies, gender disparities and colonisation, which have led to chronic poverty and inequality.<sup>20</sup> The authors explore the impacts of and responses to climate change in different economic sectors, social and ecological systems, and observe that the LOR is particularly water-stressed without climate change; with it, the situation is dire. Barnes et. al. confirm this by predicting that surface water flows in the south of the Orange River system will decline by up to 15% by 2080.<sup>21</sup> According to Turpie et. al., this situation will be further worsened by increased water demand from population growth, irrigation needs and urban centres struggling with heat stress.<sup>22</sup>

When viewed along a continuum of climate adaptation actions addressing root causes of climate vulnerability, reported responses to climate change in both South Africa and Namibia have been largely short-term responses to hazards posed by droughts, floods and sea-level rise, often focused on commercial agriculture and project-based, rather than focused on the system level.<sup>23</sup> For example, a report by the Bank of Namibia outlined opportunities for ensuring food security in the context of persistent drought conditions inhibiting agricultural practices. The report recommended rivers, boreholes and dams as water sources – despite these already being in use and failing during drought periods.<sup>24</sup> This suggests that the complex longer-term impacts of climate change are either not prioritised, or not well understood.

Nakanyete et. al. analyse secondary data from various existing publications to explore the causes and forecasting of the 2019 drought, chronicling drought-related headlines in online news reports to assess the impacts of the drought.<sup>25</sup> The authors primarily focus on the impact of the drought, but also briefly discuss drought susceptibility in Namibia. This is explained as being caused by a combination of geographic positioning, land degradation, desertification, and overall climate change. In the LOR area, like in many other areas around the world, the latter three effects are often human-induced

19 See: Charmaine Ngatjiheue 'Severe poverty still haunts Namibians' and Roland Ngam 'The thirstland years are here – prepare for four more years of crippling drought'. Accessed on 11 January 2021.

20 Spear et. al. 2018: p. 3

21 Barnes 2012

22 Turpie et. al. 2010

23 Spear et. al. 2018: p. 27

24 See: Bank of Namibia, 'Feeding Namibia: Agricultural Productivity and Industrialisation', Windhoek, The Research Department of the Bank of Namibia, 21 September 2017. Accessed at: <https://www.bon.com.na/CMSTemplates/Bon/Files/bon.com.na/52/52c35978-5912-4429-9052-3c8f5cc7971e.pdf> on 11 January 2021.

25 Nakanyete, et. al. 2020: p. 380

or exacerbated by human activity in areas that were once not regarded as ‘permanently arid’ but have since begun to develop desert-like conditions due to consistently decreasing or no rainfall. Aside from that brief mention, climate change is not referred to again in Nakanyete et al.’s (2020) paper. Much like the discourse I experienced from farmers and business owners during my research visit, both reportage and research on the 2019 drought in southern Africa is seldom contextualised in broader climate discourse.

But to the untrained eye (like my own) the river looked healthy enough, meandering along on both the South African and Namibian sides. Perhaps this was wishful thinking, but resilience, or the ability to spring back into shape, seemed coded into the way that the river was coursing along powerfully, seemingly oblivious to the drought. Wishful thinking indeed: Shikangalah observes that analyses made over the last decade show a continuous rise in temperatures in tandem with decreases in the annual rainfall from December to March, resulting in shorter seasons in Southern Africa.<sup>26</sup> A further decline in rainfall of up to 5% is expected over the southern African region; and future projections for the Namibian climate shows further, highly variable drops in rainfall amounts. Indeed, another photograph made at the ruins of Hohenfels former police station, but taken from another perspective, suggests that the river is much less powerful than at first sight.

*Fig. 3: Lower Orange River, Oranjemund, (January 2020) 35mm film (Sindi-Leigh McBride private collection).*



Worryingly, despite the arid conditions of the border region – where the Noor-doewer/Vioolsdrift dam would be built – existing studies about water use in the Orange River basin suggest that there is insufficient information about the potential for increased efficiency of water use, through dams or otherwise.<sup>27</sup> This complicates efforts to understand the impact of both dams and climate change on the lower part of the river system. This is problematic because the area is likely to experience significant impacts from rising temperatures and changing rainfall patterns; but if there is little publicly available research on this topic, it follows that there is probably a gap in local knowledge about plans to build the new dam, and water resource management more generally. The implications of limited awareness include limited opportunity for individuals adversely affected by water resource management (in both countries) to raise their concerns. It is also important to note that most research on or about the river concentrates on the upper reaches, making the dearth of readily available information for the LOR a significant barrier to understanding resilience in the region – both empirically and at a more abstract level.

## Historicising the river

With this initial description of the LOR, the planned dam, and the context of vulnerability to climate change, it is possible to historicise the LOR. As the most developed of all the rivers in southern Africa, the (hydro) history of the river is both complex and long: the earliest remains of humans were found in the basin, near Taung in the North-west Province, but ‘it was only much later, about 1.5 to 3 million years ago, that the exploitation of the river started on a grand scale.’<sup>28</sup> The most prominent example of this was Orange River Project (ORP). Launched in 1962 (and publicised as ‘Taming a River Giant’), the ORP aimed to promote and stabilise irrigation along the Orange River and in the Eastern Cape, as well as to generate hydropower, to supply water to towns and industries, and to limit flood damage.

The historiography of Namibian-South African relations on regional/national levels is as compelling as the infrastructural development of the river. Saunders surveys both historical and contemporary aspects of the multifaceted relations between the two countries, noting that despite South Africa having more bilateral treaties and agreements with Namibia than any other country (over 60 in all); there is limited literature on the ambivalent, sometimes contradictory relationship between South Africa and Namibia.<sup>29</sup> He observes that:

on the one hand there are close ties, arising especially from perceptions of a common history and close economic links, while on the other there is, and has been in the past, tension and mistrust because, it is here suggested, of the unequal nature of the re-

27 See, for example: Mahasa et al. 2015

28 Turton et. al. 2004: p. 88

29 Saunders 2016: p. 348

lationship, a long-standing concern by Namibians to assert their independence from South Africa, and South Africa's failure to prioritise its relationship with Namibia.<sup>30</sup>

Specific to the LOR, this ambiguity manifests in interesting ways. First, in the unresolved border dispute between the two countries. In 1990, at the time of Namibia's independence, South Africa claimed that the border between the two countries ran along the northern bank of the Orange River and not, the middle of the river, which was the accepted position in international law. As this was based on the 1890 Heligoland treaty drawn up by the German colonial government, the issue was referred to a joint technical committee resulting in South Africa accepting the middle of the Orange River as the boundary in 1992, but with no consensus reached on the boundary out to sea.<sup>31</sup> Still, both boundaries remain a site of contestation. While this border dispute does not directly relate to accessing water resources on the river – as there are numerous binding international contracts defining the rights to the water that are not contested by either country, the course of the river and where one country ends and another begins is relevant in respect of land rights, infrastructure development, and the offshore use-rights at the mouth of the river.

Reporting on the intensification of tension in regions where rivers form borders, Kings notes how rivers became convenient borders in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region during the colonial divvying-up in the late 1800s.<sup>32</sup> 12 SADC states share 21 river basins, with most of these crossing more than two countries, and increasingly, climate change is testing their water agreements. Today, South Africa maintains that the border is on the high-water mark on the Namibian side while Namibia maintains that the border is in the middle of the river. Namibia, however, relies on its larger southern neighbour for trade and food imports, so it has little political capital, especially when compared to the economic clout wielded by South Africa which maintains the status quo (relative hegemony over water resources) in respect of transboundary water sharing in the SADC region.<sup>33</sup> Rickard explains that Namibia is unlikely to push this issue at the level of international law after taking a similar border dispute to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to decide which side of the border between Namibia and Botswana a mid-river island fell.<sup>34</sup> After the ICJ's 1999 ruling in favour of Botswana, Windhoek is probably not keen to go up against Pretoria, leading to an 'incongruous status of political suspense.'<sup>35</sup> Border dispute negotiations between the two countries are treated as top secret by Namibia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, while in South Africa, opposition parties have called on the Department of International Relations and Cooperation to speed up these negotiations.<sup>36</sup>

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30 Saunders 2016: p. 348

31 Saunders 2016: p. 348

32 Kings 2016

33 Kings 2016

34 Rickard 2015

35 Hangula 2010: p. 195

36 See: 'DA: DA calls on government to give clarity on the Namibia border dispute'. *Polity*, 1 November 2018. Accessed at: <https://www.polity.org.za/article/da-da-calls-on-government-to-give-clarity-on-the-namibia-border-dispute-2018-11-01> on 11 January 2021.

This border dispute is particular to the colonial and apartheid history of South Africa and Namibia, but the fact of it being situated in the river raises broader questions about rivers as non-human entities. How they are embroiled in politics, despite resisting the boundaries of ownership or citizenship. How finding the exact middle point of a river – to demarcate its international boundary – might make sense to political geographers but appears ludicrous to those navigating its surface or drawing from its depths for daily use.

Beyond these questions, the relevance of this historical dispute to resilience along the river is well articulated in a study by Grainger and Conway who highlight the paradox between the stability needed for a boundary and the dynamism of fluvial landscapes in times of climate variability.<sup>37</sup> Their work on the historical and legal role of International River Boundaries (IRBs) is useful for understanding the consequences of climate change for transboundary water resources, particularly through the effects of extreme events, such as droughts. The authors assess the potential challenge that climate change represents for physical and socio-political risks associated with IRBs and identify the LOR region as a situation where aggregate regional risk is high. Based on the assessment of the biophysical and socio-political characteristics of the region, they observe that the LOR is 'clearly vulnerable to climate change given its geo-graphical configuration, extreme climatic regime' and warn that 'in the future, states may undertake hard engineering measures to secure access to increasingly scarce water resources, and simultaneously 'x' their boundary,' which is of concern for the high potential for knock-on environmental and social effects downstream.<sup>38</sup>

Rivers are dynamic systems, and the natural variability of fluvial processes has historically led to a number of riparian responses and disputes, and with continuing human modification of the environment the resilience of political structures is uncertain. These natural landforms serve as catalysts to connect, but also separate people, cultures, and communities.<sup>39</sup>

This relates to the second hydro-political history issue in the LOR: the experiences of those displaced by dam construction on the river have been devastating. The hearings from the World Commission on Dams held in November 1999 are a window into the social implications of dam construction, in particular community accounts of the impact of dams in the region.<sup>40</sup> For example, members of communities affected by the Gariep and Van der Kloof Dams higher up on the river stated that they were not consulted when the dam was planned. They were simply told to move from the farm they were living on, forced to sell or leave their cattle behind; and because of the pass laws of the time, farmworkers on impacted farms could not readily resettle in the towns. White farmers were, of course, consulted in good time.<sup>41</sup> While the hearings highlighted some of the positive aspects of

37 Grainger and Conway 2014

38 Grainger and Conway 2014: p. 843

39 Grainger and Conway 2014: p. 846

40 See: "The Report of the World Commission on Dams" (2000). Accessed at: [http://awsassets.panda.org/downloads/wcd\\_dams\\_final\\_report.pdf](http://awsassets.panda.org/downloads/wcd_dams_final_report.pdf) on 11 January 2021.

41 Turton et. al 2004: 258

the dams for communities who were not displaced, for example, reliable water and electricity supply, the negative impact on the people living in the areas affected by the dams raises red flags for future dam projects.

Already, the residents of Goodhouse on the banks of the Orange River are unhappy about the planned construction, wary that it will change their way of life forever – given the risk that the settlement may disappear as it lies directly in the dam's flood plain. Residents are especially unhappy at not having been consulted or considered, despite being the most affected.<sup>42</sup> Writing on the impact of major dams in Africa and how they affect local communities, Hitchcock notes that even when resettlement is an option, this is a complicated process, often extremely hard on the people who are relocated.<sup>43</sup> A major problem with the dislocation that comes with many dam constructions is that planners tend to focus attention on loss of residences (i.e., homes) rather than on loss of access to the means of production (especially land, grazing resources, and wild resources on which people depend for subsistence and income).<sup>44</sup> This is especially true for regions characterised by extreme climate conditions, where whole sections might dry up. As Roy states in her polemic against the big dam industry:

Anyone who has loved a river can tell you that the loss of a river is a terrible, aching thing... for the people who've been resettled, everything has to be re-learned. Every little thing, every big thing: from shitting and pissing... to buying a bus ticket, to learning a new language, to understanding money. And worst of all, learning to be supplicants. Learning to take orders.<sup>45</sup>

The river itself is ordered by the mechanisms mastering it. But in changing climate conditions, observing the impact of this is tricky. Distinguishing between differences in variation of water flows due to dams and due to climate change is difficult because, like river communities forced to reckon with the impact of both dams and climate change, river morphology continuously adapts to changing discharge conditions. According to Grainger and Conway 'climate change could therefore exacerbate underlying weaknesses and in some cases dramatically alter political and social landscapes at boundaries.'<sup>46</sup> For instance, the proposed border dam in a region plagued by drought and subject to erratic weather variability. Indeed, in late 2020 and early 2021, long and heavy rains led to flooding – affecting both southern Namibia and parts of the Northern Cape. While this does not directly impact the long-term effects of the drought, expectations of normal to above-normal rainfall between October 2021 and March 2022 across the bulk of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region are likely to influence perceptions of risk associated with the building of the dam.<sup>47</sup>

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42 Hendricks 2018

43 Hitchcock 2011

44 Hitchcock 2011

45 Roy 1999

46 Grainger and Conway 2014: p. 844

47 See: World Meteorological Organization, Normal to above-normal rainfall forecast for much of southern Africa, September 2021. Accessed at <https://public.wmo.int/en/media/news/normal-above-normal-rainfall-forecast-much-of-southern-africa>.

## Rethinking resilience

Imagining the impacts of the proposed dam on the future of the LOR benefits from the field of elemental media which thinks about how elements themselves function as media and what this means for questions of representation. Jue's science fictional strategy of 'conceptual displacement' developed in *Wild, Blue Media*, proposes imaginatively submerging familiar terms into the ocean to see how they hold up and how our understanding of them necessarily shifts.<sup>48</sup> Following this, I similarly submerge resilience into the epistemic environment of the LOR. But rethinking resilience in the dynamic context of a marginalised fluvial landscape under climatic and economic pressure requires a brief consideration of the Anthropocene, the contested geological time period advanced in 2000 by Nobel Prize-winning atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen and ecologist Eugene Stoermer who argued that the Earth is now in a new, unprecedented geological epoch, triggered by human actions.<sup>49</sup> Haraway explains that the Anthropocene thesis gained purchase in popular and scientific discourse in the context of urgent efforts to find ways of talking about, modelling and managing Globalisation, while Satgar similarly demonstrates how Anthropocene discourse is ideological, with serious consequences for how we understand the contemporary climate crisis.<sup>50</sup>

This photograph, made at the Augrabies Falls National Park, is resonant with both fluvial and geological echoes of Anthropocene considerations. The park is home to fascinating rock formations, and Echo Corner is one of three viewpoints to see the Orange River thunder through the park, sometimes cascading powerfully and at other points a mere trickle. The visual and aural display is second only to the sight and sound of the river meeting the ocean, but as the name suggests, Echo Corner produces resounding eerie echoes that loop around as a reminder of the intertwining of space and time.

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48 Jue 2020

49 See: The International Geosphere–Biosphere Programme (IGBP) May 2000 newsletter. Accessed at: <http://www.igbp.net/download/18.316f18321323470177580001401/1376383088452/NL41.pdf> on 11 January 2021.

50 Haraway 2016; Satgar 2018.

*Fig. 4: Empty Echo Corner at Augrabies Falls, Northern Cape (January 2020)  
35mm film (Sindi-Leigh McBride private collection).*



While Yusoff's highly influential critique problematises the politics of the Anthropocene, deflating the heady politically infused geology and scientific/popular discourse that has accompanied it; considering resilience within this discourse has its benefits.<sup>51</sup> First, Fagan questions the 'who' of the Anthropocene, to demonstrate the mobility of the human/nature border and the ways in which the non-human (like rivers) can/should be brought into Anthropocene politics, and acknowledged as integral to dominant political conceptual structures (like resilience).<sup>52</sup> Secondly, Nixon describes the Anthropocene's transition from an interdisciplinary idea to one that has permeated the public sphere, as filmmakers, curators and public intellectuals use the concept as a prism 'to give immense biomorphic and geomorphic changes a granular intimacy.'<sup>53</sup> It is in granular attention to a proposed new dam, a non-human object brought into being by human activity with significant implications for the future of the river, that resilience can be conceptually rethought. Thirdly, Goudie and Viles' work on direct and indirect human actions influencing geomorphological change in the Anthropocene is useful for thinking about the implications of building a new dam in an arid area like that surrounding the LOR, from the perspective of the Anthropocene hypothesis.<sup>54</sup> For example, the authors observe that it can be difficult to recognise human impact on geomorphological processes because this often manifests as an acceleration of natural processes. To emphasise this point, it is helpful to think about the historical power of this river, which has sculpted both human and non-human environments historically, affecting everything from religious practices to industrial development. The counterpoint to this is the widespread evidence of hu-

51 Yusoff 2017

52 Fagan 2019

53 Nixon 2014

54 Goudie and Viles 2016: 130

man dominance in fluvial records. Brown et al. explain this back and forth as a major challenge in demarcating the Anthropocene, because

the balance between human-influenced and natural processes varies over spatial and temporal scales owing to the inherent variability of both human activities (as associated with culture and modes of development) and natural drivers (e.g., tectonic activity and sea level variation).<sup>55</sup>

Dams are hydrological disturbances that act as both a direct influence on the morphology of the river (by changing its annual runoff, sediment load and channels) but can also be an indirect influence on the future of the river in a multitude of ways, ranging from modifications of river flow regimes and channel dimensions to riverbed aggradation.<sup>56</sup> Goudie and Viles suggest that geomorphological change is often neglected in accounts of human impact in discussions of the Anthropocene, especially when looking at changes in the riverine landforms, which have no ubiquitous markers – every river must be recognized as unique in its response to the human disturbance.<sup>57</sup> This brings to mind Didion's obsessive interest

not in the politics of water but in the waterworks themselves, in the movement of water through aqueducts and siphons and pumps and forebays and afterbays and weirs and drains, in plumbing on the grand scale.<sup>58</sup>

Looking into the river's complex system of reservoirs, transfer schemes and irrigation canals to explain the impact of a new dam is beyond the scope of this chapter, but it is an interesting place to situate a theoretical investigation of what exactly resilience represents. In this instance, it provides a way into thinking beyond human activity, and towards considering the river's own agency and the interplay between the two in the context of the Anthropocene thesis and resilience as a theoretical/ conceptual structure.

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55 Brown et al. 2016: 73

56 Brown et al. 2016: 73

57 Goudie and Viles 2016

58 Didion 2009

Fig. 5: *Augrabies Falls Northern Cape (January 2020) 35mm film (Sindi-Leigh McBride private collection).*



Joseph argues that the conceptual basis of the term ‘resilience’ amounts to very little because not only is it a shallow concept but also a shifting concept. This is a useful reminder that conceptual frameworks are grounded in changeable cultural specificities, historical underpinnings and of course, geographical imaginations.<sup>59</sup> Pendall et al. survey literatures from disciplines including ecology, psychology, disaster studies, geography, political science and economics to understand how they see resilience. Their work reveals that resilience is broadly understood as a buffer capacity for preserving normality, or what we have, and recovering to where we were, without much thought to or questioning of what exactly *normality* entails.<sup>60</sup> Specific to this investigation of resilience in and of the LOR, it is not easy to define ‘normality’, given the precarious weather conditions in the region, and the long history of human activity on the river steadily increasing the river-system’s vulnerability to the effects of climate change. In their critique of neoliberal resilience, Evans and Reid lament how *normal* vulnerability and precariousness have become, with both appearing not only as endemic and inevitable but also as *necessary* to the recovery part of the resilience schema.<sup>61</sup> But for both river systems and the human and more-than-human communities that depend on them, what used to be normal is long past: whole natural drainage basins, which once responded to grand seasonal cycles of summer floods and winter droughts now respond meekly to the whims of water managers seated in control rooms that govern sluice gates in tens of thousands of large dams.<sup>62</sup> The resilience of naturally occurring watercourses is no longer only determined by seasonal change but shaped by human consumption and human construction.

59 Joseph 2013

60 Pendall et al. 2010

61 Evans and Reid 2013

62 Lynas 2011

*Fig. 6: Natural hot spring Riemvasmaak, Northern Cape (January 2020) 35mm film (Sindi-Leigh McBride private collection).*



This photograph of two swimming pools constructed at Riemvasmaak Hot Springs, invites visitors to relax in the natural wonder of these therapeutic waters, a product of volcanic eruptions that have long since ceased, but continue to be heated by deep underground activity. Riemvasmaak is close to the Namibian border, situated between the LOR and the now dry Molopo River; a haunting reminder of both the timelessness of geology and the ephemerality of fluvial forms.

## Conclusion

Like the harnessing of natural springs for holiday resorts, the construction of dams is an intervention that fundamentally changes the biophysical properties and geomorphology of a river system. How can we make known the resilience of fluvial forms, with complex politics and long histories, in the face of these changes? How can we understand and relate to the context of increasing climate variability and plans to further change the geomorphology via inventions like dams? How can we trace the history of modern dams

on ancient rivers? This chapter meditated on these questions to rethink the LOR as more than just an environment under climatic stress, but also to consider it as an epistemic environment to situate a rethinking of the concept of resilience. Speculatively historicising and theorising the LOR and submerging the concept of resilience into this milieu contributes to geographic imaginations of this area, by paying attention to an understudied area in southern Africa. Additionally, focusing on the proposed Noordoewer/Vioolsdrift dam at the border between South Africa and Namibia revealed a nexus of issues that open questions about the meaning and potential of the term resilience, ranging from community impacts to landform transformations. Accompanying photographs contributed by speaking where words cannot, articulating that ‘resilience is a narrative, a collective fiction of the possibility for surviving present and future disasters.’<sup>63</sup> The enormity of thinking in planetary scales imposed by the climate crisis often makes it difficult to imagine the impact of human interventions of earth-systems, like rivers. As such, the exploratory insights discussed reveal the importance of small-scale studies when exploring water infrastructure resourcing issues (like plans to build a dam) in the bigger picture of global climate change. This is true for rethinking the meaning of resilience on the Lower !Garib / Orange River in this region and in the world at large.

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## Paulus Johannes: Park ranger

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*Paulus Johannes (photo by Bernard C. Moore, 2021)*



In 2008, Paulus Johannes started his new position as a park ranger in the Tsau ||Khaeb (Sperrgebiet) National Park. The conservation area, which is nearly the size of Belgium, encompasses an almost 100km stretch of the international border along the !Garib. Johannes, who grew up in southern Namibia, first began working for the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism (MEFT) as a volunteer, when the Namibian government constructed the new border post at Sendelingsdrift in 2007. 'I just wanted to get some experiences,' he remembers, 'but soon I knew that I need to apply for a real job at MEFT.' Only one year later he was appointed as a ranger at the newly created Oranjemund office. A team of just three people – Johannes, a higher ranging warden and the chief warden –

oversaw the entire southern part of the Tsau ǁKhaeb. 'We were the only humans within a huge, vast, area of desert,' Johannes recalls.

He remembers their two main tasks: repairing the fence that runs over more than 300km along the Eastern boundary of the park, and general park patrols – particularly along the Orange River. Fencing took up to 90% of his working hours. He explains:

Our storeroom at Kolmanskop was full of droppers which were sponsored by Namdeb.<sup>1</sup> We finished them within three years of fence repairs. Sometimes we had to repeat fixing the fence line, as game crossing to the neighbouring farms kept breaking through in search for drinking water and grazing on the private farms, because inside the park area there were hardly any boreholes, and it was very dry. We never managed to fix the fence 100% but we came nearly close.

We were lucky that the park is only fenced in the east, towards the private farms, while in the north it is only the tarred road that divides it from the Namib-Naukluft Park, in the west it's the Atlantic Ocean, and in the south, it is the Orange River.

On his other primary duty, patrol trips, there were always two people in one *bakkie* (pick-up truck). The rangers/wardens set off at Oranjemund, driving up and alongside the river, while always remaining on the Namibian side. On this stretch of the patrol, they were mainly tasked with law enforcement, i.e., looking for illegal fishing, poaching, and other transgressions. If they found someone breaking the law, they reported this to the Namibian police or the Ministry of Fishing. While the South African police force was, at times, also informed, there were never joint Namibian-South African patrols. 'It was only the bosses that were in contact with the South Africans, on a policy level,' Johannes explains. The patrol continued northwards, along the fence, and then through the desert, down to the coast. There, the men drove southwards, on small tracks, heading back to Oranjemund. Johannes explains: 'we never used the main roads by the mines, because that would then not count as "patrolling".'

The entire patrol took 14 days. Although Johannes has fond memories of the beautiful landscape and the quietness of the area, it was a tough job. 'The patrols in the park were not easy. We had to deal with strong southwesterly winds, long cold nights with heavy fog, and the tracks around the coastline kept disappearing because of the wind.' If something happened, Johannes had to rely on help being sent from Oranjemund or Lüderitz. 'If you did not show up after 14 days, they would send somebody to look for you.' This meant that he and his colleagues always had to account for the possibility of being stuck somewhere in the park for weeks, waiting for people to rescue them.

Today, Johannes works at the small Naute Game Park – much closer to towns and with easier communication and schedules. Still, he has mostly good memories of his eight years in the remoteness of the Tsau ǁKhaeb. 'There was hardly any poaching and other crimes, the tasks were highly interesting, with different landscapes to protect: The mountains, the coastal deserts, and the riverine borderlands.' All in all, he is convinced

1 Droppers are light wooden or iron sticks placed between the planted posts of a fence to keep the wires taut and in a parallel position. Namdeb is the mining company that holds the mining rights within the Sperrgebiet. It is jointly owned by the Namibia state and by the De Beers Group.

that important work has been done there, and hopes that the park will be opened for visitors one day soon.

*Based on an interview done by Luregn Lenggenhager, Bernard Moore and Wanda Rutishauser at Naute Game Park, 7 November 2021.*



# Interdisciplinary Conversations



# Archaeological Space and Time along the Lower Orange River and Coast: Narratives of Gudrun Corvinus

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Ulla Mussnug

## Introduction

Archaeologists, paleontologists, geologists and other geo-scientists often collaborate.<sup>1</sup> A better interpretation of the archaeological record arises from the combination of their individual training and methodologies.<sup>2</sup> In addition to their shared focus on patterns of sedimentation, geological and geomorphological formations, excavations and dating, amongst others, is their common perception of the scale of time and space. Time for these researchers may encompass several hundred thousand years, but can extend into *deep time*, for instance, relating to the formation of the planet Earth. Their measure of geological space begins at the earth's surface but can reach depths far beyond it. Sharing the same theoretical bases, commercial mines apply data from transdisciplinary geo-scientific projects to guide their search for minerals and precious metals more precisely. Few archaeologists combine training of several geo-sciences. A rare exception is Gudrun Corvinus (1931–2006). An ideal candidate to undertake archaeological and palaeontological dating in a mine setting, she became employed by the Consolidated Diamond Mines of South West Africa (CDM) in the southern Namib Desert in 1976.

Mining in Africa is, of course, extremely exploitative, environmentally destructive and – being a commercial industry – profit-bound. This situation has been somewhat alleviated by the introduction of protective environmental legislation and the emergence of a corporate moral responsibility towards the surrounding communities impacted by mining activities. Paradoxically, though, much archaeological and palaeontological material would have remained buried, had it not been for the use of over-sized mining machinery. Mining operations uncover more metres of deposit than any archaeologist, with even unlimited financial and practical support, could ever do in many lifetimes.

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1 Acknowledgements: For the late nights and all the answers to the many questions, IT and otherwise, Robert, thanks a million. Isis, for your comments and enthusiasm, merci. BAB for letting me present Gudrun's work and life, I appreciate it. And all the others who I am not mentioning by name: thank you for your support!

2 Vujičić, Vasiljević et al. 2018: 333–343; Cohen 1998: 84–92.

Gudrun Corvinus' research, during less than four years, resulted in a wealth of invaluable finds. Based in Oranjemund and working in the Sperrgebiet, she discovered palaeontological sites dating from the mid-Miocene and numerous locations of hominin habitation from the early to mid-Pleistocene and younger.<sup>3</sup> The present paper engages with these finds historiographically, considering how they inform space along the Lower Orange River at the time.<sup>4</sup> Discussing academic concerns relating to her material, I argue that despite these, its role as a singular contribution to Namibian heritage warrants re-engagement.

Final CDM reports are omitted as sources due to access issues. Used here, are the academic publications of her finds, drafts or working copies of quarterly mine reports, private diaries and personal letters.<sup>5</sup> As part of her estate, these private recordings help fill in gaps for the present discussion. Additionally, they lend a personal tone, that makes this more of a narrative on space and time, rather than a solely academic analysis.

The first section of the paper comments on the spatial distribution of human habitation sites and their cartographic presentation. As her site recording provides certain challenges, a transfer into the present is suggested. This is followed by a consideration of three sites on which Corvinus and her team worked, contrasting the difference in location and age. With her excavation of *Arrisdrift*, Gudrun Corvinus illustrates the faunal diversity at the mouth of the ancient Orange River some 12 million years ago (12mya).<sup>6</sup> From stone material collected at *Gemsbok*, she documents the Acheulian Earlier Stone Age (ESA)<sup>7</sup> and increasingly younger industries at the coast.<sup>8</sup> *Obib* intrigues her for questions it raises regarding its repeated use from ESA into the present. Here, she ponders the behaviour of early hominins who left evidence of their presence at the site, and reflects the mobility of groups over the ages, long before any commercial demarcations had been set.

Most excavated finds presently discussed are much older than 2,000 years. Younger material has often been manipulated by scientists to promote pro-Western philosophies and by politicians to support their pro-colonial agenda. Thankfully, much of the present archaeological and palaeontological material reaches so far back in time, rendering ethno-centric Western interpretations invalid. The Lower Orange River as a location

3 Miocene: 23.03-5.33mya; the Pleistocene: 2.58mya-11,700ya; Holocene: 117,000ya until present.

4 I am using the English version of 'Orange River', instead of the Afrikaans *Gariep* or the original Khoekhoegowab !*Garib*. The second version prefers one southern African language above another, while the third version might seem visually difficult for the average reader.

5 The collection of her Namibian excavated material is divided between the Iziko Museum, Cape Town and the National Museum of Namibia, Windhoek, with some remnants in the Geological Surveys, also in Windhoek and the University of Cologne. The documentation of her finds is in the form of mine reports, held in protected storage. The lithic material in Windhoek was partially organised by the author in 2018/2019 and analysed by Dr. Isis Mesfin. Most photographic material and many private notes have been donated to the Basler Afrika Bibliographien. This process is ongoing.

6 Corvinus and Hendey 1978

7 Early, Middle and Late Stone Age (ESA, MSA and LSA) describe stages of increasing technological complexity of stone artefacts. The regionally variable range of technologies consist of giant cores and large flakes to ever smaller, more complex and multifaceted tools. See list of abbreviations in Appendix for Corvinus' assigning of dates to each stone industry.

8 Schneider 2011: pp. 6–8

plays an important role in the attempt to establish a continuum of human presence over time. Considering these finds within narrow theoretical and local political confines, instead of within a world-wide context, does a serious injustice to this valuable heritage that should be ethically and scientifically preserved.

## The diamond mine, CDM, and Gudrun Corvinus

Diamonds were formed under processes of extreme temperature and pressure over 2.5 billion years ago (bya). This ancient time is called the Archean Age, when continents were only beginning to form. Spatially, diamonds are lodged below archaic cratons – the first parts of the earth's crust that stabilised. Diamonds are rarely transported to the earth's surface by Kimberlite dykes from depths of some 200km inside the earth's interior mantle. When they do, they reach the earth's surface together with other debris. Once on the earth's surface, they are eroded away and re-deposited.

The Kaapvaal Craton, more than 2.5 billion years old (by) and expanding over much of the sub-continent east of Namibia, originally held Namibia's alluvial diamonds. Having surfaced in today's provinces of the Northern Cape and the Gauteng, they were transported westward by ancient river systems, one of which being the Orange River system. Over the course of millions of years, diamonds were deposited along the way, or together with other river sediment material, accumulated at the river mouth. The largest and hardest finally reached the Atlantic Ocean. Captured by ocean currents and carried northwest along the coast, they continued to be re-deposited and eroded in a continuous cycle.<sup>9</sup> As climate and tectonic changes took place, the location of the diamondiferous layers shifted. Six distinct terraces of differing ages are presently recognised, Beaches A to F.<sup>10</sup>

Diamonds were first discovered in the then central Transvaal in 1866, with the famous Hopetown find.<sup>11</sup> It took 42 years for them to be stumbled up on 1,000km further westwards and downstream in southern Namibia (then German South West Africa). In April 1908, Peter Zacharias Lewala's find set off a diamond rush to the desert around the main coastal town of Lüderitzbucht. The German colonial government quickly reacted to this surprising source of wealth in its colony that it had until then considered 'a worthless sandpit.'<sup>12</sup> It sent its colonial envoy, Dr. Bernhard Dernberg, to verify the claims. He subsequently declared 26,000km<sup>2</sup> a restricted area on 22 September 1908. Henceforth, the area has been known by its name: the *Sperrgebiet*.<sup>13</sup>

9 Schneider 2011: pp. 6–8

10 Corvinus 1983: p. 4

11 See Janse 1995: p. 231ff for controversies surrounding the find.

12 Schneider 2011: p. 12

13 Schneider and Walmsley 2004 pp: 23–32; This virtual monopolistic commercial ownership of the Sperrgebiet continues since 1908, despite it having been declared a national park in 2004, 14 years after Namibian independence. It raises the question as to whether this reflects outdated principles of colonial entitlement, running contrary to contemporary debates on decolonisation and repatriation.

A monopoly was hereby established, making the *Deutsche Kolonial Gesellschaft* (and its corporate financial backing in the motherland) the main diamond producer. Initially, surface finds were small,<sup>14</sup> but ever bigger, gem-quality diamonds have since been very profitably mined, by increasingly deeper and ever more extensive exploration after World War 1.<sup>15</sup>

After the war, CDM was created for the purpose of unifying the various individual and corporate claims in the Sperrgebiet under one corporate flag. Harry Oppenheimer was to play a central role in this. He had previously founded his own company: Anglo American Company of South Africa. By 1920, CDM was in place and bought 21% shares in Anglo-American.<sup>16</sup> Once Harry Oppenheimer became chairperson of CDM, as well as chairperson of the former Cecil John Rhodes-owned De Beers, it became possible for him to combine the companies in a manner most profitable. De Beers bought CDM from his own Anglo-American in 1930. From this point onwards, De Beers/CDM combined would solely control diamond mining in Namibia for the next 60 years. Following Namibian independence in March 1990, the new government negotiated a 50% share from De Beers, with an agreement signed on 24 November 1994.<sup>17</sup> In the years between 1977 and 1985 – while Gudrun Corvinus worked there – somewhat of a decline in production occurred, dropping from 2 million carats annually to 1 million.<sup>18</sup>

Gudrun Corvinus was recruited by CDM, from Paris, in 1974. Trained in geology, palaeontology and archaeology, she finally arrived at Oranjemund in 1976 at the age of 45 – both experienced and professional. She held a PhD (*cum laude*) from the Geology Department of Tübingen University in Germany (1957)<sup>19</sup> and had worked in the south of France, India and in eastern Ethiopia in the Afar region, famous for its prehistoric finds. She was also extremely well- and widely connected to prominent archaeologists and palaeontologists in Europe, India and Africa. Additionally, she had previously toured Namibia and knew of its Early Stone Age legacy.

Until her arrival, CDM had concentrated exploitation within a thin strip of coastline of only 3km in length to 1km in width, just north of Oranjemund, the very sand and gravel masses re-deposited by tidal action during the Pleistocene. Projecting that this coastal strip would soon be depleted,<sup>20</sup> new sources had to be found, hence the aim to explore the river terraces – the other location of diamonds deposits. While the age of origin of the diamonds themselves were known, the period of their deposition downriver was not. Corvinus was employed to date the river terraces by means of archaeological finds, then

14 Janse 1995: p. 243

15 Between 1908 and 1913 production amounted to 5 million carats, valued at 165 million *Reichsmark* at the time (approximately 993€ million in present-day value). Schneider 2011: p. 121.

16 Scheider 2011: p. 122ff

17 Schneider 2011: p. 258; Janse 1995: p. 244

18 Schneider 2011: p. 253

19 Her PhD explored 'The Biostratigraphy of the Upper Jurassic (Kimmeridge) at Mt. Crussol, Ardeche, France, in comparison with the Upper Jurassic of southern Germany' (her translation from German).

20 Mining areas northwards from the coast are given the names *Gemsbok*, *Uubvlei*, *Mittag*, *Ker-behoek*, *Affenrücken*, *Tafelberge*, *Chamais*, *Buntveldschuh*, *Bogenfels*, *Grillental*, *Pomona* and *Elisabethbucht*, before *Lüderitzbucht*.

correlate their age to the better researched raised beaches at the coast. While she succeeded in extending the dating of some raised beaches, by the time she left in 1980, she had not yet been able to date the river terraces.

An additional condition of her employment was the recording of every archaeological site encountered anywhere in the Sperrgebiet. The purpose of this instruction is not clear. It might have been related to the fact that in 1976, Namibia fell under the National Monuments Act 28 of 1969 (Section 12 / Subsection 3) of the Republic of South Africa and Namibia combined. The act states that any archaeological finds made during mining, engineering or agricultural activities should be immediately reported to the heritage authorities. Being an archaeologist, Corvinus took the latter instruction, possibly seeing it as a form of rescue archaeology, more seriously than the mine did<sup>21</sup>. While this approach might have led to the end of her career at CDM, it was beneficial for Namibian archaeology.<sup>22</sup>

To freely negotiate the vast space of about 26,000km<sup>2</sup> of the Sperrgebiet,<sup>23</sup> Corvinus was granted a special permit and a heavy double-declutch Land Rover. Her diary entries give insight into her time with CDM. On her first trip into the desert, '*Antonius, her assistant, seem(ed) to feel as hesitant as (I) she did*'. Of the handful of men assigned to her as helpers, Antonius can '*speak some German and thus understands (her)*'. He is to be her constant companion, mostly for the sake of safety in a foreign vast desert terrain. A diary entry on 8 February, after their initial introduction and presumably a visit to his accommodation, comments on the '*barrenness of (their) dining area*.' Then, writing in the old German script – which served as a form of code for her more controversial thoughts – she notes the over-crowdedness of the living- conditions: '*ten to a room. It is not pleasant, as if one wants to exploit them*.' She privately questions his remuneration: '*if only Antonius now had a driver's licence that would have been of great help. But then they would have to pay him double*.'<sup>24</sup> After these short comments, a reaction to the dire employment conditions of rural Namibians at CDM, she seldom mentions him again – even though several photographs exist of him and the other 'helpers' (Figure 1). The kind of engagement with the local community – evident in her previous work in India, the Afar in Ethiopia and later in Nepal – seems to be lacking during her time at Oranjemund. This might be due to her being an employee at Oranjemund, instead of an employer. Another reason might have been the heavily restricted nature of the mine. However, it is Antonius' company, this possibility of freedom of movement within the mine, along with a special permit and appropriate vehicle, that makes the discovery of her numerous sites possible.

21 Mesfin et al. 2022

22 Ibid.

23 The Sperrgebiet comprises 3% of the total of Namibia's surface area of 800,000km<sup>2</sup>. Only 5% of the Sperrgebiet is actually mined. The remaining 95% functions as a security zone. See also: Schneider 2011: p 29.

24 Corvinus 1976: Diary entry 8 February.

*Fig. 1: Gudrun Corvinus and presumably Antonius. No reference was found as to the definite identity of her helper. Based on repeated photographs of the man in figure 1, the assumption is that he is, in fact, her constant helper and companion, Antonius. (Private Collection Ulla Mussnug).*

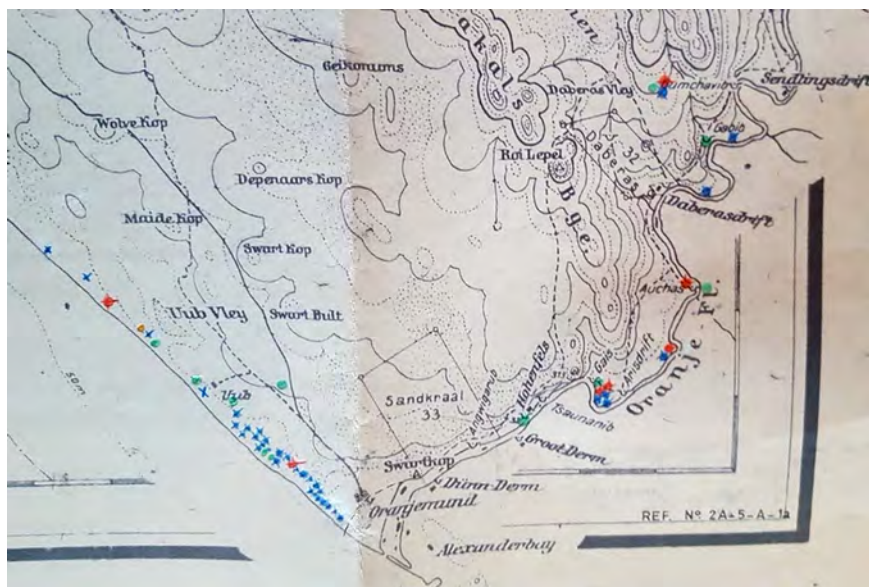


## Sites and their Recording

On leaving CDM, she writes 'I recorded all primary and secondary sites in the large mining plan of CDM, kept as a separate reference in the Geological Department of CDM in Oranjemund.' Another copy is 'kept together with the archaeological collection and their catalogue, which is stored at

*the National Museum, Windhoek, Namibia.*<sup>125</sup> Neither of these two documents were accessible at the time of writing. Therefore, an excerpt of a map compiled for the 1979 meeting of the South African Association of Archaeologists at Stellenbosch is used and reproduced here (Figure 2). It reflects only a select number of sites, in line with the content of her presentation. Numerous sites beyond the river valley and the coast are mentioned in her notes but not mapped here. I use her hand-written copy for its historical value, as well as to illustrate her method of recording. From a site distribution point of view, it shows the spatial distribution of Early (ESA), Middle (MSA) and Late Stone Age (LSA), predictably strung along two axes: one along the river; and the other along the coast, possibly reflecting the availability of vital Pleistocene resources or prevailing corridors of movement.

*Fig. 2: Excerpt from Corvinus' historical map of 1979 (Private Collection Ulla Mussngug). The extent shown here focuses on mining operations along the coast South of Uub Vley (Gemsbok). Sites along the Orange River in the East are on river terraces. Of particular interest in this text are the sites at Arrisdrieff, Gemsbok and those in the Obib Mountains (Northwest of Gabib).*



Again, without access to the original maps, it is probable that she used government Geological Survey maps. These were commonly deployed and utilised during the 1970s for any kind of work in the field. Since their normal scale of a 1:500,000 makes cartographic representation cumbersome under any circumstances, she must have had it reduced in the Geological Department at Oranjemund.

The following is an extract from her notes regarding an important site, namely *Auchas* Lower 2, which she referred to as 'the flaking sites.' Here, she plotted and then collected

1,878 pieces. In a draft of her final mine report of 1978, she writes: *‘The plotted area includes the surface of pit1/AL5 and the flat sheetwash plain adjoining pit1/AL5 to the west, gullied by small erosional rills, as well as the cobble-covered slope of the terrace 1, remnant of Au. L 7.’* She justifies her plotting and collecting the material as a labour *‘in order to preserve (it) before it may get destroyed by mining.’*<sup>26</sup> However, landmarks such as those used by her as points of reference are relative, while mining trenches are not permanent and are easily removed by heavy equipment or filled up in the process of reclamation.

The location of sites was done during the pre-Global Positioning System (GPS) years of the 1990s. Contemporary methods are more accurate and practical, allowing for immediate digital recording and subsequent mapping. A practical hand-held GPS receiver has an accuracy of up to 5–10m<sup>27</sup> and even less with certain special ‘differential GPS’ units.<sup>28</sup> Present-day archaeologists are thereby assisted in their surveying of sites, with satellite-based toolsets that not only include GPS receivers, but also various remote sensing capabilities.

Such sites that can still be identified should be recorded using GPS methods to bring her handwritten versions up to date. A first attempt at bridging the gap between 1970s and contemporary geographic software capabilities is made here, by my extrapolation of two areas from her original map (Figure 3 and Figure 4). This is an initial step towards a more scientific location and could be done with all her recorded sites.<sup>29</sup> The ultimate goal would be to have a relational database, coupled with an interactive GIS tool facilitating the recording in a format that allows present and future scientists to access and filter her data. This – being linked to a cartographic system – will allow spatial, temporal and management questions to be visually displayed. Initial examples of this can be seen in Figure 3 and 4. Such capabilities already reside within the Namib Desert Archaeological Survey, which has recorded more than 3,000 new sites.<sup>30</sup> Other institutions, such as the University of Cologne, in cooperation with the National Museum in Windhoek, have similarly set up portals that show the distribution of various features of Namibia.<sup>31</sup> The consolidation of her data under either platform would make it more acceptable and accessible to future scientists. Alternatively, due to quality concerns inherent in her data, a stand-alone database would be an alternative solution.

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26 Corvinus 1976: p. 59

27 Deo, Sushama and Joglekar 2008/09; pp. 23–30

28 Hallinan: personal communication. 10 January 2022.

29 QGIS Development Team 2022

30 Kinahan and Kinahan 2010

31 Universität Köln 2003

Fig. 3: Detail from the current iteration of digitisation. Focus is on the Arrisdrift site Northeast of Oranjemund. Map by the author.

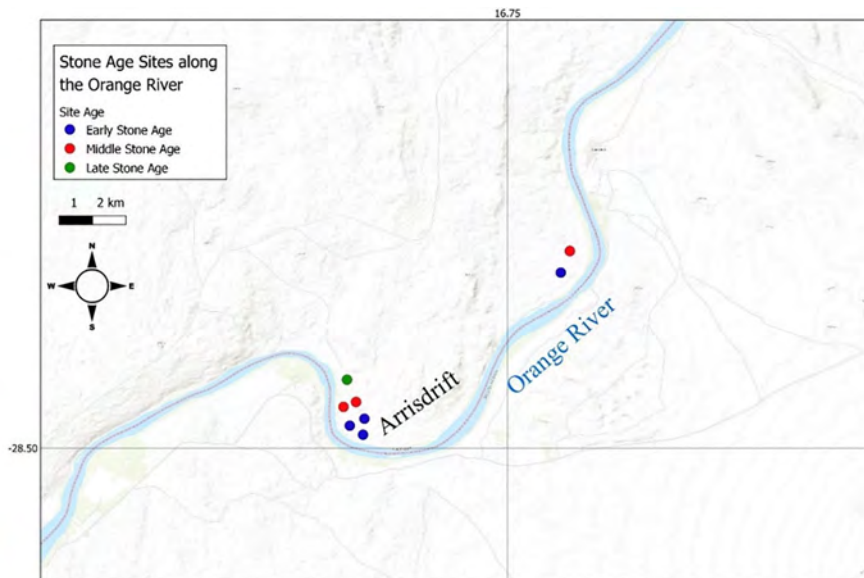
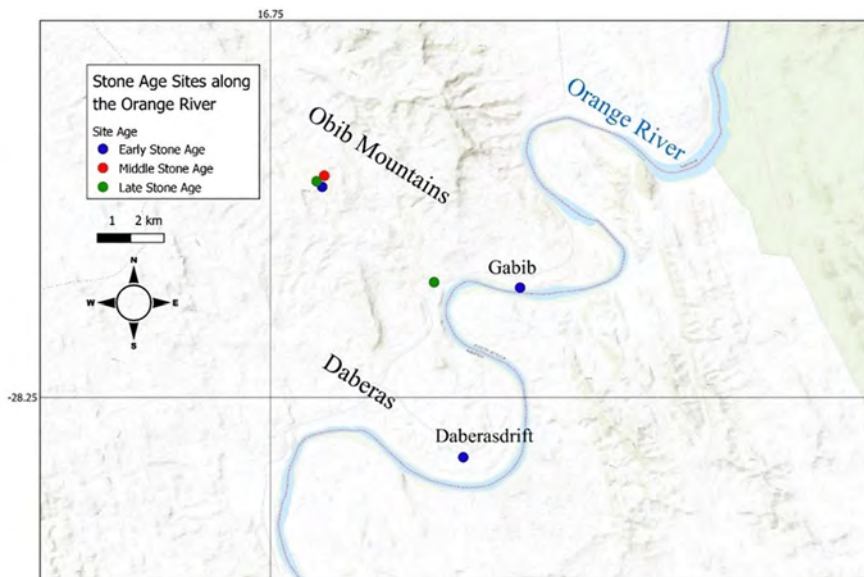


Fig. 4: Detail from the current iteration of digitisation. Focus is on the Obib sites Northeast of Oranjemund. Map by the author.



## Arrisdrift

In compliance with her first employment instruction, Gudrun Corvinus begins working at the *Arrisdrift* geologists camp on 3 February 1976. *Arrisdrift* lies 30km inland, on the northern bank in the last meander of the Orange River before it flows into the sea (see Figures 2 and 3). At the time, 16 prospecting trenches (or drill lines) of 5x10m in width and up to 30m deep had been dug into the river gravels.<sup>32</sup> In one of these trenches, namely trench 8 within pit 2 (Ad8/2), numerous compacted bones protruded. Once a further 4m to 6m of sand was removed, it became apparent that they comprised an assemblage of bone sediment. She does a standard academic excavation of a few months each over the next two years. More than a thousand fossil bones are finally identified and dated by the South African Museum in Cape Town. The remains of 35 mostly extinct faunal species, of which 27 were mammals, are retrieved from only 20cm of hard conglomerate.<sup>33</sup> She then publishes the results with Q.B. Hendey.<sup>34</sup> AD8/2 transpires to be one of a few Miocene sites in Africa at the time and of only two in Namibia. It is dated at 12million years (my),<sup>35</sup> and at the time of publication represented the largest assemblage of Miocene vertebrates in a single locality in southern Africa.<sup>36</sup>

The publication primarily consists of a taxonomic list, for instance, noting two kinds of extinct elephants: a *Deinotherium* and a type of *Gomphotherium*. *Deinotherium* possessed one set of downward sloping tusks on the lower jaw, in comparison to the modern African elephant (Genus *Loxodonta*) with its single pair of upward sloping tusks on the upper jaw. *Gomphotherium* grew a set of tusks on both the lower and upper jaw. Another notable mammal turns out to be a giant *Hyrax*, three times the size of the present-day *Procavia capensis*. Being semi-aquatic<sup>37</sup> it lives close to the water, browsing more like an antelope<sup>38</sup> on riverine bushes and shrubs.

In addition to the herbivores, six species of carnivores were identified. The largest is the long extinct bear-dog or – to use her term – ‘bear-wolf’ (Family *Amphicyonidae*),<sup>39</sup> so called because it exhibits characteristics of both these modern animals. The bear-wolf finds were the first in southern Africa. There were also some fragments of actual bear remains, an animal that has been extinct in southern Africa for the past 4my. Besides the macro-fauna, there were mice, snakes, hare, fish, frogs, tortoises, crocodiles and birds. The only invertebrate fossils were tube casts of marine sabelid polychaete worms from

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32 Corvinus 1978: p. 3

33 Corvinus and Hendey 1978: p. 13

34 Ibid.

35 In a draft of her paper presented to the South African Association of Archaeologists at Stellenbosch in June 1979, she gives a date of 16–18 my: p. 3.

36 Corvinus and Hendey 1978: p. 13

37 Corvinus 1978: p. 202

38 Corvinus 1979: p. 8

39 Corvinus 1978: p.7; Corvinus and Hendey 1978.

the Family Serpulidae.<sup>40</sup> She, therefore, writes excitedly to a friend: 'I have found everything from an elephant to a worm.'<sup>41</sup>

The mine, too, is happy about her find for a different reason: the layer just above bedrock happens to also be the diamondiferous layer. She had inadvertently dated the diamonds! The occasion is celebrated with a personal visit by the chairperson himself, Dr. Harry Oppenheimer of De Beers. Antonius and her other helpers are not mentioned in the celebrations. At least, I have as yet not found any reference to them.

In a less formal setting, she elaborates on two conclusions of the *Arrisdrift* remains: firstly, their implication for the paleo-environment of the Lower Orange River during the mid-Miocene; secondly, the absence of primate finds.<sup>42</sup>

Since the condition of the fossilised bones show no noticeable evidence of abrasion, she concludes that they originate from close by the site. She visualises a drinking place to which the listed variety of animals would come, but also occasionally die. During a sudden strong flood wave, not unusual for the Orange River, the collection of bones was then deposited in a side channel of the original river, where they were buried by a thick layer of sand. Sealed in a manner devoid of oxygen and with a high calcium content, the bones, but not the floral material, were preserved. Consequently, reconstruction of the paleo-environment at AD8/2 in any detail is difficult. However, she assumes that, due to the large number of vertebrates (35 species in all) and their types (the semi-aquatic *Hyrax*, the wetland associated *Gomphotherium*), the climate was wetter, the vegetation denser, and the surroundings carried grassland and shrubland, 'a riverine woodland'. It supported many, not just grazing, but mostly browsing animals. It follows that sea-levels were higher.<sup>43</sup> This explains her private reference to having found even a 'worm'. The serpulid polychaete worm is mostly found in marine environments, supporting the fact that due to a wetter geological period during the mid-Miocene, the sea level would have been higher. This would have placed *Arrisdrift* at the mouth of the river, compared to its present location 30km inland and 40m above sea level. Finally, this raises the question of when the Namib became a desert. Informally she suggests: 'towards the end of the Miocene' and 'during the length of the Pliocene, 7 to 3mya'.<sup>44</sup> Other Namib researchers maintain that this question is still being debated.<sup>45</sup>

The second point she raises is the absence of primate remains: the order of mammals of which monkeys, apes and we, ourselves, are members.<sup>46</sup> In comparison, by 1961 Louis Leakey had already found the 14my old *Kenyapithecus* at Fort Ternan in Kenya. At the time Namibia had two Miocene finds. One was *Otavipithecus namibiensis*,<sup>47</sup> in the centre of the

40 Corvinus 1979: p.13

41 Corvinus 1976; Since 1980, palaeontological research has been much extended, see e.g., Pickford and Senut 1999.

42 Corvinus 1979: p. 13

43 Corvinus 1979: p. 6

44 Corvinus 1979: p. 10

45 See Pickford 2000: p. 413.

46 Corvinus 1978: p. 8

47 Pickford and Senut: 1999

country and dated almost exactly the time of Corvinus' AD8/2 find, namely between 14 and 12mya. The other is a skullcap so far only named 'Orange River' Man.<sup>48</sup>

## Gemsbok

*Gemsbok*<sup>49</sup> is situated near the mouth of the river. In the heavily mined area, she finds 'rather unexpectedly an amazing amount of ESA site scatters...'<sup>50</sup> One notable characteristic of the earlier ESA artefacts is that they are made on quartzite beach cobbles. She finds these quartzite-orientated Acheulian handaxes between south of the *Gemsbok* mining area and only as far as 30km north. They differ from other handaxes of later final Acheulian and earlier MSA occurring all along the coast,<sup>51</sup> including *Gemsbok*, that are made on silcrete. The latter are more widely spread, occurring even as far as *Obib* and *Sendelingsdrift*.<sup>52</sup> Stretching ever further northwards along the coast (Figure 2), she finds numerous MSA and LSA sites with increasingly complex and smaller methods of fabrication, which she dates, in relation, ever younger. The time sequence ends with shell middens of the Holocene. The latter she calls 'young'<sup>53</sup> and privately assigns them to the 'Strandloper' tradition of Holocene coastal dwellers<sup>54</sup>, 2,000ya and even younger. Her voluminous lithic collection has been analysed as to its fabrication methods according to present-day laboratory techniques.<sup>55</sup> This proves that material that is over 40 years old, often collected *out of situ*, can be subjected to modern scientific scrutiny. Her own published interpretation of the archaeological data,<sup>56</sup> suggests a continuum of the existence of early man all along the coast.

Therefore, at *Gemsbok* we see the first signs of early humans in the area. They live at the river mouth more than 300,000ya<sup>57</sup> between the sea and a lagoon, presumably full of resources, certainly fresh water. This date falls within that of the 1mya, which John Kinahan gives as the length of time that the Namib Desert has been inhabited.<sup>58</sup> It also approaches that of the next oldest site, Namib IV, in the sand dunes of the central Namib Desert, dated at 400,000 to 700,000ya, on the basis of fossil remains of the extinct *Elephas recki*.<sup>59</sup> In the scientific literature, early ESA sites have become associated with *Homo erectus*: belonging to a wider group of bipedal dwellers on sites with a source of water, hunting rather big game with a well-established tool kit of initially big stone tools, and

48 Pickford and Senut: 1998

49 Corvinus 1983: p. 10; Mesfin 2021.

50 Corvinus 1983: p. 10

51 Corvinus 1983: p. 11

52 Corvinus 1983: p. 21

53 Corvinus 1983: p. 81

54 Corvinus 1979: p. 15

55 Mesfin 2021

56 Corvinus 1983

57 Corvinus 1983: This is the initial date she gives. Elsewhere (p.86) she gives a date of 400,000 to 700,000ya. Mesfin et al.: 2022: p. 5 give a date of over 700,000ya.

58 Kinahan 2020: p. 26

59 Kinahan 2020: p. 52, quoting Deacon and Lancaster 1988: p 52; Owen-Smith 1992: p. 17.

at the coast scavenging on coastal resources. There is a scientific consensus that from 300,000ya onwards, ESA gives way to MSA, the latter exhibiting more complex and diverse tool kits. By 120,000ya these are associated with the existence of *Homo sapiens*,<sup>60</sup> direct ancestor to modern humans with a similar brain capacity and ability to solve complex tasks. The LSA and Holocene is associated with further advancement in stone technology and also rock art in south western Africa,<sup>61</sup> evidence of which Gudrun Corvinus finds at *Daberas*, away from the coast (see Figure 3). While we cannot assume a direct linear development of one specific group of people, her material suggests a sequence of human presence from the ESA to virtually the present day. The point is that evidence of this process of human evolution based on the progression in the production of stone tools, is to be found along the lower Orange River.

## Obib

Relatively little can be said about *Obib* at present, except to illustrate Corvinus' enthusiasm for it. The widely scattered sites are situated to the south-east of the *Obib* Dunes (see Figure 2 and 4), above the Orange River valley.<sup>62</sup> Discovering it on 9 February 1976, only seven days after her arrival, she writes in her field diary: '*handaxe site on the edge of the Obib dunes on the right bank of a small stream which joins the Orange*'. She follows this later, by listing several concentrations of artefacts at '*Obib Dunes*', '*Obib West*', '*Main Obib Place*' and a '*Obib River-mouth LSA Site*' (Figure 6).<sup>63</sup> Within the wider site she '*finds ESA handaxes on the edge of the dunes; MSA point at 41m' made of quartzite,*' which seems not to be available in the immediate surroundings.<sup>64</sup> She notes: '*small place on a grey, colluvial covered flat hillock at the north side of the southern hill, west of the main Obib...cleavers, handaxes of the Acheulian (certainly brought in) and with LSA artefacts...*', then '*...on the top of the dune...are some accumulations of stones. On one of them are ESA core(s) and flake(s), used again to take away flakes...*'<sup>65</sup> She did a one and a half hour / 6km walk '*from where ESA man brought his raw material namely, river cobbles of quartzite for making the tools of the Obib dune site.*' She finds graves and stone 'circles' or cairns (Figure 6). In typical 1970s fashion, she relegates these latter sites to the '*Bushmen*' phase associated with pottery and ostrich eggshell items, dated to anything from 2,000ya to '*maybe even younger than 100 years.*'<sup>66</sup> In line with the ethnicity-based identification of the times, she suggests that '*The latest people are pottery-using Bushmen, who migrated along the river on their way from the coast to the interior, establishing at one day intervals their camps near the river.*'<sup>67</sup>

60 Kinahan 2020, for instance.

61 Kinahan 2020

62 *Obib*, as used here, is a mine-appropriate name – and is not to be confused with the township of *Obib* at the Rosh Pinah Mine, to the east of and outside Sperrgebiet 1.

63 Corvinus 1976.

64 Corvinus 1976: Diary entry 4 December.

65 Corvinus 1977: Diary entry 12 January.

66 Corvinus 1979: p. 4

67 Corvinus 1979: p. 65

In her first mine report, she suggests that *Obib* should be investigated.<sup>68</sup> However, this does not feature in her monthly, mine-prescribed timetable. While she is not able to plot it, it continues to occupy her thoughts. She revisits it, photographs surface finds and collects a few select pieces.<sup>69</sup> Her enthusiastic descriptions sketch a site of a variety of early human activities: including longer habitation, repeated habitation, short-term stops, fabrication of stone tools, importing of raw material, and removing such raw material. She writes about many layers of occupation, from all Stone Ages up to the Holocene; super-imposed and intermixed, tools re-used. They start with ESA Acheulian handaxes and end with 'potsherds, an iron-washer, a thumb-nail scraper. Probably not older than 40 years.' Regarding the importation of raw material, she asks herself: 'Where did early man find this material? Why did he bring it to this site?' Considering its location, she wonders: 'Why did he walk so far? Why did he prefer the dunes to the Orange River valley to live?'<sup>70</sup>

Her notes on and questions of *Obib* suggest a transit point, a gathering spot, possibly a resting place, a junction where social activities could have unfolded. *Obib* reflects mobility. It could well prove to be such a conduit, entry point and exit of early hominins into and out of the southern Namib Desert (Figure 5 and 6). It raises multiple questions that even today would be of crucial concern for archaeologists namely, questions of mobility, usage of space and migration to name a few.

Fig. 5: *Obib* Late Stone Age stone circle. Private Collection Ulla Mussnugug.



68 Corvinus 1977: p. 55

69 Photographs of *Obib* found in her estate are located at BAB; the stone material is stored in the National Museum in Windhoek.

70 Corvinus 1977

Due to the climatic conditions, sites in the desert are known to remain undisturbed for thousands of years. Allowing for the cyclical covering and exposing by aeolian sands, they remain preserved over time. *Obib* also lies outside mine interests, a facilitating factor in the application of permission of access and work. Furthermore, it forms a link to sites and ultimately people, living beyond the artificial, commercial boundary of the Sperrgebiet, who might have a pre-historic narrative of their own. Given the proper financial backing, *Obib* may very well prove a site to be revisited and examined.

Fig. 6: *Obib River mouth, Late Stone Age site. Private Collection Ulla Mussnug.*



## Conclusion

Corvinus exposed the prehistoric heritage of the Lower Orange River area in the four years that she was at CDM. She recorded innumerable sites, primarily along the river and coastline, but also inland. These point to a prolonged habitation of the area by both animals and humans. Two obvious reasons for the abundance of evidence might be: firstly, enhanced preservation due to the scant vegetation and desert climate; and secondly, the status of the Sperrgebiet as an area of prohibited public access since 1922. The use of diamond mining infrastructure and tools to expose fossils and artefacts from deep layers is an ironic exception to this isolation policy.

I contrast three sites in this chapter based on either their faunal or human presence. These are chosen for their spatial location and their temporal variability. They illustrate how her material may characterise the prehistoric conditions in the southern Namib Desert. The faunal material at *Arrisdrift* provides insight into the biodiversity and paleo-environmental riverine conditions during the mid-Miocene. This is contrasted with

the site's present location inland. Stone tool collections from the area mined at *Gemsbok* and northwards point to the presence of early humans from the early, middle Pleistocene (300,000ya) until the late Holocene (2,000ya). Gudrun's fascination with *Obib* is evident from her personal field diaries. Situated away from the river and outside mine activity, it covers a timespan from ESA to the present. It reads as a compelling site. If funding were secured, contemporary methods of archaeological excavation and analysis could be utilised here.

*Obib* raises the question of mobility of early human groups. In fact, Corvinus' diaries are replete with references such as '*obviously these people have arrived at the coast from the interior along the Orange River.*' Scientists admit to the river acting as a conduit from the interior of the sub-continent, as archaeological sites continue beyond and upriver.<sup>71</sup> It is generally accepted by researchers that *Homo erectus*, associated with the ESA, was widely mobile. Scientists admit that the hominins that lived in the centres of evolution were widely dispersed and inter-linked.<sup>72</sup>

Looking at *Obib* would direct our gaze beyond the arbitrary commercial boundaries of the Sperrgebiet, boundaries that were set up to satisfy the desire for luxury items. Local communities gained nothing from them. Also, connecting with the areas up-river will let us once again engage with people and their memories that have been banned from the Sperrgebiet for more than a century.<sup>73</sup> Further back in time, results from an excavation of *Obib* might provide clues to the life of hunter-gatherers and their mobility prior to mining and farming.

Many archaeologists consider her finds with caution. The coherence of her lithic material has been impacted by its distribution between different institutions, as well as the National Museum of Namibia moving several times. Records of her finds in the latter institute have been misplaced. Most pertinently, the Corvinus finds were collected under contractual conditions with the mine. Academic inquiry was not the purpose thereof, nor was it in the direct interest of the company. She therefore attempts to bridge the academic-corporate gap. Corvinus develops inventive techniques of correlating dump finds with trench stratigraphy or correlating the original sand matrix still sticking to artefacts with trench profiles.<sup>74</sup> Artefacts she excavates are marked with the location of the parent pit, trench, layer and/or depth. This allows her to associate dump-heap finds with the original trench layer.<sup>75</sup> This method of association allows for dating by previously dated geological layers. For some, this is an approximation and does not fulfil the criteria of inclusion in the larger pre-history narrative.

In defence of her own limitations, she points out that at the time in Namibia, there were no known sealed primary sites. Paradoxically their discovery would not have been made, had it not been for the mining activity.<sup>76</sup> While researchers have followed up on her

71 Morris 1995 in Smith 1995.

72 Kinahan 2020: p. 16

73 Wendt 1981

74 Mesfin et al. 2022

75 Mesfin et al. 2022

76 The prospecting mine trenches at *Arrisdrift* were up to 30m deep. Even after that, another 4 to 6m of sand had to be removed for her to get to her conglomerate of bone deposit.

work, I argue that her material has been unfairly overlooked. Modern methods of archaeological analysis include such technology as high resolution, multi-proxy environmental modelling; biological analysis; and genetic analysis, apart from the comparative wealth of data available at present in the form of a standard. In fact, her material is dated relatively by an inferred series of advances in the technological mastery of stone tool production, and not absolutely. Ultimately, for the present purpose of an illustration of habitation along the Lower Orange River, a laboratory analysis and absolute dating is not of prime significance.

Yet, at least the most important of her uncountable sites need to be located and recorded in a modernised scientific manner. Ideally, their precise locations need to be documented making them accessible to the scientific community in published form, such as the material from *Arrisdrift* and *Gemsbok*. New stone material needs to be stored scientifically, augmenting that already present in the State Museum in Windhoek (Figure 7). Some stone material was organised and once again centralised into the official laboratory by the author and laboratory staff in 2018 and 2019, once again allowing access to a more coherent block of material to researchers. It should be publicised, engaging both scientists and the local community. Local origin stories related to ancient stone tools might have their own versions. We are fast losing time for incorporating narratives of origin stories of residents upriver from the Sperrgebiet as part of the scientific knowledge base.

*Fig. 7: One of the boxes containing stone artefacts from Obib in the State Museum in Windhoek. Photo by Ulla Mussgnug.*



Any nation needs to know its (pre-) history. Few countries in the world can show the kind of time sequence of human evolution at their doorstep as Namibia can at the Lower Orange River. Gudrun Corvinus' material contributes towards this quest; we now need to fill in the gaps. As an important Namibian heritage, her material should be preserved before it might get lost, mismanaged, scattered or even appropriated.

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## List of Abbreviations:

- AD8/2 Arrisdrift Trench 8 pit 2
- CDM Consolidated Diamond Mines of South West Africa
- ESA Early Stone Age (extrapolated from her notes ESA from around the date of Gemsbok until about 200,000ya)
- MSA Middle Stone Age: (extrapolated from her notes: from approximately 200,000ya)
- LSA Late Stone Age (extrapolated from her notes: the past 2,000 into the present)
- GIS Geographic Information System
- Mya Million years ago
- Ya years



# Landscape Archives, Aerial Photography and Geomorphic Change along the Lower Orange River

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'Each discipline has its own narrative and archive'<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

As an interdisciplinary project, 'Space in Time' sheds light on the different methodologies and research questions of participating disciplines by considering the types of archives used to build narratives of the past. This paper focuses on the geomorphologic archive which is typically composed of physical material in a state of ongoing change. This disciplinary orientation approaches landscape change in relation to natural processes and human interactions that have left behind physical traces which geomorphologists use as a basis for defining and interpreting change. While typically focused on the physical features of the landscape – such as sediments – this chapter highlights an alternative archive based on historical aerial photography in combination with satellite imagery and runoff data.

## The Geomorphologic Archive

A geomorphologist's archive is typically composed of material dug up from behind a dam wall after a flood has washed sediment down a river (see image below). Once the sediments are retrieved, they are assembled vertically so that layers of compact grey can be contrasted with more sandy ones. The differences in colour and texture provide a starting point for the researcher to narrate the past. For instance, the sediments might show that at one point there was a big rainfall event, while other layers may be indicative of events

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1 To quote Giorgio Miescher's statement during the introduction session of the Space in Time workshop that took place in Oranjemund in December 2019.

of lower magnitude. Measuring how quickly the sediment has built up over time aids in climate reconstruction. The amount and conditions of the material therefore tells a story about how the physical landscape has changed over time.

*Fig. 1: Sediment Archive (Klaus Kuhn 2018).*



Evidence in the form of sediments is typical of the northern Karoo, however not all parts of the semi-arid region have the same archival conditions.<sup>2</sup> The region adjacent to the Lower Orange River has low rates of flooding, and therefore not much sediment is left behind dams. Rather, the water flows through a rock bed – leaving little material behind that could be preserved, dug up, analysed, and studied. Building a climate model, accounting for large scale floods, or narrating the socio-economic history of the region through sediment accumulation, is therefore not possible. But there are alternatives to the traditional geological archives.

A readily available archive of aerial photographs of the Lower Orange River is stored at the National Geo-Spatial Information (NGI) in South Africa. The earliest images from the 1930s were planned along routes that flew directly over the Orange River and were mostly likely produced for strategic reasons, first, and then later for mapping and documenting soil erosion.<sup>3</sup>

2 Hoffman et al. 2007 and Zuziwe 2004.

3 Rizzo 2019

Using techniques in structural photogrammetry, geomorphologists can stitch together photographs of the same place taken at different times to make landscape change visible. Visible features of the landscape (such as buildings and airports) are used to anchor the series of photographs taken of the same location at different times. The stability of landscape features through which the Lower Orange River flows aids the process. Because it is a desert, much of the built environment has not changed much over time making it easy to connect images in reference to features of the landscape – i.e., corners of buildings, roads, airports, and railway lines.

*Fig. 2: Airport (Brigitte Kuhn 2019)*



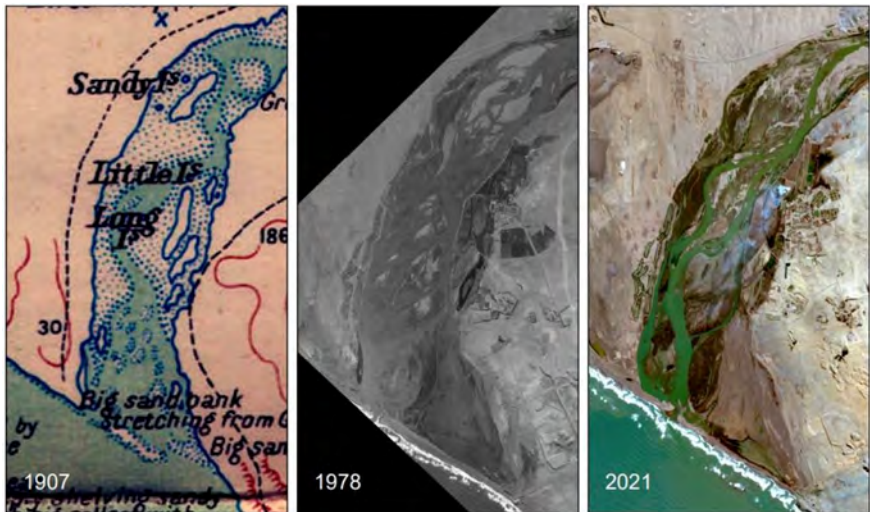
Comparing images reveals that there is more terrestrial land between the northern and southern shores of the Orange River than there was 40 years ago. Before the construction of dams in the 1960s there were only a few channel bars – or islands – which shifted during every flood. When the flood receded, sediments were deposited again, creating new islands. The construction of dams upstream, though, has stabilised the river, reducing the rate and frequency of floods. The Orange River has since lost its ca-

capacity to wash sediment out to the sea, resulting in a more clear-cut riverbed and more stable islands.

The figure below, assembled by Jonas Laube (2022) puts three different representations side-by-side in order to demonstrate the spatial resolution of the Orange River Mouth: The map from the cartographer's view point, the orthomosaic composed of historical aerial imagery from the National Geospatial Information archives, and a satellite image from Sentinel-2.<sup>4</sup>

The connection between hydrology and morphology visible in the aerial photographs can be strengthened in combination with other sources of information such as runoff data, which links the visual archive with sediment load and morphology showing the annual peak runoff before and after the construction of dams.<sup>5</sup>

*Fig. 3: Evolution of spatial resolution of geodata: historical map, orthomosaic created from aerial photography and a satellite image from Sentinel-2 (from left to right). Laube 2022.*

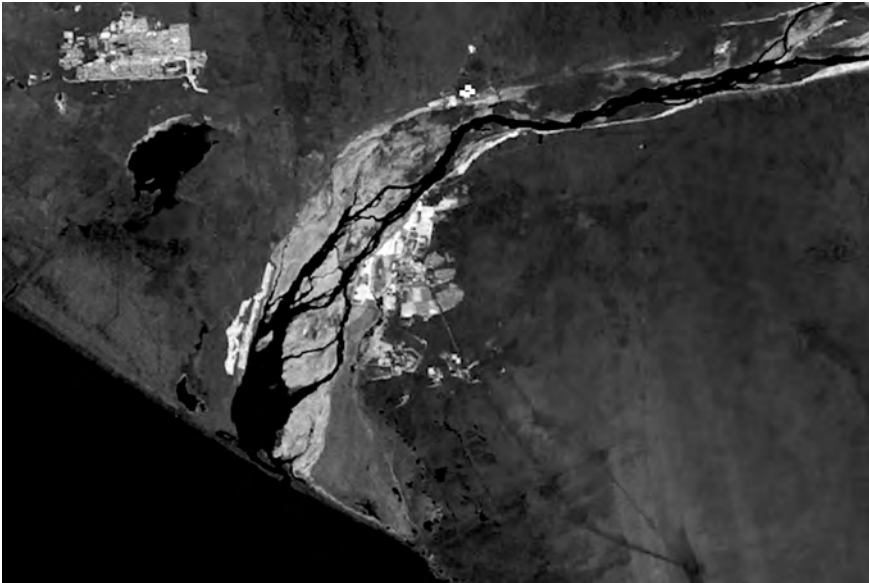


4 Laube 2022

5 Runoff, sediment load and morphology of rivers are intrinsically linked. Lowland rivers with a relatively constant flow and a predominantly fine sediment tend to form a meandering channel pattern. Rivers with highly variable runoff and a sediment load dominated by sand, gravel, and boulders, on the other hand, are characterised by unorganised or braided channel patterns. Therefore, the construction of dams potentially affects channel morphology because peak runoff rates are reduced in magnitude and frequency, and sediment load also often declines.

The series of aerial images and runoff data can be further combined with data about the distribution of vegetation. Using satellite images with near infrared reflection<sup>6</sup> and high-resolution topographical maps adds additional data and gives a better sense of terrestrial vegetation. The vegetation index of the river mouth (below) shows an increase in the terrestrial environment and a decrease in the area covered by the river channel. In other words, the stable land forming in the middle of the river due to runoff changes has become vegetated.

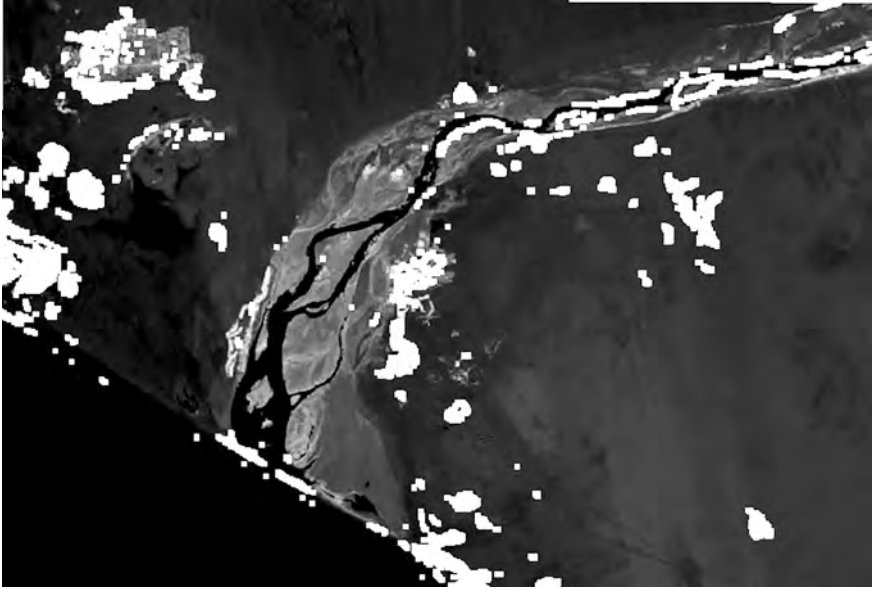
*Fig. 4: Vegetation Index 1990 (Krenz, 2020).*



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6 The NDVI – or Normalised Difference Vegetation Index – is a spectral index that measures the difference between the visible and near-infrared sunlight reflected by vegetation. See Shekhar et al. 2019: pp. 74–75.

*Fig. 5: Vegetation Index 2020 (Krenz, 2020).*



The impact of dams constructed along the Orange River signalled in the time series of aerial photographs in combination with other data shows a dramatic change in morphology due to dam construction. This has had serious ecological consequences, mostly because incoming seawater is mixing with fresh water (blurring the boundary between sea and river). As a contact zone between land and sea that shifts between fluvial and non-fluvial, the tidal estuary which was usually freshwater dominated has become brine and saltwater dominated.

### **The Power of the Archive**

A geomorphological gaze sees landscape change as an ongoing process that can be studied in reference to the traces that are left behind, such as layers of alluvium that wash down a river and collect behind a structure (like a dam). These materials constitute a specific type of landscape archive and sediment deposits make it possible to understand how the flow of the river has changed. These archives only emerge, however, where surface processes have left behind traces that have been preserved and can be analysed from a fixed position.

In the dry desert environment through which the Lower Orange River flows, there is a limited amount of surface processes unfolding which reduces the number of potential archives that could be interrogated. In locations where hardly any surface processes unfold, different landscape archives are required such as those housed at the National Geospatial Information (NGI) in South Africa (which can be combined with a heterogeneous assemblage of other data such as runoff and spectral imagery).

But the archive is more than just a repository of retrievable information about the past. It is constituted by a discursive and epistemological order that determines what counts as information and what sorts of narratives can be built. Focusing here on data sources in the form of aerial photographs, while the spatial archive is not constituted by the same materiality and process and it is not 'living' in the same sense that a sediment archive is, it is founded on a different logic, system of classification and order that engenders a different set of epistemologies.

This switch from the material physical landscape to the discursive visual archive therefore raises questions about the power structure and ideology that underlay how the landscape is imagined, depicted, and conceptualised. The power of the archive is thus lodged in forms and practices of knowledge production, and what is preserved as landscape is not contingent simply on natural processes. Rather it is the result of selection and rejection, of inclusion and exclusion, and is constitutive of value systems based on a hierarchical order of material evidence.

The landscape as both a material and discursive archive thereby requires attention to questions of perception and vision, to examine how the materiality of the landscape produces regimes of vision that determine what is made visible and what remains invisible.<sup>7</sup> Therefore information that is physically disconnected from the absolute space constituting a material landscape through remote sensing data raises critical issues of the power of these archives to make some things visible while concealing others. Working with visual archives therefore entails a closer look at what the photographs show, and what is hidden beyond the frame.

Lorena Rizzo has recently offered a way to understand this complexity, and how aerial photography simultaneously reveals and keep things hidden.<sup>8</sup> Using spatial information that is disconnected from material landscape therefore raises key methodological problems that can be traced back to the early days of aerial photography, which has implications for analysing the ethical and political consequences of spatial databases in general. While useful for answering environmental questions, the spatial archive is bound up with a longer history of its production and the consequences of 'seeing like a state' which effectively reduced the richness of how people inhabited their landscape.<sup>9</sup>

## Situating the Technique

The Lower Orange River is a site of academic knowledge production that has rarely been shared with local audiences who often remain marginalised and excluded from the academy. Thus, the critical issues related to landscape archives include how knowledge is shared and used, and the political and ethical responsibilities of researchers toward an interested local audience. Questioning the structure of landscape archives is therefore one way to address how they can be used beyond the academy and for public debates.

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7 Miescher and Lenggenhager 2020

8 Rizzo 2019

9 Scott 1998

As a technique for making comparisons, aerial photographs can be used to understand patterns of change beyond the Orange River Mouth. They can be combined with satellite images and spatial databases to generate accurate geo-reference points that create maps that have a higher resolution and better accuracy than conventional maps. These representations can empower people who are concerned with environmental change along the Lower Orange River who need accurate data to support open political debates. This data could then be upscaled to make generalisations about the impacts of dams in the region, as well as their ongoing ecological and political consequences.

The wider political impact of documenting the movement of the river relates to issues of boundary demarcation, struggles to identify which islands belonged to which state, and determining private riparian owners' rights.<sup>10</sup> Namibia and South Africa share a 1,000 km border, most of which runs along the Orange River. The two countries disagree over the exact location of the political border which currently runs along the northern high-water mark, rather than being in the middle of the river – as is common international practice. The location determines the 200 nautical sea miles boundary which potentially affects mining prospects and opportunities for marine resource exploitation. The exact position of the point of boundary at the river's mouth has further implications for demarcating the exclusive economic zone with its valuable gas fields and diamond reserves.<sup>11</sup>

Extrapolating data to make claims about much larger areas perceived to be similar enough for direct comparison puts into focus, though, the limitations facing users who require tools to combine various forms of data – including aerial photographs, satellite images, and location information provided by GPS – and how this data can be stored, used, and shared. This limitation and foreseen uses of the landscape archives puts into focus the role of national archives – such as the NGI – in dealing with the uneven production of spatial data. As a landscape archive, the NGI operates against a backdrop of various discriminatory land administration exploits following colonial practices and apartheid in South Africa. Ironically, the availability of historical spatial data created by oppressive regimes has become a key resource in decision-making to redress or compensate for past injustices. As a national mapping organisation, the NGI exists to deliver highly accurate geospatial information including those that can provide historical context on land administration over time.<sup>12</sup>

Personal computers, and the democratisation of spatial data – such as aerial photographs, satellite imagery, and runoff data – has made public participation in remote sensing and spatial computing possible. This is linked to the wider application of remote sensing defined as the ability to monitor and collect data about something without the data collection instrument encountering the object or objects it is monitoring.<sup>13</sup> This definition is wide enough to include historical aerial photographs such as those used by geomorphologists to interpret landscape change along the Orange River. But beyond the genre of before-and-after images, linking these photographs with modern systems of

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10 Evans 1993 : p. 134

11 Erasmus et al. 1987

12 Denner and Raubenheimer 2017

13 Shekhar et al. 2019: p. 61

location accuracy (such as GPS) and geographic information systems (GIS) can further improve the veracity of evidence generated by the public and used in political debates. Historical aerial imagery at the scale required for national boundary mapping and documenting soil by the South Africa state is one component. Beyond this is an assemblage of spatial technologies that have shifted from military to public use since at least the 1990s.

Modern remote sensing began with the Landsat satellites which were launched in the 1960s.<sup>14</sup> Still in operation, the Landsat program has more than 40 years of consistently archived visual imagery of Earth's surface (making it a massive landscape archive in its own right). Today, scientists from around the world use Landsat images to study changes to Earth's surface over time. But while the sensors used today are much more sensitive and advanced than they were in the 1960s, the complex systems for gathering data about the Earth and monitoring areas at a distance have limitations. A major hurdle has been accessing computer processing power since the images created by satellites are huge compilations of data and transferring the data to a machine is time consuming. Since the 1990s, equipment has become more openly available and it takes a relatively short amount of time to load the necessary geographic information to perform the operations necessary to, for instance, make representations of and claims about river morphology.

Combining data is a function of geographic information systems (GISs) in general, which fuse together geographic and map data from multiple sources (including historical aerial images). An individual GIS can then store, analyse, and manage the data, and then provide visualisations of this data in the form of a map. Spatial database management systems (SDBMSs) provide the backbone of many of these technologies, which have made significant advancements with the development of cloud computing platforms, such as Google Earth Engine.<sup>15</sup> Lower cost computing equipment and open-source platforms have offered greater flexibility to map-making than ever before. As computing power, computer storage and remote-sensing tools are continuing to improve, another technological shift has been underway as Internet-based GIS made it even easier to access GIS technologies. Maps that were once viewed from a desktop computer are now accessed via mobile devices using cloud-based storage systems for their geographic databases.<sup>16</sup>

## Conclusion

Every discipline has its own landscape and its own archive, as Giorgio Miescher pointed out during the workshop in Oranjemund in 2019. Typically, the geomorphological archive is composed of sediments that are washed up behind a structure, such as a dam, which can then be dug up and studied. However, the lack of surface processes along the Orange River has made it necessary to explore alternatives. One of these exists in the form of remotely sensed data, such as historical aerial photographs and satellite imagery, which can be linked up with additional information such as runoff data. Open-

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14 Mack 1990

15 Shekhar et al. 2019: p. 10

16 Shekhar et al. 2019: pp. 99–100

source computer platforms and cloud-based tools, together with national archives that have democratised spatial information, have empowered the public to use and interact with new mapping techniques and spatial representations which potentially shape public debates. Thus, while not living in the same sense as the sediment archive, historical aerial photographs continue to shape perceptions and engagements with landscapes. The democratisation of spatial information and tools has, on the other hand, made it possible for the public to shape these technologies and archives through their continual engagement with them.

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# The Water Quality of the Lower Orange River and its Implications on Human and River Health

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*Justina T. Nangolo, Martin Hipondoka and Eliakim Hamunyela<sup>1</sup>*

## Introduction

Human activities related to agriculture and settlements are increasing rapidly along the major river systems in southern Africa, but the effects of such developments on the water quality of the river systems is poorly documented. The Orange River drains an area in excess of 1,000,000 km and runs more than 2,200 km from its source in Lesotho to the mouth at Oranjemund.<sup>2</sup> The river supports millions of people within and outside of the basin in Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, and South Africa.<sup>3</sup> Economic activities in the basin include those pertaining to agriculture, mining, power generation, tourism, and sewage treatment services. In addition, the river remains the main source of drinking water for humans and animals found in the area. Human activities such as agricultural practices, sewage discharges and residential development are known to deteriorate water quality in river systems when they are inappropriately managed,<sup>4</sup> and a link between reduced water quality and water-borne disease outbreaks is well documented.<sup>5</sup> The deterioration of water quality in river systems can also have a negative impact on the economic activities taking place along the river, such as fishing, swimming, and other tourist attractions. Public health is negatively affected by a lack of clean water and sanitation in the affected area.<sup>6</sup> Yet, many people in southern Africa withdraw and use untreated water from river systems for domestic consumption.

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1 We thank the Carl Schlettwein Foundation and Space in Time project for their financial and logistical support. Namwater at Karasburg kindly provided the historical water quality data used in this study. We also thank the book editors and two anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments.

2 Troy et al. n.d: p. 3

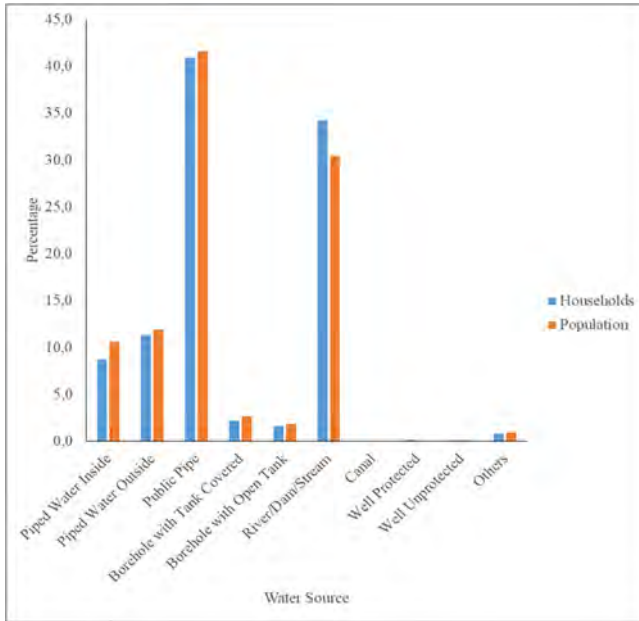
3 Mahlakeng 2020: p. 146

4 Minnesota Pollution Agency 2008: p. 2; Chislock et al. 2013: p 4; Munn 2018: p. 1.

5 Kulinkina et al. 2016: p. 26

6 Ustaoglu et al. 2021: p. 1; Hutton et al. 2016: p. 1; Tarrass et al. 2012: p. 1.

Fig. 1: Source of drinking water in Aussenkehr (Data acquired from: Namibia Statistics Agency).



The Orange River Basin is highly urbanised with densely populated areas mostly in its upper course, while the Lower Orange River is dominated by agricultural activities.<sup>7</sup> Population growth and agricultural expansion can strain water demands, therefore reducing water supply in the basin and affecting the quality of water in the river. The Orange Senqu River Commission (ORASECOM) revealed that declining water quality in the Orange River is due to acid mine drainage, inadequate sewage treatment and irrigation return flows.<sup>8</sup> These are also the major threats to the Orange River Basin's water resources. Additionally, they are the most known activities practised in the Lower Orange River. The Aussenkehr grape farm is the most prominent land use found on the northern bank of the Lower Orange River. Other types of land use found in Aussenkehr include animal grazing and recreational activities, such as swimming and car washing, which reportedly pose health issues to surrounding communities.<sup>9</sup> Some households in the Lower Orange River, including Aussenkehr (Figure 1), continue to use the water drawn directly from the stream for human consumption.<sup>10</sup> This is even though Aussenkehr has no proper sewage treatment plant, and the residents use the river for drinking water and as a toilet.<sup>11</sup> Against this background, this chapter aims to analyse and assess the water

7 Orange Senqu River Commission (ORASECOM) 2011: pp. 4–6

8 ORASECOM 2011: p. 10

9 Traore et al. 2016: pp. 9–12

10 Namibia Statistic Agency (NSA) 2011

11 Cloete 2011

quality in the Lower Orange River, using data from Noordoewer and Rosh Pinah, and to discuss the implications thereof on human and river health.

## Water quality parameters

Time series data of 17 physicochemical properties, namely: pH, turbidity (Tur), electrical conductivity (EC), total dissolved solids (TDS), sodium (Na), potassium (K), calcium (Ca), magnesium (Mg), sulphate (SO<sub>4</sub>), nitrate (NO<sub>3</sub>), silica (SiO<sub>2</sub>), fluoride (F), chloride (Cl), iron (Fe), manganese (Mn), copper (Cu), and zinc (Zn), were analysed to assess the long-term temporal change in the water quality. These are the important parameters used to determine the suitability of water based on its intended use – such as irrigation and human consumption.<sup>12</sup>

Water quality is determined by a number of water's physicochemical properties because there is no single parameter that can adequately measure it.<sup>13</sup> In reality, water suitable for some uses might not be suitable for others. Therefore, water quality is evaluated against a set of standards put down by governmental or water regulation bodies to test suitability.

The pH measures the acidity or basic of water. Different aquatic organisms function well under a certain pH level and any slight change to that pH may cause disturbances in aquatic life.<sup>14</sup> A neutral pH is best for aquatic plants and animals.<sup>15</sup> Meanwhile, low pH might corrode metals and other substances dissolved in the water. Turbidity measures the ability of light to pass through water, determined by its cloudiness from clay, silt or other organic particles dissolved in the water. Measuring turbidity in water bodies can determine if the water is safe for various uses. Thus, measuring water turbidity is imperative for monitoring water quality.

Electrical Conductivity measures the ability of water to pass or conduct electric current.<sup>16</sup> It depends on the number of ions dissolved in the water. Water with high conductivity consists of many dissolved ions. Total dissolved solids refers to the amount of negative and positive ions in the water.

Chloride and sulphate in water varies depending on the area and can occur naturally in water sources.<sup>17</sup> However, they can also come from contamination from agricultural runoff and wastewater. When in higher concentration they might cause a noticeably unpleasant salty taste and have unwanted laxative effects.<sup>18</sup> Studies report that human consumption of chloride-contaminated water can cause cardiovascular diseases as well as kidney failure in humans.<sup>19</sup> Sulphate on the other hand poses no significant health is-

12 Omer 2019: pp. 3–6

13 Leščičen et al. 2017: p. 2

14 Patil et al. 2020: p. 31

15 Omer 2019: p. 7

16 Duraisamy et al. 2019: p. 859

17 Rai 2021: p. 106

18 Auwal 2021: pp. 15–16

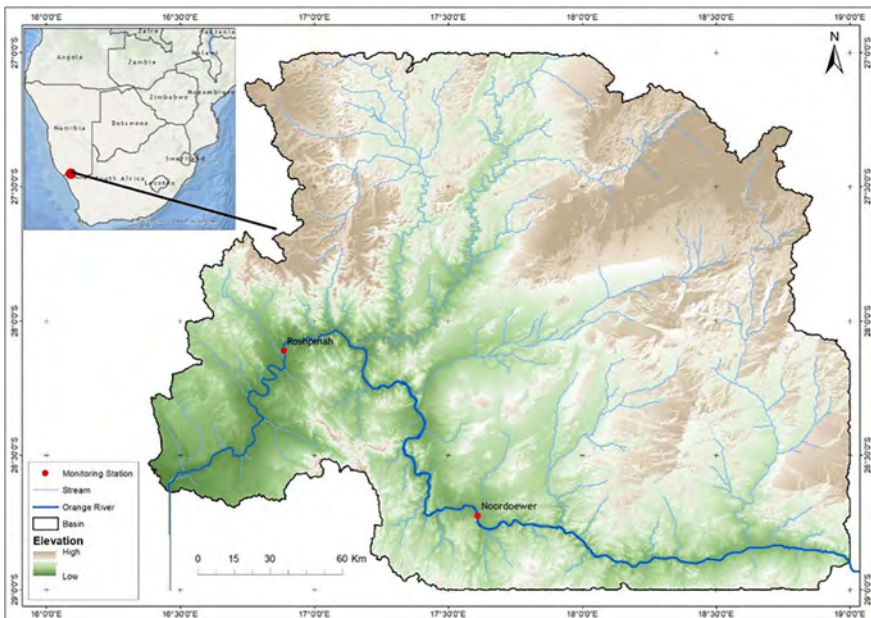
19 Chen et al. 2021: pp. 783–785

sues to humans.<sup>20</sup> Low concentrations of fluoride in drinking water effectively reduces tooth decay, but it also causes dental fluorosis when in excess.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, copper and zinc are nontoxic when found in small amounts and beneficial to human health and the growth of plants. However, they can cause a disturbing taste and milky appearance in water.<sup>22</sup>

Iron and manganese are liable to a bitter taste in drinking water.<sup>23</sup> Although nitrate is a basic nutrient to the growth of aquatic plants, it can also cause the development of algae in water – which reduces oxygen and decreases water quality when in excess.<sup>24</sup>

Calcium, sodium, and magnesium are important ions for children's development; however, in higher quantities they may increase the likelihood of disease.<sup>25</sup> Silica, widely classified as salts, is found naturally in water – from the underlying rocks of the water body. It does not affect water quality for domestic purposes. Studies found that calcium, silica, potassium, magnesium, and sulphate are good indicators of drinking water quality status.<sup>26</sup> Calcium, silica, and potassium are associated with good taste meanwhile sulphate and magnesium might cause an unsavoury taste in drinking water.

Fig. 2: Stream networks found in the watershed and the sampling locations (Data acquired from Namibia Statistics Agency and United States Geological Survey).



- 20 Omer 2019: p. 9  
 21 Narsimha et al. 2017: pp. 2501–2512  
 22 Auwal 2021: p. 17  
 23 Rai 2021: p. 106  
 24 Chebet et al. 2020: pp. 4–8  
 25 Azoulay et al. 2001: pp. 168–175  
 26 Hashimoto et al. 1987: pp.185-195

Data for each water quality parameter, acquired from the Namibia Water Corporation (NamWater), was measured over a period of more than 20 years at two monitoring stations, located in Noordoewer (1997 – 2020) and Rosh Pinah (1998 – 2020) in the Lower Orange River (Figure 2). The two sites were selected due to their historical water quality information recorded over the years. The two monitoring stations are about 150 km apart. The main land use activity found between the two monitoring stations is Aussenkehr grape farm.

### Physical and chemical indicators of water quality in the Lower Orange River

Table 1 presents the results of all water quality parameters averaged for different seasons and location of observations. The mean value of these parameters was compared with the water quality standards as set by the NamWater guidelines for drinking water.

The exploratory data analysis applied to the observed water quality parameters revealed that all parameters were within the highest recommended NamWater water quality guidelines, except for Tur and Mn. This means that they are all within Class A, with excellent water quality, except for Tur and Mn which both fall under Class D, which poses higher health risks, or is water unsuitable for human consumption. Similarly, turbidity concentration in this study area has previously been found to be above the recommended guidelines for drinking water.<sup>27</sup> This means that an increase in water quality values was recorded between Noordoewer and Rosh Pinah, although most of these values were within the recommended guidelines.

Based on seasonal analysis, F and NO<sub>3</sub> are the only parameters that increased during the wet season at Noordoewer. Meanwhile at Rosh Pinah EC, TDS, Na, K, Mg, SO<sub>4</sub>, F, Fe, Cu and Zn all increased during the wet season. Spatial variation shows that EC, TDS, Na, K, Ca, Mg, SO<sub>4</sub>, F, Cl, Fe, Mn, and turbidity increased at the downstream station, but still remained within the recommended guidelines (Class A).

Table 1: Overall water quality of the Lower Orange River based on the NamWater water quality guidelines for drinking water (Time series data acquired from NamWater).

Water quality Parameter	Noordoewer (upstream)								Rosh Pinah (downstream)							
	Wet season				Dry season				Wet season				Dry season			
	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D
pH	8.2				8.3				8.3				8.3			
Turbidity (NTU)				34.6				26.9				114.5				38.2

Water quality Parameter	Noordoewer (upstream)								Rosh Pinah (downstream)							
	Wet season				Dry season				Wet season				Dry season			
	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D
Conductivity (mS/m)	45.3				48.7				53.9				53.7			
TDS (calculated)	303.2				326.4				361.1				359.4			
Na (mg/l)	38.3				40.6				51.4				49.2			
K (mg/l)	3.1				2.8				3.7				2.9			
Ca (CaCO <sub>3</sub> )	74.9				83.2				77.6				87.2			
Mg (CaCO <sub>3</sub> )	67.4				73.8				77.				76.8			
SO <sub>4</sub> (mg/l)	44.1				53.7				66.3				64.8			
NO <sub>3</sub> (mg/l)	0.9				0.7				0.9				1.0			
SiO <sub>2</sub> (mg/l)	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
F (mg/l)	0.4				0.3				0.4				0.3			
Cl (mg/l)	35.6				38.7				47.8				47.9			
Fe (mg/l)	0.02				0.02				0.06				0.04			
Mn (mg/l)				26.6				31.3				40.9				31.2
Cu (mg/l)	0.03				0.02				0.02				0.02			
Zn (mg/l)	0.02				0.02				0.02				0.02			

**Note:** NamWater guidelines for drinking water class (A= Water with an excellent quality, B= Water with good quality, C= Water with low health risk, D= Water with a higher health risk, or water unsuitable for human consumption. \* **No guideline set**)

## Trend Analysis of the Water quality parameters

### Annual trend

Assessing changes in water quality over time is an important objective in water quality monitoring programmes. This is mostly done using trend analysis to track changes over time and identify and detect different drivers in water quality. To meet this important need, trend analysis has been widely applied in studies that have analysed the water quality of river systems over the years.<sup>28</sup> A trend test is carried out to determine if the measured water quality parameters have increased or decreased over a specific period at

28 See Antonopoulos et al. 2001: pp. 679–692; Hirsch et al. 1983: pp. 107–121; Yu et al. 1993: pp. 61–80; Baldy et al. 1995: pp. 93–102; Wan et al. 2018: pp. 2–6; and Mahmoodi et al. 2021: pp. 159–173.

a significance level of 0.05.<sup>29</sup> In this study, the non-parametric Mann-Kendall test was used to analyse and determine whether trends exist in the annual and seasonal water quality data. Seasonal analysis was divided into the wet (November to April) and dry season (May to October). Data analysis was performed using R software.

In general, water quality in the study area is better at Noordoewer compared to Rosh Pinah (figure 3), however they are both within the recommended guidelines. Conductivity, turbidity, TDS, Na, SO<sub>4</sub>, NO<sub>3</sub>, F, K, SiO<sub>2</sub>, Zn, Fe, and Cl were higher at Rosh Pinah compared to Noordoewer (figure 3). This implies that there is an increase in pollutants entering the river between Noordoewer and Rosh Pinah; which was suggested to be due to the agricultural activities, sewage, or dolerite and shale rocks found at Aussenkehr.<sup>30</sup>

Although the overall water quality at both stations remains in the same Class A, the higher concentration of some water quality values recorded at Rosh Pinah is surprising considering that the upstream of the river is dominated by similar human activities – which include agricultural activities, practised at a larger scale than Aussenkehr; mining activities; and hydro-infrastructure construction, such as dams. It was therefore expected that the impact of the agricultural farm at Aussenkehr on the water quality should have been minor, compared to all combined upstream impacts, which was not the case in this study.

Previous studies conducted elsewhere revealed that human activities, such as the construction of dams, have a positive impact on some water quality parameters downstream. This is attributed to the trapping and accumulation of sediments and nutrients more easily in reservoirs because of the long water residence.<sup>31</sup> This implies that good water quality recorded at Noordoewer could be attributed to the multiple dams located upstream of Noordoewer, as previously suggested in research conducted in the study area.<sup>32</sup> However, this was not further explored in the current study.

In this study, the time series water quality parameters were tested for trends using the non-parametric Mann-Kendall test. The significance of the trend was also carried out to determine if this change is statistically significant. Temporal trends for annual water quality show that all water quality parameters except pH, Na, Mg, NO<sub>3</sub>, F, and Cl have no significant trends at both stations (table 2). Similar findings were found in the study area, whereby most parameters tend to increase as distance towards the river mouth increases.

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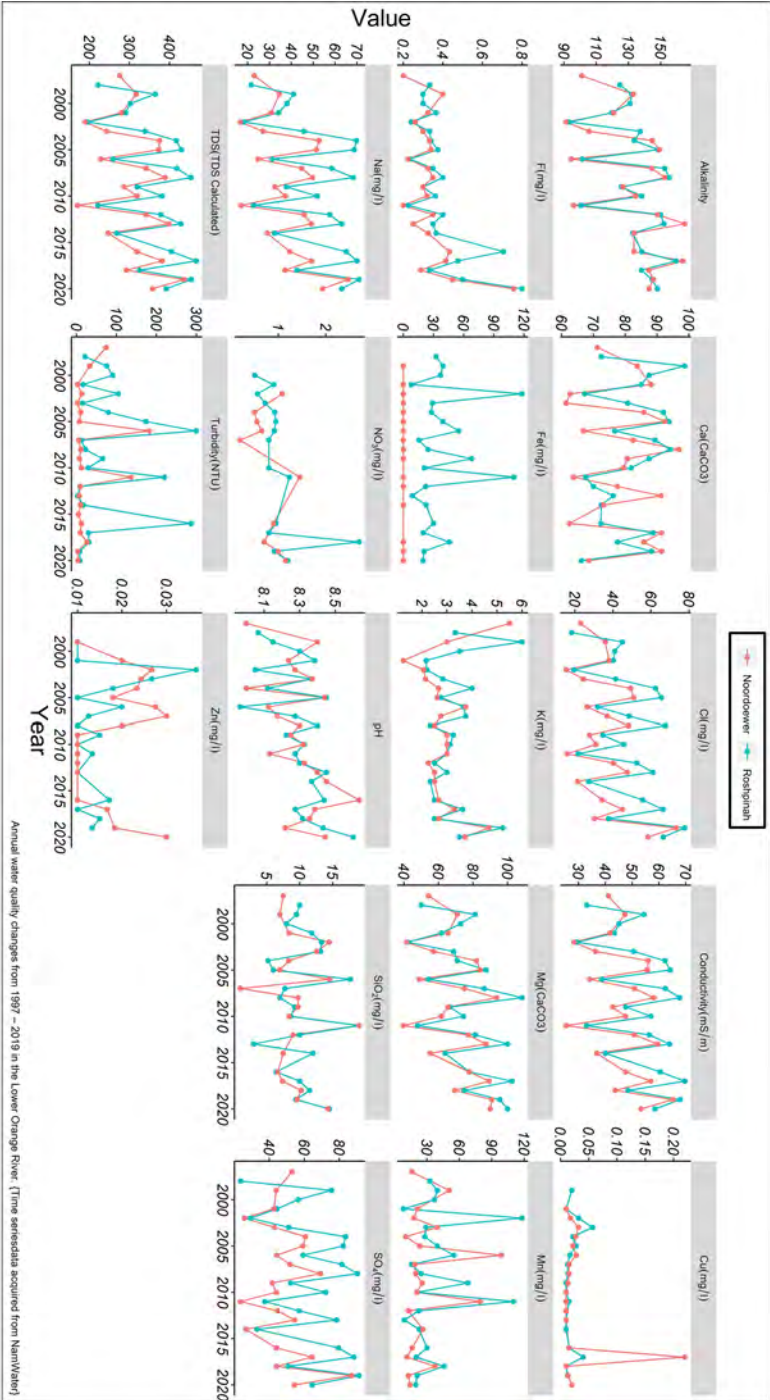
29 Antonopoulos et al. 2001: pp. 679–692

30 Nangolo 2021; Kimwaga et al. 2014: pp. 1–4.

31 See Wei et al. 2008: pp. 1763–1780; Kamidis et al. 2021: pp. 1–16; and Kimwaga et al. 2014: pp. 1–4.

32 Kimwaga et al. 2014: pp. 1–4

Fig. 3: Annual water quality change from 1997–2019 in the Lower Orange River. (Time series data acquired from NamWater).



pH (slope = 0.01), Na (slope = 1.41) and Mg (slope = 1.41) had a significant positive trend at Rosh Pinah. Similar results were found at Noordoewer for the same parameters (pH slope = 0.01), Na (slope = 0.03) and Mg (slope = 1.14). This implies that the water quality in terms of pH, Na and Mg decreased at both stations over the last 20 years. However, NO<sub>3</sub> (slope = 0.03), F (slope = 0.08), and Cl (slope = 1.18) had no significant trend at Noordoewer, but a positive significant trend was observed for all three variables at Rosh Pinah. This denotes that water quality in terms of the three variables decreased at Rosh Pinah compared to Noordoewer over the same period. As suggested earlier, these changes could be attributed to land use activities occurring along the river between Noordoewer and Rosh Pinah. Vineyard plantation at Aussenkehr is the most significant land use between the two towns. The application of fertilisers with other land use activities at Aussenkehr may thus be attributed to that NO<sub>3</sub> increase.<sup>33</sup> Other studies found similar results, noting that anthropogenic influences, such as wastewater discharge into the water body; runoff from industrial and agricultural areas; decomposition of organic matter; storm water and runoff from residential areas and infiltration from landfills were the reason for the increasing trend of nutrient-related parameters such as NO<sub>3</sub> and Cl.<sup>34</sup> Some studies found that high amounts of NO<sub>3</sub> can be poisonous to humans and fish.<sup>35</sup>

In this study, pH was found to be increasing over time at both monitoring stations. High pH is detrimental to aquatic life. pH, here, was at the upper end of water with excellent quality. In addition, alkaline water might cause eye irritation in humans.<sup>36</sup> Thus, the increase in pH and NO<sub>3</sub> needs to be closely examined.

Table 2: Annual trend analysis of the water quality parameters and river discharge at Noordoewer (1997–2019) and Rosh Pinah (1998–2019).

Parameter	Noordoewer	Rosh Pinah
pH	↑	↑
Turbidity	-	-
Conductivity	-	-
TDS	-	-
Na	↑	↑
K	-	-
Ca	-	-
Mg	↑	↑

33 Nangolo 2021; Kimwaga et al. 2014: pp. 1–4.

34 See Singh et al. 2012: pp. 4473–4488; Mustapha 2013: pp. 5630–5644; Gonzales-Inca et al. 2016: pp. 166–180; Purnaini et al. 2018: pp.1-5; Antonopoulos et al. 2001: pp. 679–692; Bucas 2006 and Rahman et al. 2021: pp. 1–13.

35 Dey et al. 2021

36 Khatoon et al. 2013: pp. 80–90

SO <sub>4</sub>	-	-
NO <sub>3</sub>	-	↑
SiO <sub>2</sub>	-	-
F	-	↑
Cl	-	↑
Fe	-	-
Mn	-	-
Cu	-	-
Zn	-	-

Note: -- = No significant trend, ↑ = significant positive trend, ↓ = negative significant trend

### Seasonal trend

Seasonal analysis of the studied variables revealed that the water quality of the Orange River at Noordoewer during the dry season remained the same over time (table 3). However, it deteriorated for Mg (slope = 1.504), and Na (slope = 1.208) during the wet season; all implying that there has been a significant decrease. This means that Mg and Na are influenced by the rainfall, thus resulting in an increase in the trend during the wet season. Similarly, this increase could be due to surface runoff of the materials, wastes or sewage effluents – as documented in Finland.<sup>37</sup>

At Rosh Pinah, pH (slope = 0.025), Na (slope = 1.672), Mg (slope = 2.11), F (slope = 0.001), and Cl (slope = 1.91) had a positive trend during the wet season. However, no trend was found for these variables during the dry season. This is similar to the findings at Noordoewer, and it is likely due to surface runoff.

No significant change was recorded for Fe and Cu during the wet season, but a negative trend was found during the dry season at the same station (Cu slope = -0.001 and Fe slope = -0.002). The detection of negative trends in these two variables during the dry season suggests that there is an improvement in the water quality during the dry season, which could be due to changes in the contaminant sources around the river. Similar results were found in a study done in Kansas rivers.<sup>38</sup> Meanwhile, NO<sub>3</sub> concentrations had no trend during the wet season but had a positive trend during the dry season. This implies that during the dry season some water got lost through evaporation, leaving the concentrated water solution in the river and thus increasing the content of the NO<sub>3</sub>. Trends in Mg, NO<sub>3</sub>, SO<sub>4</sub>, Cl, and pH found in this study are inconsistent with trends found in the Nisava River, Serbia.<sup>39</sup>

Chloride, F and pH had no significant trends during the dry and wet season at Noordoewer; however, they decreased at Rosh Pinah during the wet season. This implies that

37 Pereira et al. 2018: pp. 2701–2710

38 Yu et al. 1993: pp. 61–80

39 Gocic et al. 2013: pp. 199–210

the water quality declined between Noordoewer and Rosh Pinah, which could be due to surface runoff from farms in the sub-catchment.

Despite the statistically significant increase in some parameters – as explained above – the water quality remained within the recommended guidelines of Class A, with excellent water quality at both stations. This is despite new and increased anthropogenic activities in the study area over the years.

*Table 3: Annual trend analysis of the water quality parameters and river discharge at Noordoewer (1997–2019) and Rosh Pinah (1998–2019).*

Water quality Parameter	Noordoewer		Rosh Pinah	
	Wet Season	Dry Season	Wet Season	Dry Season
pH	-	-	↑	-
Turbidity	-	-	-	-
EC	-	-	-	-
TDS	-	-	-	-
Na	↑	-	↑	-
K	-	-	-	-
Ca	-	-	-	-
Mg	↑	-	↑	-
SO <sub>4</sub>	-	-	-	-
NO <sub>3</sub>	-	-	-	↑
SiO <sub>2</sub>	-	-	-	-
F	-	-	↑	-
Cl	-	-	↑	-
Fe	↓	-	-	↓
Mn	-	-	-	-
Cu	-	-	-	↓
Zn	-	-	-	-

**Note:** – = No significant trend, ↑ = significant positive trend, ↓ = negative significant trend

## Implications on human and river health

Nutrients are essential for plant growth, however when in excess they can pose harmful health and environmental effects.<sup>40</sup> The ongoing nutrient-loading – such as nitrate and chloride – into the Orange River system as shown in this study, could lead to a series of adverse effects known as eutrophication. Excessive amounts of nutrients in water bodies can cause water pollution from algae which can reduce dissolved oxygen in the wa-

<sup>40</sup> United States Geological Survey (USGS) n.d.

ter. Algae production in water bodies can die and decompose and this process consumes too much oxygen and therefore causes insufficient oxygen for both aquatic plants and animals. Dissolved oxygen in water bodies gives an indication of the aquatic vegetation growth and potential stress to aquatic life.

High amounts of nitrate in water can have harmful effects on humans and animals and can cause severe illness in infants and domestic animals.<sup>41</sup> Additionally, some forms of algae can produce toxins that can be harmful if ingested by humans and animals.<sup>42</sup> Some of the significant risks associated with drinking water with a high content of nitrate from applications of inorganic fertilisers and animal manure in agricultural areas includes cancer, methemoglobinemia, an enlargement of the thyroid gland, and diabetes mellitus.<sup>43</sup> Although the nitrate found in the water in this study is within the class with excellent quality, if it continues increasing it might pose a similar health issue and therefore should be tackled to avoid the continuous consumption of nitrate-contaminated water.

Similarly, although notable changes were recorded in fluoride concentration in the water, the water quality has remained in Class A over the last two decades. Although a high amount of fluoride and nitrate in drinking water might cause dental and skeletal fluorosis, methemoglobinemia in infants, and stomach cancer in adults<sup>44</sup>, the current status of the water quality in terms of the observed parameters is not of concern when it comes to human health.

Algae blooms can also yield an unpleasant odour and appearance that can reduce the aesthetic appeal of the environment and harm the water quality.<sup>45</sup> This can cause economic damages, including loss of recreational revenue through a reduction in fishing, swimming, and the tourism industry; decreased property values from a reduction in social activities occurring in the area; and increased drinking and agricultural water treatment costs.<sup>46</sup>

An increase in the concentration of turbidity in water quality, as seen in this study, can also increase the water treatment costs.<sup>47</sup> The high amount of Tur observed in this study is of concern because the materials suspended in the water can also cause other health issues in humans, such as headaches and nausea, when directly consumed. The observed increasing trend in Na in the study area is also of concern, given that high amounts of Na in water commonly limits the use of water for irrigation purposes<sup>48</sup> and the study area is mainly dominated by agricultural practices, with irrigation water sourced from the river in question. In addition, a study in Japan found that high Na was closely related to death rate due to epilepsy.<sup>49</sup> This means that we should continuously

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41 Chitra et al. 2020

42 Chislock et al. 2013: p. 6

43 See World Health Organisation (WHO) 2011; Ward et al. 2018 and Parvizishad et al. 2017.

44 Sunitha et al. 2020: pp. 150–161

45 Chislock et al. 2013: p. 7

46 Parvizishad et al. 2017

47 Omer 2019: pp. 2–3

48 Brindha et al. 2017: pp. 89–104

49 Hashimoto et al. 1987: pp. 185–195

monitor the concentration of Na and other parameters in water to ensure that it does not reach the threshold and cause similar health issues in humans.

## Conclusion

This study analysed the water quality of the Lower Orange River as well as the associated river and human health from two monitoring stations. The water quality of the Lower Orange River is declining, mainly at Rosh Pinah where the concentration of nutrient-related water quality parameters (Na, Cl, F, Mg, and  $\text{NO}_3$ ) and pH is increasing, however they remained within the recommended guidelines of class A with excellent water quality. Similarly, at Noordoewer, an annual increase in Na and Mg was detected. When analysed based on seasons, Na, Cl, F, Mg, and pH have increased over time during the wet season at Rosh Pinah, whereas  $\text{NO}_3$  increased during the dry season. At Noordoewer, Fe, Na and Mg increased over time during the wet season.

Despite an increase in some parameters, the overall water quality of the Lower Orange River remained in the category of excellent water quality (Class A) for human consumption when compared against the NamWater guidelines. Turbidity and Mg are the only parameters that are regarded as having a higher health risk (Class D), thus urgent and immediate attention should be given to this matter. However, the statistically significant increase in nutrient-related water quality parameters in the water of the Lower Orange River is a concern. It suggests that there is ongoing nutrient-loading into the river system originating from human activities, especially between Noordoewer and Rosh Pinah. Left unchecked, continued loading of such nutrients has a potential to compromise the health of the biologically diverse Lower Orange River system and that of many people residing along the Orange River between Noordoewer and Rosh Pinah, who use untreated water from the river for domestic consumption. Therefore, further field-based study is urgently needed to investigate the sources of nutrient-related parameters between Noordoewer and Rosh Pinah. In addition, the increase in most parameters was found to be statistically significant, but not significant enough in terms of water quality, and this is despite new and increased anthropogenic activities in the study area. Thus, there is a need for a large-scale study to be carried out on the whole Orange River, especially the upstream of the river, to fully investigate and compare the effects of different anthropogenic activities on its water quality.

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## Epilogue

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*Martha Akawa, Romie Nghitevelekwa and Ndidzulafhi Innocent Sinthumule*

Most of our interactions on the research site took place just prior to the outbreak of Covid-19. A lot has happened in the region since then, opening interesting possibilities for further research. One of the developments is the completion and inauguration of the Neckartal Dam – a construction that began in 2013. The dam is expected to boost agricultural development in the region, with agricultural production planned on about 5,000 hectares of land, focusing on table grapes, dates, lucerne, fruits, vegetables, and other cash crops. The underlying vision of this costly state intervention aims to make the region an agricultural hub, and boost economic development in one of Namibia's marginalised regions. The construction of the dam is accompanied by the simultaneous hope of creating opportunities for tourism, water sports and aquaculture – which will collectively be important for employment creation, the region's economic revival and Namibia's economic growth at large.

Many hail the development of Neckartal Dam. For example, an investment magazine recently stated that:

The story of the Neckartal Dam is also a story of local community development...[The main characteristics of the !Karas Region] is the aridity of its land, barren and without water for most of the year. Now scarcity has been significantly reduced thanks to the Neckartal Dam.<sup>1</sup>

The Neckartal Dam mega project joins existing irrigation schemes in the region, particularly those found along the Orange River. Together, these will remain important for job creation, not just for the region but attracting migrant labour from as far as northern Namibia. Irrigation schemes add millions to the national economy, bringing hope, especially in times of economic downturn, which is particularly important with the collapse of other sectors of the economy due to Covid-19 measures. In 2021, for example, it was reported that grapes exports would bring in N\$ 1 billion in revenue.<sup>2</sup> However, not everyone profits from the booming grape industry, and headlines of despair continue to dominate in the media. Examples of these are: 'Grape crop brings in millions, but farm

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1 We Build Value Digital Magazine 2020

2 Freshplaza 2021

workers live a harsh life';<sup>3</sup> 'Aussenkehr grape farm works left in limbo';<sup>4</sup> and 'Bumper harvest expected for Namibia's grapes ... workers still bemoan squalid conditions.'<sup>5</sup> Collectively, these headlines reflect the long-standing deplorable working and living conditions on the grape farms, which are characterised by makeshift shelters and meagre wages, without any social protection. This fits the overall capitalist agenda, which prioritises profiteering over humanity. Semi-privatised and private companies running irrigated agricultural schemes and mining operations have brought jobs to the region but have not managed to transform or uplift the living standards of the people residing there. It needs to be seen whether the celebrated Neckartal Dam is of the same kind; or whether new modalities can be found to make the hopes around the dam a reality, for the good of the people.

Another important development in the region is the Namibia Diamond Corporation (NAMDEB) extending the diamond mine's lifespan by an additional 20 years – from 2022 to 2042. During our visits to Oranjemund in 2019 and early 2020, uncertainties dominated the landscape as NAMDEB's land-based operations were due to close in late 2022. This situation would have had a serious impact on Namibia's economy, as mining is the largest contributor to the GDP. The potential loss would have been '2,100 direct jobs and many more indirect employments, and also the likely economic collapse of the town of Oranjemund.'<sup>6</sup> With the extension for a further 22 years, all of this is averted, although fears remain that sub-contracting by NAMDEB will erode the relatively good salaries in the mining sector. Still, the transformation of Oranjemund will continue to provide opportunities to explore how this town can evolve beyond the mining sector. The town's transformation processes have already begun, with the transfer of the town's management from the mine to the government, the start of transitioning socio-economic services – such as education and health – into public services, and the gradual transformation of the economy through diversification and the introduction of new industries beyond mining.

While these developments are progressive, and bring hope to the region, ambiguity regarding the border between Namibia and South Africa remains. Although the Orange River forms the international border between South Africa and Namibia, the precise geographical location thereof has remained an issue of contention for decades. South Africa's decision to move its borders beyond the Orange River into Namibia's drylands have been questioned, particularly by the Namibian members of the National Assembly. Despite promises that the border between the two countries will be moved to the middle of Orange River – leading to the independence of Namibia – up to this day, no formal agreement has been concluded. As a result, the future of those who depend on the resources from the Orange River and its surrounding areas remains uncertain.

While intended to discuss some of the bilateral issues between the two countries, the Namibia-South Africa bi-national commission third session meeting – due to take place from 9–12 April 2022 – has been postponed until further notice. The meeting was meant

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3 Smith 2021

4 Tendane 2021

5 New Era 2020

6 Ndjavera 2021

to provide an impetus to further enhance bilateral cooperation, as well as a platform to exchange views on issues of mutual interest and concern at regional and multilateral fora, alongside reviewing cooperation in a wide range of areas – including diplomatic, legal, economic, social, and defence and security concerns.<sup>7</sup> It is anticipated that when Namibian president Hage Geingob finally meets his South African counterpart, President Cyril Ramaphosa, the Orange River boundary will be an agenda point. The Namibian side, in particular, is eager to initiate discussion around allowing Namibia to be a full riparian partner of water from the river, and the border of the river falling on the deepest middle mark of the river, as per international law.

In addition to these unresolved border issues, the region is also marred by many unresolved historical issues, such as the expropriation and uneven distribution of land under colonial rule, which applies to both the Namibian and South African sides. In central and southern Namibia, in particular, the experience of genocide and strong demands for reparations play an important role in the debates around land and landownership. These open questions, along with the looming challenge of climate change, will continue to dominate the discourse in the region.

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7 Vatileni 2002



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**Bernard C. Moore** is a PhD Candidate in African History at Michigan State University (MSU) in the USA. His research is concerned with the economic and environmental history of agriculture in Namibia during the apartheid period. He investigates the relationship between vermin eradication schemes, apartheid homeland policies, and the casualisation of labour hire throughout the second half of the 20th century in arid southern Namibia. In addition to his work at MSU, he is employed as a history lecturer at the University of Namibia, as an economic history researcher on the ERC-funded project 'The Political Economy of African Development', and as a Fulbright-Hays DDRA Research Fellow through the U.S. Department of Education.

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**Kolosa Ntombini** is a PhD candidate in the Department of Environmental & Geographical Sciences at the University of Cape Town. Her research explores spatial justice at the margins by analysing South Africa's land policy and practice in peripheral areas. Kolosa joined the Space in Time Project in 2018 and pursued her honours and master's dissertations as part of the joint research project. Her chapter contribution was developed from her master's dissertation which interrogated the role of community development trusts in brokering property rights on communal land in the Richtersveld.

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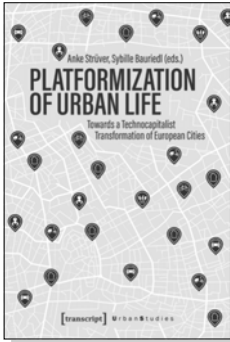
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Cape Town. His research interests and areas of publication include environmental conservation and society, transfrontier conservation, borders and regions, land reform, indigenous knowledge systems and human-environment relationships.

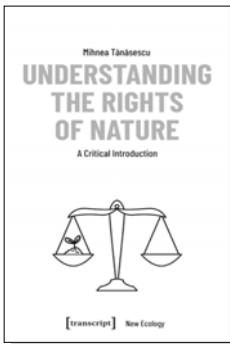
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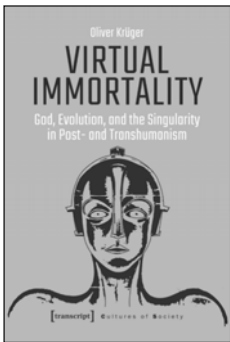
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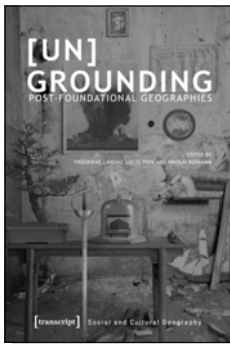
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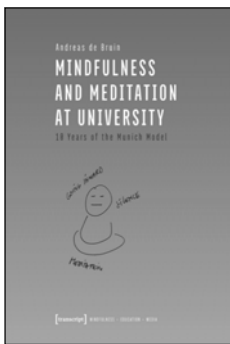
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