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

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The Orange River is the most prominent river in South Africa and one of the longest on the continent.[1] 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.[2] 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.[3]

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 20th 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.[4] 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.

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 Gariep is also widely used, and an application for officially renaming it is pending. Gariep 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.'[5] 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 21st 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.[6]

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'[7] 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

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.[8] 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 18th century confirm the Lower !Garib / Orange River's historical role as a central artery of life in this (semi-)desert area.[9] 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.[10]

For 18th and early 19th century explorers from the Cape, the Orange River constituted remoteness: a threshold to unknown lands, which also remained inaccessible by sea.[11] To them, crossing the river held the promise of discovery – of gold and other treasures of the African interior.[12] 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 Khoe and San, Christian missionaries, and traders. These conditions led to disputes over control of resources, of power, and of physical and social reproduction.[13] 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.[14] 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.[15] African farmers were further dispossessed and forced to either live under the protection of the mission stations established in the

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 18th 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, Dedering 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.[16] 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 20th 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.[17]

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 19th century.[18] 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.[19]

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

farms (Dye and La Croix, 2020 p. 34). The official surveying of the farms along the Orange River only happened in mid-20th 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 19th 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.[20] 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.[21] 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.[22]

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.[23] 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.[24]

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.[25] 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 20th 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.[26] 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.[27] 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.[28]

The South African amalgamation of areas south and north of the !Garib / Orange River homogenised the experience of colonial rule to a certain extent.[29] 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.[30] 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.[31] Today, Khoekoegowab 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.[32]

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*.[33] 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.[34]

For local communities, the closure constituted an enormous physical barrier to lands closer to the coast, used for grazing and hunting.[35] 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

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,[36] is written by insiders who have worked for the mines,[37] is based on personal memories,[38] or else is written without consulting the mining archives.[39] 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.[40]

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.[41] 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.[42] 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

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 Mussgung 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.[43] 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.[44] 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.[45]

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 transfrontier 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.[46] 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* !G*arib / 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.

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 .

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 18th-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 19th and 20th 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-20th 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 20th 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 20th century towards a neo-liberal, cash-crop orientated model of production by the late 20th 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 ǁGamaseb conservancy, focusing on their struggle to get their share of the profit from the ǀAi-ǀAis / 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 Mussgnug 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 Merron 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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