

**THE FORMATION OF 'NATIONAL CULTURE' IN POST- APARTHEID
NAMIBIA: A FOCUS ON STATE SPONSORED CULTURAL FESTIVALS
IN KAVANGO REGION.**

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Dissertation presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Anthropology)
at University of the Western Cape

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

UNIVERSITY *of the*
WESTERN CAPE

PROMOTER: PROF HEIKE BECKER

2011

ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates colonial and postcolonial practices of cultural representations in Namibia. The state sponsored Annual National Culture Festival in Namibia was studied with a specific focus on the Kavango Region in northeastern Namibia. I was particularly interested in how cultural representations are produced by the nation-state and local people in a post-colonial African context of nation-building and national reconciliation, by bringing visions of cosmopolitanism and modernity into critical dialogue with its colonial past

During the apartheid era, the South African administration encouraged the inhabitants of its 'Native Homelands' to engage in 'cultural' activities aimed at preserving their traditional cultures and fostering a sense of distinct cultural identity among each of Namibia's officially recognized 'ethnic groups'. This policy was in line with the logic of South African colonial apartheid rule of Namibia, which relied upon the emphasis of ethnic differences, in order to support the idea that the territory was inhabited by a collection of 'tribes' requiring a central white government to oversee their development. The colonial administration resorted to concepts of 'tradition' and 'cultural heritage' in order to construct Africans as members of distinct, bounded communities ('tribes') attached to specific localities or 'homelands'.

My central argument is that since Namibian independence in 1990, the postcolonial nation-state has placed emphasis on cultural pride in new ways, and on identifying characteristics of 'Namibian-ness'. This has led to the institution of cultural festivals, which have since 1995 held all over the country with an expressed emphasis on the notion of 'Unity in Diversity'. These cultural festivals are largely performances and cultural competitions that range from lang-arm dance, and 'traditional' dances, displays of 'traditional' foodstuffs and dramatized representations.

The ethnographic study shows that while the performers represent diversity through dance and other forms of cultural exhibition, the importance of belonging to the nation and a larger constituency is simultaneously highlighted. However, as the study demonstrates, the festivals are also spaces where local populations engage in negotiations with the nation-state and contest regional forms of belonging. The study shows how a practice which was considered to be a 'colonial representation' of the 'other' has been reinvented with new meanings in postcolonial Namibia. The study demonstrates through an analysis of cultural representations such as song, dances and drama that the festival creates a space in which 'social interaction' takes place between participants, spectators and officials who organize the event as social capital of associational life.

KEY WORDS:

Post-colonial state, reconciliation, Anthropology, culture, globalization, nationalism, cultural festivals, cultural diversity, national identity, media

DECLARATION

I declare that **'THE FORMATION OF 'NATIONAL CULTURE' IN POST- APARTHEID NAMIBIA: A FOCUS ON STATE SPONSORED CULTURAL FESTIVALS IN KAVANGO REGION'** is my own work, that it has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged as complete references.

Michael Uusiku Akuupa



November 2011

Signed.....

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to all those that participated in culture festivals in Kavango Region.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Firstly, I thank God for the strength, courage and ability to do this work. Equally so, I express my profound gratitude and appreciation to my promoter Professor Heike Becker for your superior guidance and encouragement in writing of this thesis. It was a long journey and we have reached the destination.

Furthermore, I thank Professor Olajide Oloyede ‘the elder’ for your outstanding academic support and listening to me when I did not make sense, during weekends on end. You made me believe in myself. I also thank Professor Diana Gibson ‘auntie’ for your encouragement and our critical deliberations on ‘performance’ and ‘trance’. I thank Dr. Sakhumzi Mfecane ‘Bra Saki’ for your academic support and being a friend. I also acknowledge Dr. Emile Boonzaier for your insights on matters of Anthropology. I also thank the entire staff in the Department of Anthropology and Sociology for being good colleagues and their critical input during seminars when I presented my work. I thank Professor Meredith Mckittrick for reading my chapter drafts on numerous times.

I want to acknowledge my academic friend and brother Kletus ‘Mukashirongo’ Likuwa for being very supportive and constructively critical to this scholarly work. We have worked, laughed, and suffered together during this journey. You are a true friend ‘Likiti’.

I am highly indebted to Dr. Herbert Ndango Diaz the director at National Heritage and Culture Programmes (NHCP) for the opportunity you gave me to work as an intern at Maria Mwengere Culture Center in Kavango, and Mr. Simon Indongo for giving me crucial information about the festival. At Maria Mwengere Culture Center, I thank Mr. Thomas Shapi, Tamwa Mbambo, Valesca Kazanga, Donaveltha Bashir, Gelasia Shikerete, Seraphina, Theresia, Nangombe and all others for making my stay enjoyable at the center.

I am equally indebted to the people of Rundu who participated in this study for their time and willingness to contribute to the wealth of knowledge. Thank you so much for working with me.

I also thank my social friends Tate Jason Ambole, John Sivute, Gerre Kakonda, Nyerere Shanghala, Mukuve Hausiku, Maggy Nepaya, Nehoa Kautondokwa, and Michael Shirungu for

keeping in touch when I secluded myself during this academic project. I also thank everybody that contributed in any way to this study, but wished to remain anonymous.

I am also grateful to Luccio Schlettwein and the Carl Schlettwein Foundation specifically, for its generous financial support during the first three years of my PhD research without which this study would have never come to fruition. Thank you for your kind support.

Finally, I would thank my family especially my wife Mwengere for your support in this endeavor. I am also grateful to my parents, brothers and sisters and my children for being patient with me, I know that you needed my attention, but I could not afford it all to you fully.



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Chapter 1: The festive ‘moment’ of Namibia

A: ‘It is early Saturday and the weather is cool, but the favorable morning breeze will not last as the summer heat rays through a thin cloud cover promises a very hot day ahead. December is a very hot month in Namibia, the summer weather is unbearable. Despite the scorching summer weather, an event is unfolding. A large number of festival goers dressed in colorful ‘traditional’ attires wait for a signal to begin the march through town to the Rundu Sport Stadium for an official opening of the Annual National Culture Festival. They danced, sang loud and held banners which display names of Namibia’s thirteen political regions. The traffic officers signaled to the festival directors for the march to begin. People began to walk on the main road towards the stadium. Inside the stadium the noise level pitched, I could barely make sense of what people sang. The sound of the drum and clapping of hands was too loud. As the marchers take sitting on the stand, they stamp their feet on the metal seats and more sound emanated. Opposite the sitting stand, is a large canopy on the grass lawn with decorated tables and soft chairs which would later accommodate ‘very important people’ invited to attend the cultural festival. Moments later, when all protocols related to state rituals have been concluded; cultural groups were invited on ‘stage’ to represent their ‘cultures’ through performance of dance, song and drama. This occasion was the state sponsored cultural festival in Kavango Region.¹’

B: ‘It is indeed a pleasure and honour as well as privilege to make use of this opportunity to sincerely inform your good office about the above-mentioned Annual National Culture Festival 2008. Historical and political background of the Annual National Culture Festival: After our country attained its independence and became the Republic of Namibia, the SWAPO-Government wisely thought of reviving, preserving, researching and promoting our diversity of Cultures in our beautiful country. This process should lead towards the Namibian national reconciliation, nation building, mutual respect, acceptance and tolerance among all the communities in the Republic of Namibia. As all of us are aware, the Colonial Regime divided the Namibia people into ethnicities and language groups in order to rule and dominate the Black Communities and to cultivate destructive unnecessary hatred among the various Black Communities. This was the scenario before our beautiful country obtained its independence. Our various communities were isolated from one another. Against the above illustrated sad background, the SWAPO-Government therefore thought of an annual occasion which could attract groups from our various communities to come together and share as well as to exchange our diversities of cultures and to accept one another as people belonging only to one country and one nation. The noble-SWAPO-Government dream has crystalised into what we are calling today an Annual National Culture Festival which is hosted by regions on rotating basis.²’

¹ My field notes.

² This is a Ministerial communication about the Annual National Culture Festival dated 09 October 2008 to the Kavango Regional Council. On the 9th October 2008, the Directorate of National Heritage and Culture Programmes (NHCP) sent the national invite of the imminent culture festival to the Kavango Regional Council and the local

Introduction and Background

After independence³ in 1990, the postcolonial Namibian state has emphasized the need for a national cultural pride, based on the identification characteristics of ‘Namibian-ness’. This is done, supposedly, to fulfill the need for social reconstruction. The above is stated, for instance, in the presidential report of the commission of enquiry on education, culture and training that was published in 1999. (Presidential Report, 1999) Further, following the same report, other reasons for the supposed need for social reconstruction included the diverse ‘cultural scenes’ that make the Namibian nation. According to official sources, this was the main reason that led to the institution of cultural festivals all over the country. Simultaneously, the emergence of the ‘cultural tourism industry’ resulted in the establishment of numerous ‘cultural groups’ i.e., groups of people, who supposedly have an interest in preserving their customs. (Fairweather 2001; Mans 2002) This preservation of customs was not limited to performances only; it included also the creation of museums, the construction of cultural villages, as well as the initiation and identification of would-be heritage sites in independent Namibia. In this process of creating Namibian pride, the state involved schools, community forums and regional governments to reach its objective. This has been an ongoing motive for the past 15 years or so. Most recently, for instance, the Namibian nation-state through the Ministry of Information Communication Technology launched a so-called ‘nationhood and national pride campaign’ whose objective is to create awareness among its citizens of belonging to the Namibian society and to embrace multiculturalism. Supposedly the campaign through media would spread messages about unity, the importance of national symbols, anthems and ideals of nationhood. (The Namibian and New Era Newspapers, 6 May 2011)

In 1995 the Namibian state tasked the ministries of education and youth and culture respectively to organize cultural festivals at various local, regional and national levels throughout the country. The first installment of the national finals was held at Swakopmund in Erongo region. The festivals are held in all thirteen political regions of Namibia in the form of a competition which culminates at the national level for the finals officially referred to as the Annual National Culture

culture office. This would be a big event as about 2200 participants and a couple hundred officials from different regions were expected in town.

³ As Namibians usually refer to the country’s post colonial period.

Festival (ANCF). These cultural festivals are largely performance orientated. Performances include *lang-arm* dance⁴, and ‘traditional’ dances, displays of ‘traditional’ foodstuffs and storytelling. The first vignette describes the Annual National Culture Festival I observed during 2008 in Rundu-Kavango Region, which is the main subject of this study.

The excerpt from the ‘letter of invitation’, in reality a communication that caused little cheer, to the Kavango Regional Council⁵ indicates two historical moments which makes the nationalist discourses of post colonial Namibian society. This letter implies that Namibia, like its neighbour and one-time colonial power South Africa was a country that forged its culture in the ‘hard mills of violent and relentless struggle which is now decompressing in a rapid, uneven process of political liberalization and cultural reinvention while promoting transformations of outlook and behavior’ in which ideas of economic prosperity are deeply embedded. (Barber, 2001:177) The letter also emphasises that the ethnic diversities in the country were enforced by the colonial dispensation and that this legacy created disadvantages for what would and should be a united Namibian nation. As such, the letter says new ways or methods for ‘making’ a Namibian nation became necessary. Implicit in the ‘invitation letter’ is the usefulness of this process which would be used to create this new nation. This is a process of celebrating diversity through cultural representation.

While one would normally assume that an ‘invitation’ to hold a major national cultural event would cause joy and pride among those given the honour of hosting the event, this was not at all the case here. When the letter ‘inviting’ the Namibian government’s Kavango office to host the 2008 Annual Culture Festival arrived, the situation was an interesting one. When the director of National Heritage and Culture Programmes (NHCP) and his team announced that the annual event was to be held in Kavango, the staff at the regional office was not impressed by such news. For the officials in Kavango, if the event was to be held in a different region it meant extra income for them as they would have to be paid travel and subsistence allowances which would complement their December salaries. In this case they were going to lose out as host, while

⁴ Lit. long arm dance is ‘traditional’ Afrikaner music popular on farm parties.

⁵ In Namibia, administrative provinces are known as regions. The regions are demarcated in constituencies. Each region has regional government and it is headed by the Governor with councilors. It is accountable to central government and the citizens who participate in the election in order to choose councilors. In total there are thirteen regions in Namibia.

employees from other regions would gain. By virtue of the festival being hosted in the region that makes the regional government part of the event by default, as it has to receive and anticipate the arrival of very important state officials from central government in the region. Also the office of the governor as head of the regional government was also hesitant to be part of the festival citing budget constraints. After repeated contestations between the NHCP officials at head office and the local office, the festival came to Kavango and everybody in the region had to work together in order to make the event a success.

Every year since 1995, the competitions have started according to a government-issued 'activity calendar' at the local (constituency; i.e. district) level in primary and secondary schools for junior participants (as they are called officially) and in other local contexts for adults denominated 'senior participants'. It is compulsory for schools to participate; other groups may participate if they wish to, but they are not forced to participate. Schools and local groups start to compete at what is referred to as zonal (district) competition. During this preliminary round the winners qualify for the regional competition from which they will proceed to the national festival if they did well. At the regional festival where the zones battle it out, government officials organize everything. The state pays for the transportation of participants from around the region, accommodation and food. This is done in all thirteen regions of the country. The regional cultural officer usually officiates at the zonal festival while the governor presides at the regional; the competition is decided by judges who may include prominent teachers, secretaries of traditional authorities and other members of the local elite; in most cases it is state officials.

The winners from each of the thirteen regional festivals proceed to the national level where the national winners in both the junior and senior category will be selected. The groups in the two categories (junior and senior) compete against other regional groups at the Annual National Culture Festival, which is attended by high ranking state officers, sometimes including the head of state. The Annual National Culture Festival may be held in any of the regions and not necessarily in Windhoek where the central government is located.

At these platforms officials of the postcolonial Namibian state regularly emphasize the importance to celebrate the diversity of cultures during their keynote speeches⁶. Some of the remarks made by speakers seem to imply that the government uses cultural festivals as an agent for politically unifying a nation that was previously divided along ethnic lines by the colonial rulers.⁷ The professed goal is that Namibians should learn to tolerate each other in diversity. It has since been a postcolonial ideology of nationalism in independent Namibia. In line with these pronouncements, the central means to achieve this ‘unity in diversity’, final emancipation and ultimately self determination is by celebrating diversity through cultural festivals.

When I first became aware of these annual events, this enthusiastic embracing and emphasis of tradition and culture at cultural festivals or at any other state gathering in postcolonial Namibia in relation to its past seemed rather surprising. The format and content of these festivals seemed reminiscent of events held during an earlier period when racial differences had been turned into ethnic ones with the introduction of homelands that would realize the colonial or apartheid central ideology that each race and nation had unique, divinely ordained destiny and culture. Historical sources show that Namibia is a country in which the legal recognition of cultural diversity and tradition ‘led to the shocking injustices of colonialism’. (Du Pisani, 2000:64)

At independence when SWAPO⁸ took over the government of the new nation, it abolished a range of activities that ostensibly, directly or indirectly, displayed or suggested ‘ethnicity’, understood as an expression of the colonial apartheid era-politics of ‘divide and rule’. It also left me with the following questions: Was the change of policy from mid 1990s necessitated by the waning threat of apartheid and the realized freedom of neighboring South Africa as Becker (2004, 2007) tentatively suggests in her work on memory and commemoration in Namibia? Was it because of the shifts in the sub-continental identity politics which became rooted in cultural discourses? The official discourse is ‘unity in diversity’ yet one wonders how the participants and spectators at the festivals interpret their meaning. How are the festivals appropriated at the

⁶ One of the recent statements made by the Minister of Youth and Culture at the institutional cultural festival (Polytechnic of Namibia), was that “it is important to celebrate the diversity of our culture”, New Era 09 August 2006.

⁷ Bayart (2005) in his book on *The Illusion of Cultural Identity* argues that the divided ones also took part in its formations by appropriating the new political, cultural and economic resources of the then bureaucratic state.

⁸ After independence, SWAPO, formerly the South West Africa People’s Liberation Organisation changed its name to *Swapo Party*. Hence the usage *Swapo* in this context refers to the postcolonial period.

local level by spectators, participants and those that represent government? Do the representations (cultural) of the public space signify the political, ideological, social and moral imagery of the Namibian postcolonial state? When the Namibian State emphasizes ‘unity in diversity’, was there imminent polarization among the different ethnic communities in postcolonial Namibia? How do the postcolonial cultural festivals in Namibia compare to the colonial exhibitionary practices from which they descended? How did different levels of the state possibly use them? For instance there might be contestations between the central government and the regional governments about the venue of the Annual National Cultural Festivals. If such contestations exist, it would be useful to find out whether there are any benefits accrued by the regional government holding the event in terms of possible recognition.

I was wondering whether the postcolonial government of the Republic of Namibia was employing almost the same methods and tools that were used by its predecessor the apartheid government to divide the inhabitants in order to carry out its policy of segregation, which resulted in divisive instead of unifying politics. I grasp from the above-quoted letter that Namibia’s leadership might have realized the void left by the ending of the colonial culture festivals and recommitted to the same format of celebration in order to deal and address issues, which concern the process of postcolonial nation building. As I will show later in the thesis, instead of simply emphasizing regional intra-ethnic cultural differences, the SWAPO government embarked on an articulated national project of social and cultural ‘unification’, which explicitly cited cultural ‘unity in diversity’ in the Presidential report of the commission on education and culture and training. (Republic of Namibia 1991:3)

The last two sentences of the communication reported above presents the Annual National Culture Festival (ANCF) as a renewal ritual through which the Namibian citizens could see themselves as a new nation. It is presented a social space through which they can associate in unity while acknowledging their diversity. The ANCF is regarded by the state as a social space in which they can celebrate nationhood and belonging. It is this festive moment which is the focus of investigation in this thesis.

Aims and objectives of the study

The main aim of this study is to investigate the colonial and postcolonial practices of representations in cultural festivals and the meanings they derive from local people with the specific focus on Kavango region northeastern Namibia. The thesis shows through ethnography that while the performers showcase diversity through dance and other forms of cultural exhibition, the importance of belonging to the nation and a larger constituency is simultaneously highlighted. The focus of the study is on how the practice which was considered to be a 'colonial representation' of the 'other' or the 'subject' has been reinvented with new meanings in postcolonial Namibia by analysis of historical narratives and official archive documents through which the colonial festival is reconstructed in order to make sense of the contemporary political ritual.

I investigated state-sponsored cultural festivals with the specific focus on Kavango region in northeastern Namibia as a suitable case study in which cultural representations are produced by Africans in a post-colonial context of nation building and national reconciliation, by bringing visions of cosmopolitanism and modernity in to critical dialogue with its colonial past. In the festival context people of Kavango have been presented by both officials and participants as distinctively different from other ethnic groups in postcolonial Namibia present at the event through its showcase of what is perceived as 'Kavango culture'. Through engagement and discussion of historical narratives the thesis teases out the notion of Kavango-ness as a colonial construct and how it is reconstructed and appropriated in the postcolonial time through a process which takes place in a particular political space, that of the culture festival, which the state has organized and mediated since the mid-1990s in order to create a new nation.

The study presents several interrelated arguments. Firstly, I argue that the culture festival event as constituted through various historical contexts should be viewed as a social practice which produces ideas of being and meaning according to context. I will show that although, the festival was conceptually colonial it has been reinvented with a new meaning and purpose which is to make the Namibian nation. The festival creates as a social space in which 'social interaction' happens and it is viewed by participants, spectators and officials who organize the event as social capital of associational life. Festivals rituals are seen to develop community stability and pride.

The festival evokes understanding among people seeking ‘to give birth to new and viable nations’ as argued by July (1983:124). Most importantly in the context of Kavango where my research is set the festival is seen and presented by its organizers and participants as a social space where the younger generation can learn the history and culture of the Kavango people.

Furthermore, the dissertation aims to show representation in the postcolonial context I will show that the state sponsored culture festival is a space of intensive interaction. The interaction includes, but is not limited, to expressions of ‘belonging’, the emphasis on ‘difference’, the right to be heard, acknowledgement of what is believed to enhance the social and economic life of citizens, praise of leadership and the making of the nation through presentation of cultural dances.

The second key argument in my research relates to anthropological studies which deal with the question of nationalism through investigation of fairs, festivals and carnivals in the analytical context of ritual performance. In this context it relates to the work of Kelly Askew (2002) on performing the nation which focused on Swahili music and cultural politics in postcolonial Tanzania; and Paulla Ebron’s (2002) study of praise singers locally known as *jaliya* in transnational encounters in The Gambia. Theoretically, my own research speaks to their complex usage of performance⁹ in Anthropology. It particularly relates to the contemporary theoretical and methodological concern of looking at performance as processes of practice in analyzing nationalism. The usage of the concept in the context of her study of praises singers locally known as *jaliya* in transnational encounters in The Gambia is of particular importance to my study. She has used performance as a mode of enquiry in three different levels, first in the analysis of formal events in which artists perform for audiences, secondly in informal contexts in which one can observe the enactment of social categories and finally as a way in which to analyse scholarly modes of enquiry. Respectively it speaks to Askew’s investigation of Tanzanian nationalism whose focus was on Swahili musical performance and other social activities such as weddings. Askew’s work is also of particular importance to my study specifically in the sense that it provide an alternative lens for looking at nationalism so that it can be investigated and understood in social practices and not necessarily in publicized political rituals.

⁹ I will discuss the anthropological genealogy of performance in chapter two in detail.

While contemporary scholarship of performance in rituals has moved away from studying them as systems of representations to looking at them as processes, (Schieffelin, 1998) my study specifically stresses the importance of analyzing festival performances not only as processes, because of their public enactment, symbolism and aesthetic activities, but as social practices which defines the being of the people we study. Respectively I suggest not to view the festivals or any celebratory ritual for that matters as mere ‘celebrations’ without clearly showing the performative aspect and indicative of the context in which it is used and meaning thereof, due to the ambiguity and complexity of performance as a concept; and festivals should be studied as the practice of meaning making. In the context of this study I propose usage of the phrase *showcase* when we refer to the various presentations and representations in the festival space as it is seen as practice of ‘culture’ display by festival participants, spectators and official organizers. They perceive what is displayed to be facts of the ‘habitus’ which are in an incorporated state and ‘objectified’ as segments of real life. (Bourdieu 1998:80-81, Handler 1988:1-13)

Significantly, this study speaks about how local people and performers see themselves in the context of performance and also how the state views the spectacle it has organized, hosted and mediated respectively. While the festival organizers (state) perceive and present the festival as a performance which can be objectified and in which various groups which are participating can be distinguished, participants and spectators who participated consciously saw themselves as practicing reality.

Thirdly, I present ‘culture’ as a central resources and analytical tool in this study. As a result of hosting cultural festivals in various social contexts of postcolonial Namibia ‘culture’ has becomes a vehicle resource through which political and social agenda are driven. In Kavango, as I have shown elsewhere, where this study is situated people refer to ‘culture’ which is performed in the festival space as “*Mpo zetu*”. (Akuupa, 2006) In Kavango the vernacular Rukwangali word for ‘culture’ is ‘*Mpo*’. ‘*Mpo*’ is generally used, and most commonly by older people, to refer to something that is old and different from the modern – in other words, synonymously with ‘tradition’. (See Spiegel and Boonzaier, 1988) But it is seldom used alone; rather, it is generally linked to ‘*zetu*’, meaning ‘our’ indicative of ownership. The phrase ‘our tradition’ thus clearly signifies something that carries the authority of the past, and that is associated with a

particular population. It is commonly used to refer to practices that are assumed to have been handed down for generations and that need careful protection against foreign influence (Sahlins, 1993:4). Although my engagement with the vernacular understandings of ‘culture’ is rather tangential to this dissertation, the study also shows how culture as a resource is variably appropriated by people and state representatives alike in the festival context, and its usefulness in understanding social life.

Finally, the study contributes to the anthropological methods of doing research and methodology through addressing matters about access and negotiation of the field from the perspective of an insider. Methodologically my study contributes a new insight from doing anthropology at home with a specific focus on forms of kinship insertions and their workings during fieldwork. In that context the study shows how local social and kinship relations in the field create conditions of research possibility in the field.

In the next section I will discuss the research setting, limitations, ethical considerations and the chapter outline of the thesis.

PhD research and setting

I chose to research on state sponsored culture festivals in Namibia. My PhD research was set in Kavango¹⁰, with frequent travels to Windhoek the capital city of Namibia. My fieldwork was characterized by an extended period of creating relations as I will show later in the thesis. During my fieldwork which was largely observational, I was stationed at Maria Mwingere Culture Centre in Kavango region as an intern. The Maria Mwingere Culture Centre serves as a regional culture office of the directorate of National Heritage and Culture Programmes for the Ministry of Youth, National Service, Sport & Culture. There I worked as an intern for a period of seven months during 2008. As an intern I participated in all office activities such as meetings, and preparation in culture festivals, and I also travelled with the state officials to various constituencies to host culture festivals. I worked closely with the official responsible for the museum at the centre. At the centre, I occasionally went to visit and chat with labourers at

¹⁰ My family lives in Rundu the administrative capital of Kavango region.

various sections such as at the botanical gardens, at the dining hall and dormitories especially during tea and lunch breaks.

My role in the festival context has been that of an assistant. As an intern I acted in an official capacity¹¹ in the festival space and had the privilege to access all aspects of the festival such as talking to group leaders and taking pictures. Although, I did not participate in the festivals dances – not being much of a dancer - I joined in certain aspects of the ceremony. At the festival I either made video recordings or took pictures and spoke to various people who were either participants or spectators. I observed all the circuit festivals including the regional one which were organized by officials at Maria Mwegere Culture Centre. The two festival contexts (circuit and regional) were building up to the Annual National Culture Festival which was later hosted in the region in December 2008. I also observed the Annual National Culture Festival and served on the local preparatory committee as an ordinary member. In that capacity with the official responsible for the museum, we pushed for the inclusion of an exhibition of artifacts at the Kavango Museum, although it never materialized.

I also conducted over twenty five interviews with various people in Windhoek and various outlying villages in the traditional authorities¹² of Shambyu, Mbunza, Gciriku, Mbunza and Mbukushu including Rundu¹³ town. My interviewees ranged from officials in the education sector and at the culture office to youth¹⁴ and older people. With officials we conversed about their experiences of the culture festivals, while the youth narrated their life stories, experiences and perceptions of the postcolonial festivals. I asked the elders questions about their life stories including narratives on how they remember the colonial culture festivals. I also held interviews

¹¹ I discuss the process of gaining access to informants and information during my research in chapter three where I reflect on my fieldwork. Although I was seen by festival participants as an official of some sort, the senior culture officer always made sure to explain my role in the festival as that of a ‘student of culture’ when he introduced his team to the audience before the events began.

¹² What was known as ‘tribal’ lands during colonial time are now referred to as traditional authorities after the acts for traditional leader and traditional authorities were gazzeted in 1997 and 2000 respectively.

¹³ Rundu is an administrative town of Kavango region.

¹⁴ Youth and elder are “elastic concepts” in Namibia. For example young people are described variously as young adults, teenagers, adolescents or juveniles and “they all qualify under the rubric youth”. (Mufune 2002:179) This youth age group has been selected, because of the legislative impression and definition of what a youth might be. The Namibian legislation has opted for an age-based definition of youth for the effective implementation of its programs and development initiatives. Due to the complexities of determining exactly who a youth or an elder is, it is just fair to regard it as part of the negotiations and contestations of the cultural process.

with cultural group members. Interviews were useful for the insights they produced about a lot of what I observed in the field. Only interviews which were made in the official contexts were formal and duly recorded. I could not record some the interviews due to what I refer as ‘cultural barriers’ locally known as *yidira* pl.; and I only summarized them later in my field notes when I was at home.

My research extended to everyday life, outside the sphere of the organized festivals and their preparations, where I frequented various social spaces in Rundu such as bars, *cuca* shops¹⁵, and churches, the latter especially when there were weddings or funerals. As a member of the local community in Rundu and *ekoro*¹⁶, I also attended community meetings, traditional courts and government offices. My participation in either family or social activities led to the creation of casual and adopted kin relations an aspect that would become a crucial determinant of access to my fieldwork.

I also spent about two months spread over six months at the National Archive of Namibia in Windhoek. There I searched for official colonial documents about Kavango and newspapers of the time. Newspapers of the time such as *Kavangudi* and *Muruli* served as important sources of information about the people and social life of Kavango including the colonial culture festival which was known as *sangfees* then. Archive resources complemented by oral sources from interviews were helpful in constructing perspectives on colonial festivals and the history of Kavango specifically and Namibia in general.

Limitations

The main limitation of this ethnographic study was the ‘field’ of research. Generally, observation as a very important aspect of ethnographic studies in my research context was fairly even. My study was largely observational and it was mainly in public places especially where culture festivals are held. When I observed the circuit and regional festivals respectively it was

¹⁵ A *cuca* shop is a small business holding which usually sells small merchandise such as traditional alcoholic beverages, sugar, salt, bottled beer and many other household needs. It also serves as a social space where villagers come to relax after their long day at work. The name *cuca* is derived from the beer that was sold by the Portuguese merchants in most northern areas in the early 1970s.

¹⁶ *Ekoro* is a very important communal relationship tightened in clan affinity. I will discuss the workings of *ekoro* in detail in chapter three.

easy, because I travelled with the officials and spaces were not secured by police¹⁷ unlike at the Annual National Culture Festival. The former events are relaxed unlike the latter.

During preparations of the Annual National Culture Festival those of us who wanted to record the proceedings had to apply for clearance. I witnessed on one occasion how the deputy director¹⁸ reprimanded and warned some European¹⁹ and Chinese tourists who took pictures at the proceedings. He warned them not to make video recordings as they did not hold rights to do it, but they could only take pictures. The situation even got tricky when local organizers were joined by others from head office whom I did not know or had not met before. So I had to begin making new relations with these ‘strangers’ from head office in Windhoek.

In the event that there was an impromptu meeting for the organizers, the deputy director was not always willing to share information when asked. When these meetings happened the local officials always invited me to attend, but many times the deputy director asked me to leave the meeting place. During the last meeting which was held at Maria Mwengere Culture Centre to do a review of the whole festival, the deputy director also asked me to leave the room. As a result of such contact, I could not get some information first hand as I really wished. In order to get information from those meetings I relied on certain officials who attended and briefed me later when I invited them for a drink at a local bar. Why there was so much secrecy around certain aspects of the festival is a question worth reflection, but which I cannot answer in this study.

The other serious limitation was in doing interviews. I realized that conducting interviews in Kavango and also in Windhoek has become difficult. I came across instances when research informants²⁰ insisted to be paid before we made an interview. They mentioned names of certain

¹⁷ Security at the Annual National Culture Festival is always tight, as the presence of senior state officials is anticipated.

¹⁸ He is second after the director of National Heritage and Culture Programmes. This man also removed all the culture booklets which the various cultural groups submitted to the judges, as a result I could not get hold of those from other regions except the ones from Kavango which I had witnessed being made.

¹⁹ One woman who said that she was a PhD student from Europe, had to produce her student card and letter before she was allowed to even sit in the space which was designated for the media.

²⁰ This has become an issue especially with people who are regarded as knowledgeable about certain subjects.

researchers and radio broadcasters²¹ who had paid for doing interviews with them. It is not important now as to which party paid for interviews first, but the consequence is detrimental to future research data produced from such an environment. I had to abandon many of the interviews I had set without knowing that I would be asked to pay²² before they happened.

I entered the field as a black Namibian; as a result I was somehow expected by my research participants to know some of the things I asked about. For example when I asked questions about usage of certain local implements and told them that I seriously did not know about what I asked they answered my questions though with reservations. Once, I asked about the initiation ritual of babies as I saw it dramatized during the festivals in Kavango; the women I was interviewing seem surprised especially by the fact that I have children, but did not know about how they are initiated in the 'Kavango' way. This was also the situation when I wanted to discuss specific subjects with certain people which were regarded as taboo, because of our relationships. As I later realized, it was important to bring certain knowledge to the field of how things are done in black communities. For some reason, when people saw that you were black they felt that you were familiar with local knowledge, and it was expected of you to be conversant with various basic practices. There seemed to be some ideas among local people that if someone is black one somehow need to know local basic practices. In my research context which was rather complex in terms of relations, people often treated me as an insider in certain times especially when I spoke local languages and as such expected me to know various things. They would, however, feel compelled to answer certain questions without hesitation and reserve when a person who asked them was 'obviously' foreign such as whites. This supports what Mfecane (2010:33) says about the importance of entering the field not on a 'blank slate' as this will limit one's ability to question various aspects of the ethnography.

Ethical Consideration

²¹ One could understand the context of state radio broadcasters especially in Namibia as they have an obligation to reward people for their intellectual property, when they make recordings which will be stored and aired occasionally.

²² For ethical reasons I cannot reveal the identities of the informants who had otherwise agreed to hold interviews with me, only to change at the last minute, because they expected me to pay for their time.

Culture discourses and related issues are very sensitive especially if they involve the state and thus require cautious handling. During my stay at the state institution, the culture office in Rundu, I was entrusted with certain confidential information and have thus not used it in my study as it may create problems for those who have given me access to such data. Before I interacted with the research participants I informed them about the nature of the study and those who needed anonymity for fear of reprimand (officials) were guaranteed confidentiality. Their names and any possible information that may lead to them being identified are withheld. However, certain subjects were more than willing to have their names publicized in the outcome of the study.

Regarding interviews especially the formal ones I sought informed consent from the participants on an ongoing basis as I had more than one interview with some of them. There were certain issues we spoke about which they did not want to be on record and in such instances I duly complied and switched off my voice recorder. Due to the nature of the study which required people's names to be revealed especially when I sought to reconstruct the history of my research area participants were encouraged to withdraw from the study anytime when they so wished or when they were not comfortable with the subject.

Public spaces may not require any form of permission, but as we have seen in the context of the ANCF I was required to seek clearance in order to record the event and all proceedings. I duly complied with that process. There is an ongoing ethical debate on the usage of visuals. It appears to be very complex, because there is no standard procedure that can be adhered to when producing such data. This study has an extensive usage of visual materials and as a result I have obtained permission from people that are depicted in the pictures to use them for analysis and publication. However, pictures that I took from a distance are displayed without permission.

The above situation did not influence the study greatly, because greater part of the data was produced through observation. I will also take responsibility of any consequences that may arise should any content of the study be published or otherwise.

Chapter outline

The thesis has two parts which locates the study historically and in contemporary moment. The first part outlines the local history of Kavango as a research scene in three contexts namely pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial times. This historical discussion presents evidence on the migratory and settlement patterns of people in Kavango and how they have changed overtime. It focuses on pre-colonial identity making and how it was influenced by colonialism and eventual appropriation in the postcolonial time. The second part deals with ‘making the nation’ in a post colonial context through participation in state sponsored culture festivals.

In chapter two I locate culture festivals within the wider theoretical discourse of representation and performance. In it I show that festivals are about the practice of identity “pride” by those involved. (Meyer, 1999:103) Representations of culture performances in the festival produce meaning. I show that festivals are not just celebratory in the post-colonial discourse of nation building in independent Namibia but also serve as social practice and a resource for social cohesion.

In the third chapter I reflect and discuss my fieldwork experiences with specific focus on the workings of kinship relations and its influence on my access to the field. I interrogate the workings of *ekoro*²³ as a very important social relation and the practice of *kukutongonona*²⁴ in how they determined my access to various aspects of social life in Kavango specifically and Namibia generally.

Chapter four sketches the historical background of inhabitants in Kavango through oral legends which speaks about issues of early migrations and colonial representation over the years. Importantly here is the idea of Kavango-ness inherent and how it is subsequently reconstructed, appropriated and asserted in various historical periods. While the historiography of Kavango is largely absent from public discourse, I will show that, historically, Kavango has played a special part in Namibia culture politics by presenting evidence of contemporary academic discourse which is an attempt by local scholars to re-locate and sanitize the history of the region in public.

²³ Ekoro is a very important communal relationship rooted and tightened by clan affinity.

²⁴ Kukutongonona is a practice of introduction. It is an extensive introduction which does not just end with the name, but with presentation of your extended relatives including your parents, grandparents and previous domiciles.

Chapter five deals with the inception of culture festivals which was officially known as the ‘*sangfees*²⁵’, in colonial South West Africa/Namibia with a specific focus on Kavango as a homeland. Using memory narratives of my research participants and archival materials I investigated, I reconstruct a story of the colonial festival in order to understand the intentions of its making and relevance in what was then the Kavango ‘homeland’. The focus in this context is the former Department of Education in the Administration for Kavango and culture activities at *Ekongoro*²⁶ or Maria Mwangere Culture Center as local contexts where colonial identity was asserted.

In chapter six I present an ethnography of the Maria Mwangere Culture Center as a space in which the state produced and articulated identities of the local people through the compilation and promotion of the ‘culture booklet’, collection of oral stories, songs and research on various musical instruments and the Kavango museum at the centre. In the chapter I also discuss the booklet (then known as a *Sangbundel*) which comes from the colonial South West Africa period, when it was commonly held that the ‘culture of the native’ should be captured and stored in museums for ethnographic presentations, and the tourist gaze and finally the way the project of colonial cohesion is reinvented with new meanings in the postcolonial period.

In chapter seven I deal with the theme of ‘making the nation’ with the specific focus on the role of the local people, participants in the cultural performances and audiences and state officials in the festival space. Following Goffman’s (1959) conceptualization of ‘backstage’ and ‘front stage’ I detail rehearsals and regional festival sessions in order to explore social interactions of the people in the festive context with the specific focus on *maliyombiliso*²⁷ and *kulinyanyukisa*²⁸. I show that the contribution and participation of the lay/local people to the activities of the various culture groups in the state sponsored festival context makes them active role players in the processes of a nation making project as mediated and prescribed by the state.

²⁵ Sangfees literary translates as Song festival in English

²⁶ The phrase Ekongoro is used in situational contexts to refer to a very important water serpent believed to be living in Kavango River or the rainbow. In this case it can be understood to refer to the rainbow which is also locally believed to symbolize the various population groups in Kavango which have been celebrated during colonial culture festivals hosted by the Maria Mwangere Culture Centre.

²⁷ Lit. rehearsal

²⁸ Lit. to make ourselves happy or to entertain ourselves.

In chapter eight my analysis shifts to the postcolonial state sponsored culture festival. In particular, this chapter draws on the events of the festival's 2008 installment, which took place in December of that year in Rundu, the capital of the Kavango region in northeastern Namibia. I present a detailed ethnography of the processes of the 'making' of Kavango identity which unfolded during the festival as distinctively 'different' from that of other ethnic groups in postcolonial Namibia. The ethnographic description and analysis focuses on the cultural performances of two groups, namely the *Ntunguru Cultural Group* and the group from the *Noordgrens Secondary School*.

Chapter nine draws major arguments from the various other parts of the thesis to conclude the study. I conclude that although the state sponsored culture festival has undergone various stages of transformation in which it has acquired new meanings; it is an important social investment for associational life. The event is vital for post colonial states and its citizens as it enhances social cohesion; an aspect of life many states have been struggling with since independence from colonialism. The chapter also shows other possible avenues which were beyond the scope of this study for further academic research; such as how the festival is conceived and politicized in other political regions of Namibia.

Now I begin with the discussion on the theoretical and conceptual framework of the study in the next chapter.

Chapter 2: On ‘doing’ and ‘performing’ ‘culture’ at State sponsored culture festivals

Introduction

In this chapter I discuss ‘performance’ as a concept of social processes and analytical tool. Performance has recently been used as a key-concept in several widely read studies of culture, nationalism, and the making of national and Pan-African identity-making. (e.g., Askew 2002, Ebron 2002) Studies such as mine, which examine cultural performance and political ritual, can benefit from drawing on the concept of performance and its application in studies of culture and politics. Specifically, my study benefits from Askew’s (2002) key argument on the connection between performance and power and the imagining of the nation state as it contributes to understanding the emergence of momentous realities in the world. Askew’s (2002) idea to analyse and situate postcolonial identities within their broader political and economic context is of particular importance, as they underscore how performance has been fundamental to active and reactive processes of transformation. In order to locate and make sense of how performance is conceived in my research and the anthropological/academic discourse respectively I explore how the term is used and perceived by those (state officials, cultural groups and audiences) who participate in the making of the state sponsored culture festival in Kavango northeastern Namibia. I argue that in this context performance is used to refer to the practice of particular symbolic or aesthetic activities, such as ritual, or theatrical and folk artistic activities, which are enacted as intentional and unintentional expressive productions in established local genres on one hand. On the other, I set out to show how, academics analyse ritual processes as performance due to their framed, heightened, public with symbolically rich enactments.

Firstly, I discuss the theoretical implications of the state sponsored culture festival as an important political ritual which connotes expression and development of social relations presented as ‘performances’ in the anthropological literature of nationalism and performance theory. I impress that if we are to understand processes of nationalism we need to take social rituals such as cultural festivals which are employed as means to achieve national goals seriously. Specifically I talk about the complexity of studying and analysing festivals as performances, because of their public enactment, symbolism and aesthetic activities in relation to how they are conceived and understood by our research subjects. I engage what I believe to be

challenges posed by our usage of ‘performance’ in anthropology theory in order to understand social life in its ‘realness’ or as a social practice. The tendency to refer any aspect of social act as ‘performance’ (Schieffelin, 1998), I believe presents a danger to misread and reduce the significance of what we as social scientists observe as performance. With reference to the festival under investigation those involved in its making see themselves as ‘doing or practicing culture’²⁹. Thus, as students of performance it is important for us to distinguish and contextualize performance as process from practice as a single act in the process.

Secondly, I turn my focus on the links of cultural festival in Namibia to related politics in order to understand the state’s nationalist policy. In order to make sense of the festivals complexity and its place in the social space I draw on insights from my research in order to show how people during the state sponsored culture festivals assert identity, and contest citizenship and belonging through representation of dances and drama which are deemed ethnical and traditional in order to signify an unique ethnic existence within the national context. (Akuupa, 2010) My preliminary archive research shows that while the colonial power linked the concept of nationality to ethnicity, the postcolonial government linked nationality to the state. In Namibia both concepts of nationality and ethnicity are in use and in discursive negotiation with one another as KJÆret & Stokke (2003:580) have argued in their analysis of national discourses in postcolonial Namibia. In the following section, I discuss Anthropology and Performance in order to lay a foundation on which I will locate my research’s theoretical discussion of performance.

Anthropology and Performance

There is a significant interest in the study of ‘performance’ in Performance Studies and Anthropology especially in postcolonial nationalism. Recent studies have shown how festival fairs and other political rituals have become spaces and resources through which ideas of nationhood are constructed, a situation making them better social spaces for understanding processes of nationalism. In Africa, explicit anthropological studies of performance and politics of nationalism were done by Kelly Askew in Tanzania and Paulla Ebron in the Gambia and published in 2002. In a restorative context of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in

²⁹ I will discuss this aspect later in the chapter.

South Africa, Catherine Cole (2010) researched the stages of transition as performance in the process of national reconciliation from the performance studies perspective.

Kelly Askew in Tanzania, observed Swahili music and cultural politics. She focused on the imbrications of power and performance and how it applies to multiple levels of social life, from individuals to party politics at the national level. She constructed her theory of performance from events she encountered upon her arrival in Tanzania such as customs checkpoints, state holiday celebrations, ad hoc funerals and weddings in order to conclude that performance constitutes a means of countering and destabilizing established power. She has suggested that in the context of the above, performance is best viewed as an active dialogic interaction between and among performers and audience, rather than the traditional emphasis on the product (the text, the message communicated), and argues that the recent emphasis on the process and concern for forms and the politics of context can be united and integrated into a single model. This interaction she argues is not proved to be dialogic and the distinction between the communicators can become highly fluid though not so easily glossed as performers and audience. The seeds of an integrated theory on politics of performance she emphasizes lie within the many theoretical contributions of performance theory. Askew argued in the context of her study that elements of performance that directly relate to politics are the processes of its production, its communicative function, the messages it communicates, its reflexivity, its capacity for an enhancement of experience and the capacity for active power negotiation and contestations in local and national, private and governmental performances and this is partly the focus of my study.

Ebron's work in The Gambia is equally important as she calls our attention to the importance of reading literature on performance and representation with and against each other in order to understand contemporary politics of nationalism in Africa. She explored the implications of performance as a social encounter and practice as well as its significance as an ideological construct through a discussion of Mandinka praise singers. Her study on praise singers locally known as *jaliya* produced evidence which suggests that performance as an act or practice create 'Africa' for the tourist sector on that part of the continent.

Catherine Cole in her book *Performing South Africa's Truth Commission* explored the larger cultural memory and its many guises of performance. She focused on the commission's public enactments of how things were said, scripted, produced, rehearsed and represented by witnesses,

commissioners, perpetrators and victims. She examined layers of performance from witness to interpreter to journalist to audience. Because of the TRC's feature as a public enactment she analysed it as performance. Based on a closer reading of sources, raw video footage of the TRC hearings and interviews she has come to conclude that the ritual (TRC) as a performative act had multiple and ambiguous meanings.

Other studies elsewhere in the world and on the continent implicitly employ performance as an analytical concept. In mind I have the examination of *la fête* in Quebec by Richard Handler (1988), Guss (2002) of transformed cultural landscapes in Venezuela, Van Binsbergen's (1994) Kazanga festival in Zambia and Lentz's (2001) Kobine and Kakube festivals in Ghana.

Guss has dealt with the contestations of nativeness and the notion of *mestizaje* in the celebration of the monkey dance on the Day of the Monkey. At the centre of contestations is the myth of *mestizaje* which carries a discourse of all-inclusiveness between the blacks, whites and those of mixed race in this part of South America.¹¹ However, as he has argued the *mestizaje* was employed for the precise purpose of excluding those who are seen not to conform to national ideas of progress and market economy. Similarly although in a different context, in the study of Handler (1988) we see how French speaking Canadians negotiate belonging to the nation of Quebec (a province on mainland Canada) claim allegiance to the province and mainland while there were those who felt the province should not be attached to Canada. This he evidenced during the celebration of *la fête* when Parti Québécois won the provincial elections in 1976. He has also observed elements of differentiation and belonging in other social spheres such as sports where some of his interlocutors have told him how they felt discriminated against during local hockey games a situation contrasted to international hockey tournaments which seemingly generated displays of pan-Canadian unity. He has since argued that processes over products of cultural production are political, insofar as they involve contests over identity formation.

Van Binsbergen (1994) focused on the Kazanga Festival in Zambia through which he explored the cultural dynamics of ethnicity in the context of a postcolonial African state. With a particular attention to the participation of the Nkoya ethnic group in the Kazanga festival, his analysis brings out an instance of ethnic self representation *vis-à-vis* the national state in order to argue that in the festival space ethnicity transform local historical cultural forms towards a global idiom of performance, inequality along class, gender lines and commodification of culture.

In West Africa Carola Lentz (2001) has shown how competitive and why it is important for provinces to hold cultural festivals. In her extensive research in Ghana over the years Lentz has demonstrated and argued through what she call politics of invitation and participation why it is important for local chiefs to host Kobine and Kakube cultural festivals in their areas. Unlike the festivals which are held by the state, local chiefs hold the festivals in order to show the political influence they can generate at the level of their administration and their ability to mobilize a large following which represent local and regional interests with the central government. When the local chiefs organized and hosted the festivals they benefitted from business and community contributions in the name of the event. Also the area of the chief became noticed and known at the state level which in turn has used the gatherings to disseminate information about its political agenda. All the above studies speak about performance explicitly or implicitly; and in common they all deal with processes of representation which mark belonging, ethnicity, exclusivity and the development of social relations. In the next section I present a perspective of performance studies within the social science context.

Performance theory in context

The most influential students of performance theory such as Erving Goffman, Victor Turner, Clifford Geertz, Richard Bauman and Robert Schechner have largely concentrated on how performance is used to address human social interaction. In his representation of everyday life Goffman (1959) in dramaturgical context suggested that when an individual plays a part he/she implicitly requests his observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered before them. They are asked to believe that the character they see actually possesses the attributes he appears to possess and that the tasks he performs will have the consequences that are implicitly claimed for it, and that, in general matters are what they appear to be. He argued that within there is a popular view that the individual offers his/her performance and puts on his show for the benefit of other people. What interested me in Goffman's view of performance is the idea of turning the consideration from what is on show towards the individual's own belief in the impression of reality that he/she attempts to engender in those among whom he finds himself. In this regard Goffman (1959) argued that the notion of performance has two extremes, but for the purpose of the discussion I will limit myself to one, which is when the performer can be fully taken in by his own act and be sincerely convinced that the impression of reality which he stages is 'real'.

(Goffman, 1959:28) If his audience is also convinced in this way about the show he/she has just put on and this seems to be the typical case then for the moment at least, only the socially disgruntled will have any doubts about the realness of what is presented³⁰. (Goffman, 1959:28) It is within this extreme in which I locate my usage of the term ‘performance’. It is when an individual plays a part in which he believes and implicitly requests his observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered before them. In this context observers are expected to believe that what they see in general matters and are what they appear to be. (Goffman, 1959:28)

For Turner (1979) performance is an interaction between social actors and their environment which he understood to be ‘social drama’ a model of life performance which occupied the larger part of his work. For him social dramas occur in all levels of social organization from state to family. The dramas are never amorphous or open ended, they have diachronic structure, a beginning, a sequence of overlapping, but isolable phases and an end. However, these dramas seem conflict driven and required interventions at most times. He argues further that if man is a sapient animal, a tool making animal, a self making animal, a symbol using animal he is no less a performing animal, not in the sense of an animal in a circus, but that a man is a self performing animal and his performances are in a way *reflexive*, in performing he reveals himself to himself. These performances (drama) are enacted in the social context which he termed *communitas*.

In the ritual context what stands out between Turner and Goffman is their conception of performance. Turner view rituals as dramatic events in which participants not only do things but try to show others what they are doing or have done; actions take on a ‘performed for an audience aspect’. While Goffman using a scenographic approach views the world as a stage on which performances are staged. All of them stress the importance of processes and processual qualities in their theorizations. Despite the manner and angle the two authors took to position their arguments, of importance is the type of emphasis the two attach to their perspectives. I have a problem with Turner on how he reduced every human act which he neatly discussed as

³⁰ The other extreme which is also alluded to in the work of Schechner and Appel (1990, reprinted in 1993) is when the performer is not taken in at all by his routine. This possibility may be understood especially when there is no one with skills to read through the act as the person who puts it on. When the individual has no belief in his own act and no ultimate concern with the beliefs of his audience he may be called ‘cynical’ while reserving the term ‘sincere’ for individuals who believe in the impression fostered by their own performance. (ibid)

social drama to mere processes³¹. Goffman's presentation of the world as a stage also gives a reductionists impression on actors of that stage as just performers. However, his analysis of the stage according to what happens in the hidden and exposed realm and the belief in it by actors is of particular importance in understanding the festival under investigation. One can only utilize Goffman and Turner to a certain extent in understanding ritual bearing in mind the contexts which influenced their theoretical orientation at a time.

In the essays published posthumously for Turner in Richard Schechner (1993:16-18) invented a useful idea on how to understand the interrelationship between social drama and stage drama or cultural performance. In that thought they argue that the manifest social drama feeds into the latent realm of stage drama; its characteristic form in a given culture, at a given time and place, unconsciously, or perhaps precociously, influences not only the form, but also the content of the stage drama of which it is the active mirror. (Turner, 1993:16) He goes on to say that although the 'stage drama is always meant to entertain, it becomes a meta-commentary explicit or implicit, witting or unwittingly on the major social dramas of its social context in *which it happens*' (italics my emphasis). In turn the stage drama feeds back in the social drama and life itself now becomes a mirror held up to art, and the living now perform their lives, for the protagonists of social drama, a drama of living, have been equipped by the 'aesthetic drama with some of their most salient opinions, imageries, tropes, and ideological perspectives'. (Turner, 1993: 17) So, within the bureaucratic discourse of 'performance' in the, culture festival in question is conceived as a 'completion of a more or less involved process of various acts; which is (acts) done by those involved'. (Turner, 1979:82) A process which according to the ritual stages Turner invented is that of redressive action in a conflict perspective. However, conceptual complexities emerge when some of these acts represented in these processes also happen in daily life and not necessarily only remembered when the festival is enacted. I will elaborate on this a little later in the next section.

Bauman (1986) has also argued that display events such as rituals, festivals, fairs, ceremonies and spectacles be viewed and analyzed as 'cultural performances'. (Bauman, 1986:133-134) Like Turner (1980) Bauman (1986) have shown that it is important to treat cultural performance seriously, because they are meta-cultural enactments, occasions in which members of the society

³¹ We need to distinguish process from practice as I discuss in the critique.

put their culture on display for themselves and other in performance. In the festival context it is an occasion in which members of the society put their 'culture' on display for themselves and others in performance. The nature of such display he argued includes 'cultural forms about culture, social forms about society, in which central meanings and values of a group are embodied, acted out and laid open to examination and interpretation in symbolic form, both by members of that group.' (Bauman, 1986: 133) In the festival sense the event is 'framed as display of performance and opened up to evaluative scrutiny by an audience.' (ibid) Festival participants represent cultural forms which include artifacts, rehearsed 'traditional' dances and drama about 'the ways of life'.

Theory of Performance: A critical look

In critical review of performance theory William Beeman (1993) has argued in his essay on the anthropology of theatre and spectacle that; anthropologists have studied performance largely for what it can show about other human institutions such as religion, political life gender relations, and ethnic identity in a *functionalist* perspective. (Italics my emphasis) He claimed that less study has been devoted to performance per se: its structure, its cultural meaning apart from other institutions, the conditions under which it occurs and its place within broad patterns of community life. As a student of theater he noted neglect particularly to performance activities which are designed specifically to entertain: theater and spectacle even though both were universal human institutions to which societies devoted much time and energy. (Beeman, 1988:370-371)

It appears from critique of performance as a theory of social interaction that it is only useful when applied to processes and not to practices which I argue makes processes. In order to make a better analysis of the festival in question we need to somehow clarify and distinguish *processes* from *practices*. When Turner spoke of performance he had in mind a 'processual sense of bringing to completion or accomplishing. To perform is thus to complete a more or less involved *process* rather than to do a single act'. (Turner, 1979:82) In my understanding a process happens over an unspecified period of time and it depends on what it (process) entails and how it is sanctioned. While a practice broadly refers to anything people do in the Bourdieuan sense of practice. Implicitly practice can be understood to be a customary action, habit, behavior, a

manner or routine. Accordingly, I argue that process constitutes practice. Although process constitutes practice, it does not happen anytime. A process is sanctioned. On the contrary practice happen on a daily basis. In the context of my study certain elements of representation which are showcased in the festival are practiced on a daily basis and not necessarily during processes which are sanctioned in order to mark a particular occasion in the ritual sense.

There also seems to be a neglect of agency and what I call the ‘psychosocial element’ in performance theory. Although, the ‘psychosocial element’ present in human practice commonly referred to as reflex or meta-cultural enactment in the theory of performance is difficult to analyze it still remains important. ‘Individual agency in performance also present a problematic role’ (Walker 2003:149 cited in Cole 2010:10) which cannot be ignored. Walker (cited in Cole 2010) has argued that performance resonates simultaneously in several different registers including reason, emotion, and experience. The above earlier authors on performance have one aspect in common namely the element of meta- commentary or meta- cultural enactment in their writing which is largely ignored or overlooked by contemporary authors on performance theory in anthropology. Even though Turner (1979) thought that cognitive reductionist was dehydration of social life, matters of the brain, body and culture seem to have dominated his later work.

This oversight in contemporary performance theory has been lamented by Edward Schieffelin (1998), who argues that it has resulted in performance to be conceived as particularly symbolic, or aesthetic activities, such as rituals, or theatrical and folk artistic activities, which are enacted as intentional expressive productions in established local genres. Although the contemporary scholarship of ‘performance’ in anthropology has moved away from studying them as systems of representations (symbolic transformations, cultural texts) to looking at them as processes; they have time and again used performance to refer to bounded, intentionally produced enactments which are usually marked and set off from ordinary activities, and which call attention to themselves as particular productions with special purposes or qualities for people who observe or *practice* them. (Schieffelin, 1998, see also St John, 2008) In the same breath Hughes Freeland (1998) in the introduction to the collection of essays on recasting ritual performance argued that there is a danger to misread performances and to allow the symbolic to dominate the functional if we in the social sciences do not appreciate performances as constituents of social practice and start to look at them as such. If we do not see social practices as constituents of performance

maintain Schieffelin (1998), performances seem to be inquisitively robbed of life and power, especially when distanced within discussions concerned largely with meaning. Thus I suggest that it is important that we not only acknowledge the psychosocial elements and agency in rituals which conceptualize processes, but illuminate them as practices and determinants of power which influence the lived experience which we in turn claim and analyze as performances.

The omission of psychosocial elements and agency in practices which makes processes and analysed as performance in the anthropology of performance has resulted in most contemporary authors on ritual presenting them as staged acts especially in the festive context. The work of Boonzaier and Sharp³² (1994) is a useful point of departure in dealing with the issue of performance in the Southern African context; in which they have argued ethnic identity to be a carefully controlled performance in their essay on lessons from Namaqualand on the occasion of celebrating the signing ceremony at the reserve park when the Nama people presented Nama choir, the singing of Nama songs and the construction of a 'traditional' matjieshuis. Through investigation of the events which transpired during the signing ceremony to mark the park establishment in the Namaqualand they concluded that the acts were role-play, a highly self conscious statement which was formulated collectively through dialogue and modified according to context, but they did not problematise the performative aspect of role-play in relation to what people said they were doing. (Boonzaier & Sharp, 1994:405-406)

In Namibia Ian Fairweather (2003) in his work on heritage is of particular importance when located in the discourse of performance. In his attempt to elucidate meanings in the series of dichotomies which were presented by his research subjects, he focused on local distinctions between pagan and Christian, traditional and modern and finally rural and urban which he analyzed in the light of Fergusson's work on the adoption of local and cosmopolitan styles by mineworkers in Zambia. His case study was of a wedding ceremony which was held at Olukonda in northern Namibia in a refurbished early Lutheran church which is next to an old

³² My personal communication with Boonzaier, he has indicated that the context in which their essay was written was a complex one, especially when some of their informants indicated to them that they were in the true sense of the word 'just' role playing; and that what they presented was not 'really' their daily culture. That sentiment itself begs careful attention. It seem that they (people in Namaqualand) were weary of the new developments in the politics of 'belonging' and 'differentiation' especially among the 'coloureds' which were emerging at the time. He expressed similar sentiments in his talk during the launch of a journal special issue on: Engaging difference: Perspectives on belonging and exclusion in contemporary southern and East Africa.

mission house that serves as a museum. He analyzed the wedding as a staged nostalgic construction of 'tradition' which is implicit in the proceedings and that allowed for a multi layered performance. Although Fairweather's ethnography demonstrates his subject's lived experience since the arrival of missionaries his argument seems to suggest that the practice has become static and thus can only be staged.

Askew in her study in Tanzania has clearly acknowledged the aspect of reflexivity for her subjects' actions in her discussion of performance with influential insights from Schieffelin who is outstanding in anthropological critique of performance theory. However, she has not fully engaged the notion of reflexivity in her ethnographic presentation. She has demonstrated through her presentation of musical ethnography that 'performance' of especially *ngoma* and *taarab* musical dances has the capacity to constitute, negotiate, and transform social relations. However, she does not clearly bring out what her research subjects say about what they were doing, thus making it difficult for her to clearly locate her usage of performance as a process or practice. However, it is clear that implicitly she referred to a process as her work is largely influenced by Turner's perspective of performed 'social drama' as process of social interaction.

In the case of Boonzaier & Sharp (1994) and Fairweather (2003), they have both made sensible assertions with regard to the cultural situations they have investigated; however, there was a danger to reduce the 'practical relationship between agents (actors, observers, organizers) and fields to a utilitarianist vision' as argued by Bordieu in his theory of action. (1998:79) As a result their theory reduces every action by agents in that particular field to having been motivated by 'economic interest and monetary profit' which in this case was access to the reserved land and the material 'show-off' in the wedding. (Bourdieu, 1998:79) Fairweather located the staged wedding within the realm of performance, and ignored the view of nostalgia and its challenges as an important psychosocial variable which determines and mediate the lived experience which is practiced at the wedding. I think nostalgia is an aspect of the mind which should be placed and contextualized clearly within the idea of being. In this case Turner (1988:84-85) has called our attention to the observance of static models for thought and action such as cosmology, theology, philosophical systems and ideologies in the epistemological tradition of 'lived experiences'.

Although, the above three authors in a way acknowledge the importance of psychosocial elements especially for the performers in the performances they discuss, it is an aspect they have

not fully exhausted analytically. Their focus was more on the symbolic representations which they observed. They did not consider the aspect of the mind or being which is about people's belief in what they do within the context of the symbolic representations they discussed and theorized as performance. It is that aspect of reflexivity which is at centre of my research and theoretical understanding especially when my research subjects has a belief that what they are doing also defines who they are and is not necessarily a performance³³. In order to clarify my stand I will employ Goffman's belief in the part one is playing during the performance and Bourdieu's notion of habitus as it manifests itself in the interested and disinterested acts of human beings.

I use Bourdieu's theory of practice further explain the complexity and distinction of processes and practice in my research context. Taking a cue from what is implicitly believed by actors in the social field is what Bourdieu refers to as cultural capital which is somehow stored in the habitus. In his theory of practice he argued that actors have embodied a host of practical schemes and appreciations which function as instruments of reality construction, as a principle of vision and division of the universe in which they act. He implies that actors are not just subjects faced with an object that will be constituted as such by a process of thought; they are absorbed in the affair. It is in this context that I locate my study of state sponsored culture festivals. Although, as Ebron (2002) has suggested that we read performance and representation with and against each other, in my research context I think performance should be employed to refer to the process and not the practice which makes the process.

In my research local people refer to the cultural festival as *sipito soudano wompo* which translates as the feast of traditional/cultural dances/play literary. Herein the *sipito* (feast) is composed of *udano* (dances/play) which are believed to be 'traditional/cultural' by those who participate in the feast. These dances/play are 'done' thus the saying *kwa ku rugana yompo*³⁴ during the culture festival gathering. By implication it means, because dances are done, they are practiced and not performed during festivals only, but in other instances of social life. On the other hand those (state officials) who produce the festival refer to the act of symbolic representations such a dance/play as performance. In this context they use the concept

³³ I will discuss this shortly below.

³⁴ We are doing culture.

performance as a noun to refer to what transpires in the festival. Interestingly as I have observed, state officials also use the same idea as ordinary locals in reference to the practice of dances/play. In the English language, which is also the official language in Namibia, they say ‘people are doing the performances³⁵’. This usage of performance as a noun refers to the practice at the festival and its understanding by research subjects in relation to our analytical ability and conception thereof creates some ambiguity especially when contexts of conventions are not clearly explained. Respectively the ‘cultural/traditional’ is said to be ‘done’ in order to be showcased to the public or to those in attendance. Showcase in this context is locally conceived to be an act of public display. Hence I argue that what is ‘done’ in the festival context is believed and seen by all actors as facts of the ‘habitus’ which are embodied in an ‘incorporated state’ from the local perspective and ‘objectified’ segments practiced in real life by state representatives and participants alike. (Bourdieu, 1998:80-81; Handler, 1988:1-3) In other words I view the state sponsored cultural festival as a social space or processes which contains practices through which perceived *social* reality is showcased by actors. Following Bourdieu’s idea of disinterested acts which suggests the difficulty to measure and not to assume that people do not just do anything; that they are not foolish and that they do not act without a reason, I acknowledge the challenge we face in dealing with performance theory. Thus, in the context of my research I present subjects in the festival as actors who are present in the event unfolding; doing the deed and there is an immediate correlation of practice which is not posed as an object of thought, but which is inscribed in the presence of the event. The above discussion on performance as a process and analytical tool is necessary in order to locate and make sense of how the phrase is conceived in my research and in relation to the anthropological/academic discourse respectively.

For me the most important issue is how we should deal with the question of performance as a process, when those who participate consciously saw themselves as doing or practicing acts of ‘reality’ and not performing in that process. My research of the state sponsored cultural festival, data shows that the state representatives regard the event as framed, heightened, public with symbolically rich enactments which they refer to as performance. Also the state representatives view and present the festival representations as acts which can be objectified in order to

³⁵ My field work notes.

distinguish the groups ethnically which are participating in the festival. In this context performance is used to refer to the particular symbolic or aesthetic activities, such as ritual, or theatrical and folk artistic activities, which are enacted as intentional and *unintentional* expressive productions in established local genres. (Schieffelin, 1998) I will elaborate on this discussion in the next section.

Postcolonial nationalism: ‘One Namibia One Nation’

In a rather surprising move, five years after Namibia gained independence, the postcolonial state created the Annual National Culture Festival in order to enhance a ‘polyethnic participation and heterogeneous cultural expression’ (Cohen, 1993:8) which was argued would enhance social cohesion contrary to their earlier condemnation of the practice right at independence when it (the practice) was seen to still be a colonial hangover. The desire to replace different ethnic identities with a Namibian national identity is expressed in the constitution adopted in February 1990, the Swapo Party³⁶’s slogan which is synonymous with that of the state of ‘One Namibia- One Nation’, in the use of linguistics rather than ethnic categories and in the replacement of the ethnic homelands with the new administrative regions. (KJÆret & Stokke, 2003, Swapo Party) Nationalist politics are normally dated from the launch of South West Africa National Union (SWANU) and the Ovambo People’s Organization (OPO) which dealt with contract labour issues from the late 1950s before it was transformed into broad base movement, SWAPO on 19 April 1960 with a different mandate; that mobilized all people in the country. Instead of representing contract workers from the former Ovamboland only it became a recognized liberation movement by the United Nations (UN) for the course of the Namibia liberation struggle in South West Africa. It became the Swapo Party when it participated in the first UN supervised election in 1989. The slogan ‘One Namibia, One Nation’ was born of the Swapo Party’s realization, so the party maintains, that ‘divided the nation shall fall’³⁷ hence the call for a united nation. Ethnicity, tribalism, and regionalism are listed as main enemies in the ruling party’s constitution³⁸ which its members and citizens in general seemingly should guard against.

³⁶ Swapo Party is the current ruling political party.

³⁷ See Swapo Party website: www.swapoparty.org/history.html accessed 31 August 2011.

³⁸ See Swapo Party website: www.swapoparty.org/history.html accessed 31 August 2011.

At the adoption of the constitution as Geingob³⁹ (2004) shows metaphorically in his thesis; ethnicity was to be one of the building blocks of the Namibian nation. Once the blocks have been laid they are plastered and painted with colors. He went on to say further that: ‘once the house has been painted no one would see the bricks or different ethnicities’ (Geingob, 2004:144). The Swapo Party constitution and political agenda highly informs government policies; in fact in Namibia the formally liberal democratic state often appears as an extension of the ruling party.

The Swapo Party government discontinued the cultural festivals which were created by the colonial state, only to resurrect them five years in to independence. It appears, the idea to discard thoughts of ethnicity, presented the ruling party with a conundrum: how was it going to define its citizens. Becker (2003) in one of her extensive publications on postcolonial Namibia has also indicated the same idea especially in owning and remembering public heroes and national monuments. In Namibian postcolonial nationalism Becker (2011) has demonstrated in her work on memory commemoration how ethnic affiliation played a role in order to define and determine belonging to national ideals of nationhood and ethnicity. She sketched a picture with images of a greater desire for ethnical association than national belonging which she conceptualized as the ‘culturalization’ of Namibian nationalism. (Becker, 2011:21)

Similarly for the South African context Brown (2001) and the Comaroffs (2001) argued that postcolonial states found themselves faced with enormous diversity and very few unifying elements. As they sought to reconstruct themselves in more humane and equitable ways: they struggled with competing demands of difference and unity. African leaders developed different approaches to the problem of internal unification and almost all placed much dependence on the production of national culture. The postcolonial period has been marked by a great deal of more than just a move to democracy. At independence the idea of belonging was about nationhood based on ‘One Namibia, One Nation’. Those who took over power spent their energy to sensitize the importance of belonging to the nation. At the independence of Namibia, their South African neighbours also strove towards the abolishment of apartheid. In this context the idea of the ‘Rainbow Nation’ championed by Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela as the first black president became the bedrock of South African nationalism. And later in the context of Namibia

³⁹ Hage Geingob was the chairman of the Constituent Assembly which drafted the Namibian constitution. At independence he became the first Prime Minister of the republic.

it was no longer ‘One Namibia, One Nation’, but ‘Unity in Diversity’ as citizens began to emphasize ethnic belonging first rather than national belonging. In this context, arguments about national belonging and cultural difference increased in prominence. These changes are at the core of this thesis. This is an epoch in which most countries experienced an unprecedented wave of demands for democracy. Inclusive was the loss of power by the institutions of the state into transnational corporations, associations, nongovernmental organizations and at times crime syndicates, because of neo liberal capitalism.

The challenge for the state as to how to define ‘Namibianess’ persisted seemingly because of the wane of apartheid and continental shifts in identity politics which became rooted in cultural discourses, so the Swapo led government devised a policy titled ‘Unity, Identity and Creativity for Prosperity’ which was accepted in principle by the Namibian cabinet during 2001. Contrary to the Swapo Party constitution which shunned ethnicity and tribalism, the new policy which is built on a constitutional guarantee presented a new political vision which read:

- We envisage ourselves as a united and flourishing nation, celebrating the diversity of our artistic and cultural expressions, and globally admired as is the skin of an African leopard.
- We envisage ourselves as a united and flourishing nation, achieving sincere reconciliation through mutual respect and understanding, solidarity, peace, equality, tolerance and inclusion.
- We envisage ourselves as a united and flourishing nation, treasuring and protecting our material and spiritual heritage and customs, developing creative talents throughout our lifetimes, and employing our skills and knowledge for economic development and common good⁴⁰.

The above vision was the total opposite of the political ideal at the time of independence. It present a new idea of enhanced diversity as expressed in the metaphor of an African leopard skin. It focused on the notion of tolerance between ‘different cultures’. The underlying goal of the policy was to promote widespread cultural and artistic expression through representations in cultural festival and arts. (Culture Policy,2001) As a result officially recognized ethnic groups

⁴⁰ Culture Policy, Government of the Republic of Namibia 2001.

gather in order to present and perform what is believed to be their 'exclusive culture' (Cohen, 1993:6) under the banner of Namibian Culture.

Article 19 of the constitution of the Republic of Namibia guarantees that "...every person shall be entitled to enjoy, practice, profess, maintain and promote any culture, language, tradition or religion subject to the terms of this constitution and further subject to the condition that the rights protected by this article do not impinge upon the rights of others or the national interest." Implicitly, the constitutional guarantee supports and encourages diversity. Although diversity is highly encouraged in the festival context, festival organizers and the state seemingly have, similar to Cohen's (1993:6) observation in his research on a carnival in London a 'conscious concern about and preoccupation with the possible development of exclusivity.'

Exclusivity is of utmost importance where ethnicity is viewed by those in positions of social influence as a tool to be used for accessing various social fields. (Bourdieu, 1998) In post colonial times I argue that exclusivity has become synonymous with ethnicity especially due to the negative social consequences they have produced elsewhere on the continent.

As Dickson Eyoh (1998) explains with reference to social realist cinema and representation of power the justly celebrated resurgence of popular movements for democracy in Africa retreated into ethnic and kinship networks as a sanctuary from the violence and intensity of competition over dwindling resources; this presented a major pattern of response to the erosion of the utopian dreams of independence. The above perspective gives an impression that Africanist discourse on postcolonial nationalism was previously dominated by the management of social tensions that are generated by ethnic interaction with modern and traditional forms of production, institutions of political power and cultural systems. In this regards I acknowledge what Magubane in (1969) cautioned in his essay on pluralism and conflict situations in Africa that when we try to understand postcolonial social tensions which are labeled as ethnic or tribal tensions or tribal we should not do that in isolation from the colonial context which created them.

In the South African context the Comaroffs (2001) have argued that global neoliberal capitalism constructed the modernist subject- citizen characterized by the explosion of identity politics during the late 1990s. This led to shifting relations between the concepts of citizenship, community and national sovereignty under neo liberal conditions in South Africa. In fact later

xenophobic attacks on foreign immigrants in the later years of 2000 could be understood in terms of politics of identity and belonging and access to resources.

The Comaroffs in the context of Botswana in 1970s argued, for instance, of a tension between the model of one party state and multiparty democracy in Botswana where it appeared to have taken root firmly. The one party state model was seen by the majority of Botswana citizens as an 'African' alternative especially by looking at the comparative ethnic homogeneity of the time, different from the deeply taken-for-granted European political practices and institutions. (Comaroff and Comaroff 1997:20) However, the antagonism against the postcolonial Botswana state, in turn was seen to be against the Setswana tradition by those that represented the state. With reference to the South African apartheid period of forty years and the bloody war in Rwanda, Duncan Brown has attributed such painful historical moments to increased sensitivity of 'inclusive and exclusive conceptions of identity'. (Brown, 2001:758)

The recent publication by Peter Geschiere (2009), presents interesting changes in the discourses of belonging in Cameroon since that country's independence in the 1960s, with a special focus to inherent ambiguities within the concept. He has described various forms of political rituals in Cameroon which signified local ideas of belonging in the context of nationhood, and has demonstrated how they changed overtime. He has focused on the particular expression of the local namely the idea of autochthony and allogènes in Cameroon and his native Netherland in the 1990s. In question is the history of violence against allogènes in both countries traced from the Greek context over time in order to inform the making of contemporary ambiguities in Cameroon and Netherland. Of course the contemporary making is influenced by different factors such as immigration and access to postcolonial resources. The idea of autochthony and its working is similar to workings of ethnicity; more specifically when local rituals are essentialised by leaders and believed to display allegiance to a particular cultural group. He observed rituals such as funerals which serve as spaces in which autochthon belonging was celebrated. What interested me in his book is the discussion of the manner which autochthony is operated to mediate exclusion and inclusion of citizens in democratic processes and resultant hostilities in Neoliberal Africa.

Significant research in the field of nationalism studies indicate that festivals may be instrumental in how national identity is constructed and presented. (Handler, 1988) In his work generally

regarded as seminal in the field of political rituals Richard Handler (1988) has argued that although processes of cultural production are political insofar as they involved contests over identity formation. In such processes⁴¹ identity formations are manifested and enforced, contested and manipulated in order to emphasize the required display. In the context of constructing nationhood he saw nationalism as an ‘ideology about individuated being’, because it is concerned with bounded-ness, continuity and homogeneity encompassing diversity. (Handler 1988:6) Thus the identities were economically significant in their modes of objectification. On his exploration of nationalist discourse in Canada he frequented fairs, festivals and folklore exhibits while asking questions and observing the reactions of the crowds. Respectively, he found ‘that celebration of *la fete* expressed more than partisan joy-it marked their belief in the coming of age of a collectivity and their pride in belonging in that collectivity’. (Handler,1988:4) In the next section I discuss the notion of ‘culture’ as an important political resource for enhancing sovereignty and belonging in wider postcolonial Africa.

Festival making in postcolonial Africa

I attempt to show in this dissertation that people during the state sponsored cultural festivals assert ethnic identities through cultural representations. I will show further that favoured cultural representations are those deemed ‘traditional’ and including characteristics, which signify a unique ethnic existence within the national context. Thus the African states make use of cultural representations to refer to bounded, intentionally produced enactments which are usually marked and set off from ordinary activities, and which call attention to themselves as particular productions with special purposes or qualities for people who observe or perform them as argued by Schieffelin (1998). And it is these ‘particular productions’ I argue which marks the postcolonial ethnic and inner-ethnic differentiations in my research context.

In my ethnography of the state sponsored cultural festival it is evident that the state representatives regard the event as framed, heightened, public and symbolically rich enactments. I argue that through festival participation and interactions individuals create their self identity which is appropriated collectively. In my research people were more concerned with: who they

⁴¹ Recently the Namibian government embarked on a National Pride campaign in order to create awareness of national identity.

are, their descendants (clan), ethnic orientation and finally national identity. Like anyone else in the social sciences I acknowledge that identity as a concept is rather complex to unravel. However, in this context, for participants and spectators, the state sponsored culture festival provides an opportunity to not only practice what is referred to as their ‘culture and tradition’, but also to impress their identity in essentialist terms as argued by Hall & Du Gay (1996). In that sense, identity is presented ‘on the back of recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiances established on this foundation’. (Hall & Du Gay, 1996:2-4) The importance is the emphasis on the participants and spectators who harness the social space in order to present their identity to the audience through the culture performances which are acted out in the festival context.

For those who organize culture festivals including politicians who officiate at the gatherings, the social space presents itself differently and is used differently than by spectators and participants in the festival. In contrast to participants and spectators, culture festival organizers in planning, organizing and hosting the event already assume a perceived identity of both those who will participate and those represented respectively. This conception and simultaneous presentation of these perceived identities ‘is not *necessarily* an essential one, but a strategic and positional one’. (Italics, my emphasis) (Hall & Du Gay, 1996:3) What is significant here is the point that identity as a *construct* becomes subject to manipulation during the presentation of cultural performances and like all signifying practices, it is subject to the play of difference. At the same time it is reconstructed, given new meanings and used as a means to forge solidarity. (Hall & Du Gay, 1996:2)

I use identity in this study as a category of practice as suggested by Brubaker and Cooper (2000) which they borrowed from Bourdieu in their essay on ‘Beyond Identity’. I follow their cue in which they propose identity as categories of everyday social experience, developed and deployed by ordinary social actors, as distinguished from the experience-distant categories used by social analysts. As suggested by Brubaker and Cooper (2000) I use the notion in the context in which it is practiced by lay people in some of their daily setting to make sense of themselves, of their activities, of what they share with, and how they differ from, others. From the perspective of politicians, I employ the notion as used to persuade people to understand themselves, their

interests, and their predicaments in a certain way, to persuade people that they are ‘identical’ with one another and at the same time different from others, and to organise and justify collective action along certain lines. (Brubaker & Cooper 2000:6-8) Below I will now discuss the festivals in order to show how nationhood, ethnicity and access to resources become manifest in the festival space through a discourse of culture.

Culture and making the nation

Concerning postapartheid culture politics in southern Africa, Richard Wilson (2001) examined practices, methods and discourses of culture and race. He focused on two main human rights institutions in South Africa, namely the constitutional court and the TRC (Truth and Reconciliation Commission) and studied how local people’s notions about reconciliation were different from those of these central institutions of the postapartheid South African state. He explained that postapartheid nation building appealed to civic nationalism as new basis for national integration. The key term here is ‘Ubuntu’. Wilson (2001) contends that Ubuntu was an African concept which leaders used in order to address and justify amnesty during the truth and reconciliation commission. The usage of Ubuntu he argues created an artificial polarity between Africanist and Western perspectives of reconciliation. He took the historical trajectories of race, culture and ‘group rights’ in South Africa into consideration in his attempt to deconstruct the post- apartheid politics of culture. He argued that, even if human rights became the paradigmatic discourse of compromise and constitutionalism, rights had been subordinated for the reason of nation-building. An example in that respect was the abolition of the death penalty in South Africa when an appeal was made to African ideas of unity and community through the new ‘culture of rights’. (Wilson 2001:210)

In order to realize state programmes in different ways, human rights may be combined with symbolic markers of cultural difference as a strategy of nation building. Conversely the state may counter-post them to categories of culture and race in a literal, legalistic and procedural liberalism. (Wilson, 2001) Human rights talk has become the central language of nation-building in democratizing countries such as South Africa. In South Africa, Wilson (2001) observed that state officials tend to combine elements of both liberalism and communitarianism in their interpretation of nationhood and rights. In the context of nation-building human rights

talk is deployed with significant culturalist and Africanist referents in order to legitimate the project of post-apartheid nation building. Wilson's work is important, because of its implications for the anthropological conception of culture as an analytical tool and its usage by the elite in the process of legitimizing their projects of bureaucratization and nation-building.

Oomen (2005:8), also on South Africa, argued that 'culture' which had been considered in the early phases of the postcolonial state as backward, tribalist and an obstacle to modernization now became the leading way to engage the fast changing world. Its revival was not only about the wider economic processes, but also essentially political. This South African observation relates to global developments where, ethnic and indigenous groups all over the world in recent years have revived their cultures in order to attract tourists and to assert authenticity for a range of reasons. Governments on the other hand have sponsored what Chanock (2000:17) refers to as cultures which 'brand best' in order to strengthen their identities.

A recent study which emerged from Zimbabwe by Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Willems (2009) shows how musical festivals have shifted from the celebration of the imagined united African nation to the attribution of new meanings to concepts such as 'independence', 'heroes' and unity in the changed political context of the 2000s. In their essay on making sense of cultural nationalism and the politics of commemoration under the third chimurenga in Zimbabwe Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Willems show how the gala event of music performance effectively syncretised the elite memorialism of the 1980s and 1990s with the cultural practices of the 1970s liberation war. In the process the ruling party delegitimized through musical performances the MDC⁴² as a political party without liberation credentials and as a threat to the country's 'independence' and 'unity'. The situation in Zimbabwe has resulted in chaos and displacement of its citizens

While little directly relevant literature has been written about Namibia, a body of literature on the politics of identity and cultural performances is steadily developing. Becker (2004, 2007) expresses views about the reclamation of 'traditions', developments of *efundula* (women initiation in northern Namibia, Ovambo) and other practices such as the commemoration of heroes in Namibia in mid 1990s. Fairweather (2001) on the other hand focused on identity politics and heritage industry in the northern regions of postcolonial Namibia. Fairweather

⁴² MDC stands for Movement for Democratic Change. It is an opposition party in Zimbabwe led by Morgan Tsvangirai.

(2006) has argued that cultural performances in any form have a more complex role in the production of postcolonial subjects than simply reproducing colonial ways of organizing experience. He foregrounds the role of the rapidly developing heritage sector in enabling postcolonial Namibian citizens to negotiate the local, national and global contexts in which their identities are asserted. A fairly recent work on performances from Namibia is by Wendi Haugh (2009), who analyzed song performances in order to understand the construction of Christian and national identities in postcolonial Namibia and found that discourses about threats to health and prosperity were constructed in song performances, plays and radio shows. Although her study was about performances of songs in a Christian context, it does not really relate to my argument of making ideas of differences and belonging in performance.

In his reflection on opportunities for 'rebuilding societies from below' Reinhart Kossler (2003) used the Witbooi festival among the Nama of Gibeon in Southern Namibia as a point of reference in order to demonstrate society building amid forces of globalization. Conceived in the historical defeat of the Nama by the German troops in 1905, the festival commemorates the death of Kaptein Hendrik Witbooi. Kossler argues that the festival narrative changed from being an inward looking ceremony centered on church and cemetery to a political manifestation both of the struggle for liberation of Namibia and of the Witbooi's aspiration to regain what they considered their legitimate heritage. In postcolonial Namibia, he demonstrates through ethnographic evidence that the festival gained characteristics of traditionalism, syncretism and inclusiveness. Accordingly Kossler (2003) shows that while the festival's character of traditionalism and syncretism was not surprising (especially in the midst of Southern African tendencies in popular culture); its inclusiveness presented a reflection of a conscious political effort of symbolic inclusion on the Namibian narrative of '*One Namibia, One Nation*'.

Literature from elsewhere on the African continent, and beyond as I will discuss shortly demonstrates a similar emphasis on sentiments of ethnicity, dominantly during festival fairs and carnivals especially when it comes to issues such as access to resources, and the articulation and mobilization of rights.

Festival with new social meaning and function

With respect to Ghana, Birgit Meyer argues that festivals are about performance and presentation of identity ‘pride’ by those involved. (Meyer, 1999:103) The representation of ‘culture’ in the festival produces meaning. In the section below I show that festivals in the post-colonial discourse of nation building are processes of making social meanings. Rather as an associational practice and a resource for social cohesion they are spaces in which people can ‘renew’ their being. (Owusu-Frempong, 2005:735) Thus, I argue that their meanings should be read articulately not only through representations enacted during such gatherings, but the context in which they happen. In the context of Ghana and in relation to the African American festivals Owusu-Frempong (2005) has argued that they (festivals) are a medium of cultural education and intergenerational communication in the community. However, it is important to note that these festivals are produced and held for different reasons in Africa and elsewhere and since postcolonial times they have transformed and acquired new meanings and functions. The organization and representation of genres of music, dances and drama are altered in order to meet the demands of the festival agenda which is set by the state.

In Ghana Meyer (1999) speaks of an interesting heritage initiative by the state at independence. Kwame Nkrumah launched a project on Sankofaism referring to the Akan symbol of a bird looking back over its tail which means ‘go back and take it’. This idea and cultural revival project “...posits that the indigenous culture and religion from which Ghanaians have been alienated through colonization and missionization, yielding a brainwashed, colonial mind set, needs to be retrieved. The ‘African personality’ which Nkrumah had in mind is to reincorporate his/her roots that got severed in the past and forgotten”. (Meyer, 1999:3)

In Ghana cultural festival are interesting. The body of literature on festival emanating from this country presents two perspectives. One perspective represents festivals as an invaluable source of knowledge about folklore, history, philosophy, aesthetics, music dance, art and myth all of which form part of the African collective existence as argued by Owusu- Frempong (2005). In contrast to this rather essentialist expression of African cultural nationalism, another more

instrumentalist, perspective suggests that festivals create an opportunity to those involved not only to salvage ‘traditional heritage’⁴³ but to use it in order to sustain their existence.

Ghanaian research further suggests that festivals provide an interface between local communities and the state, and that they also avail space for interaction. (Lentz, 2001) Despite the interface between those in attendance and the state, Carola Lentz (2001) observed in northern Ghana that festivals seemed mainly to be regarded as a space where local people addressed the state and where state representatives could lobby for political support. The situation is significantly different in the south of Africa as I will show shortly. Following her research of the festival Lentz (2001) has argued that research in festivals can advance anthropological and historical analysis of cultural innovation and the creation of new ethnic and local identities as well as political dimensions of culture.

Further south on the continent ‘history’ and ‘culture’ represented during culture festivals seem to be regarded as a ‘precondition for development and progress’ by those who organize and participate in them. (Meyer, 1999:103) There seems to be a difference in the way people of the continent in the south and those in the west of the continent relate to the culture festivals. While festival politics in West Africa are about lobbying for political support, in southern Africa the emphasis seems to have shifted more towards assertions of belonging and differentiation. (Van Binsbergen, 1994; Van Heerden, 2009; Akuupa, 2010) The situation could be attributed to the different colonial histories which created different encounters and experiences. What interested me most was what was made out of the making of festivals by those who organized, participated in and witnessed them. Specifically, in southern Africa culture festivals did not only feature ethnic self representations, but brought out the extent to which cultural representations of ethnicity transformed local historical cultural forms towards a global idiom of performance, inequality and commoditization of culture. This argument has been put forth in slightly different terms by both Van Binsbergen (1994) in his work on the Kazanga festival in Zambia and the Comaroffs (2009) in *Ethnicity INC*.

⁴³ Of late festivals in the postcolonial context also play a very important role in what is believed to be the “preservation of cultural heritage” for economic purposes and interactions with Diaspora blacks. (Pierre, 2009:60) The importance of the above theme is confirmed by the emphasis that numerous influential bodies place on heritage as a component of sustainable development and poverty alleviation as documented by Flint (2006) in his essay on the Kuomboka festival in Western Zambia.

An interesting recent study from South Africa is Van Heerden's (2009) research on post-1994 Afrikaner identities. This Stellenbosch University dissertation is of particular importance when it comes to understanding festivals is a purported Turnerian sense of social *communitas*. She presents an interesting insight on how ethnic Afrikaner identity is presented, contested and reconfigured among Afrikaans speakers through their participation and attendance at the Klein Karoo Nasionale Kunstefees en Aardklop (KKNK) festivals. The arts festivals she deals with emerged during a time of perceived crisis among the Afrikaans speaking people. It transpires in her study that Afrikaans as a language and its artistic expressions were in need of change especially in a post apartheid context. Van Heerden has compared and contrasted the Afrikaans oriented art festival to the former Afrikaner *volksfeeste*; in which she argues that whereas the *volksfeeste* were designed to advance the apartheid ideology of Afrikaner nationalism, the newly established Afrikaans oriented festivals were envisioned as inclusive celebrations. In a large way my research in Kavango also show that there is a significant ethnicization going on in the colonial and postcolonial culture festival and it relates to Van Heerden's work of the KKNK as I demonstrate in chapters six and eight.

The literature indicates that the post colonial African festival has a social function. I argue that one of those functions is to provide space and opportunity of expression to those who participate. In a more far going statement it has been argued that the festival has a political function which is to 'decolonize the mind'. (Wa Thiongo, 1986) In this perspective, festivals involve the crafting and shaping of the postcolonial national identity by carefully selecting, locating and legitimizing certain historical memories and literary works about indigenous ways of life. (Opoku, 1970; Wa Thiongo, 1986) Furthermore it has been argued by some authors; the festival provides not only a medium through which certain histories and ways of life are 'legitimized', but also 'state authority'. (Arnoldi, 2006:56; Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Willems, 2009:946)

It may be argued that the festival, through its space, provides an opportunity to those who organize and participate in it, an opportunity to present and create their perceptions of identity. The festival has an enormous popular appeal; therefore it should not be viewed as a mere venue for celebration and entertainment. Arnoldi (2006) whose research was on the Malian youth festival and the National Museum with the focus on their role as official sites where nationhood is imagined has argued that the festival seizes an opportunity to indoctrinate the citizens in socialist principles and decolonize the national culture while exciting outpourings of nationalist sentiment in the process. She suggests that

festivals also serve to transform local genres into modern national forms. Many local performances genres she emphasizes which are either ethnically or regionally based are inserted into a national cultural discourse in order to allow citizens at large, regardless of their specific affiliations to identify with and embrace these arts as wholly national identity. (Arnoldi, 2006)

Postcolonial rulers saw cultural festivals and other events alike through which they can strengthen their hegemonies, because of the significance they have among the citizenry. In the context of this study as I will demonstrate later Sam Nujoma the first postcolonial president of Namibia decided to introduce cultural festivals which were abolished during the early stage of independence when the nationalist narrative was ‘One Namibia, One Nation’. As I said earlier this narrative discouraged all sentiments which suggested separateness or uniqueness at the time of independence in the country. And when citizens began to emphasize their ethnic uniqueness coupled with issues of access to resources and ethnic recognition in the time of freedom the state adopted the ‘unity in diversity’ narrative that encouraged tolerance of difference. During my research interview Sam Nujoma expressed the view that:

‘Otwa ukeni miita iidhigu yo ku kwatela po eemithigululwakalo dhetu. Opo kadhi tewe po.’⁴⁴

‘Our heritage is facing a difficult war and we have to preserve our heritage so that it is not broken’

The expression of the importance of cultural preservation by Nujoma should not be read in isolation from other state activities of the time. During his tenure he had not only introduced the festival, but also worked towards creating a law that recognizes ethnic groups in traditional authorities. The law was gazzeted in 2000 five years after the official introduction of culture festivals. This state effort when read in relation to the colonial Odendaal Plan⁴⁵ of 1960s is not different especially in the context of managing ethnic diversities. This narrative of ‘unity in diversity’ is not significantly different in principle from that of the ‘Rainbow Nation’ and ‘Ubuntu’ which was advocated by Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela towards the time of freedom in neighboring South Africa.

In West Africa the popular African Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC 77) in Nigeria, initially held in Senegal and significantly dealt with by Apter (2005) brought

⁴⁴ Interview with Sam Nujoma, Office of the Founding President, Windhoek 25 November 2008

⁴⁵ I will discuss this Plan in the following chapters in detail.

about new ideas about African identity and the perception of culture by its leaders. The idea of this festival was conceived and supported by African leaders who had just taken over the reins from colonial administrators. His study did not aim to extract an authentic tradition from its fictive colonial and postcolonial forms, but rather focused on the transformations which culture undergoes when it is produced and consumed in festive mood. He engaged the production of national culture and tradition, a process that converts cultural objects and materials into icons of a higher symbolic order during the boom of the Nigerian oil economy. (Apter, 2005:7) Festivals and fairs in that western part of the continent were inspired and influenced by the makings of FESTAC. His investigation into FESTAC shows how heroic narratives of progress and modernity were both explicitly presented in the architecture of cultural representation. In this sense he argues FESTAC's path from tradition to modernity was one of progressive abstractions and singularity, building upon a culturally differentiated past to unite the black and the African world.

Elsewhere, off the continent, David Guss (2000) argued that, forms of behavior previously condemned to immediate extinction once released from their airtight environments, said to have produced them, are now being granted new meanings and even more complex lives. His study is embedded in the discursive constructions in which the traditional and the modern are seen as interpenetrating as opposed to each other. These forms do not only dissolve into the market-driven global cultural landscape, but enlarge its semantic fields where meanings of the said forms are multiplied instead of being reduced. (Guss 2000:4) Also those involved consciously engage in the act of inclusion and exclude what is deemed not to conform to the new meanings. David Guss's (2000) study of transformed cultural landscapes in Venezuela (South America) focused on the reappearance of contaminated visions of primitive paradise as alternatives to modernity. Guss observed the celebration of San Juan (one of the oldest of all church festivals in Venezuela). The context involves a conscious creation of a tie with the past where the history is 'exploited and reworked within indigenous rituals and social life'. (Corr, 2003:50)

Conclusion

The above literature review speaks to my study in various aspects, but it also shows that instead of treating festivals as occasions in which people come together and enact 'nostalgic' 'traditional' representations or 'carefully controlled performances' they should be treated as

complex social practices in processes with intended and unintended ends. (Fairweather, 2001; Boonzaier & Sharp, 1994) I suggest that we view and treat them as social practices because we need to separate them from processes in which they happen. I argue as such, because festivals are processes in which practices are manifested. Thus the notion of ‘we are doing culture’ in the festival. Although there are contradictory usages and conception of the notion of ‘culture’ between local people, state officials and us (who analyze culture) it is believed and felt by those who participate in festivals that what they do is reality hence a practice of society. (Akuupa, 2007; Bourdieu, 1998)

The literature about performance shows festivals not only as celebratory, but as loaded events through which we can read meaning about society and its roles. It is those complexities which Van Heerden (2009) suggests we should heed to, following Witz (2003). She suggests that although festivals are depicted as boisterous and care-free occasions during which festival goers feel and act in unison, it is important that we read the ‘intentions of the festival organizers and the (usually diverse) reactions by the event critically.’ (Van Heerden, 2009: 49) It is only once we have grasped the various contradictions (within complexities) that we can be able to conclude that indeed festivals lead to formation of ‘social communitas’, in which people are united and ‘renewed’. (Turner, 1979; Van Heerden, 2009)

This study shows how the conception and meaning of the festival in question vary and that it is context driven. It is also about the assertions and contestations of various identities and various social issues as presented through a variety of cultural representations. In the context of the state-sponsored cultural festivals in Namibia which take place over three phases namely the circuit, regional and national; the festival is conceived diversely. So is the content being showcased; it is very much influenced by social issues such as access to resources. At the circuit and regional culture festivals issues range from the assertion and contestation of intra-ethnic identities, the state of local governance, and praise of local leaders; while at the national context the festival is conceived as a very important medium through which development⁴⁶ and belonging can be enhanced. For example in Kavango we find the belonging of the Vanyemba contested in relation to Kavango-ness, because first of all they do not have an officially

⁴⁶ Development in local terms is ‘ekuliko’ or ‘ezokomeho’. The two words both refer to the advancement and betterment of social life as a result of state intervention through projects such as the building of roads and clinics. I use the phrase development in the same context.

recognized postcolonial traditional authority or land (defined territory); a situation which render them to be outsiders or strangers. In the context of belonging to the nation Lindholm (2008) has argued that active participation in collective rituals allows individuals to become greater than themselves; what it means is that when individuals are gathered for dance and song their feeling of belonging is experienced and elevated. Many different kinds of collectives such as religious, ethnic, political and aesthetic provides the said experience, but the nation state is one of the most potent existing today. (Lindholm, 2008:98) He further argues that in order to accomplish it's (the state's) mission of establishing a sacralized connection with its citizens, every emerging nation state not only selects, codifies and publicizes indigenous aesthetic productions as concrete expressions of the national soul; it also writes its own history books recalling its mythical origins, designs a distinct flag-totem, composes an anthem praising itself, celebrates its glorious past, and constructs all the other standard symbols. Through collectives such as rituals, in culture festivals people do not only celebrate the 'being' of their citizenry, but also legitimate its being and belonging to the nation. (Handler, 1988:14)

My study also shows in the chapters which follow that the festival has a function; which is to provide space and opportunity to those involved to 'express' themselves politically and economically. It is the context in which political and economic independence is administratively seen as not complete unless the citizen's mind, which is the *sine qua* of any genuine independence is also independent and decolonized. (Wa Thiongo, 1986) So the festival performs a function of enhancing associational life among those who participate, observe (general public) and organize them. As a process, it (the festival) is also a medium through which dances, drama and song are presented and given meaning. In relation to the above, I argue that such political rituals are social capital for associational life.

In the next chapter I discuss my fieldwork impressions and research relations. In the chapter I present a reflective narrative account of my personal experiences in the field with the focus on a communal relation locally known as *ekoro/likoro* and the practice of *kukutongonona* in Kavango, northeastern Namibia.

Chapter 3: “Whose child are you?” the dynamics and politics of *ekoro/likoro*⁴⁷ in doing ethnography at home

Introduction

During the end of the year 2006 when I had developed the idea to study festivals, I decided to visit the directorate of National Heritage and Culture Programs (NHACP) in the Ministry’s headquarters in Windhoek informally in order to find out about the Annual National Culture Festival (ANCF) and its calendar. I spoke to the secretary, but without any success in getting any information about the festival or even the dates when they happen from her. Instead she referred me to the senior clerk, Simon Indongo who also did not help much other than to tell me to listen on the radio when announcements about the festival would be made. With the director of NACP Herbert Ndango (affectionately known as Dr. Diaz) in sight, I tried my luck and asked him about the calendar. However he was not particularly helpful either; instead he instructed Indongo to assist me and moved inside his office and closed the door. Although I did not say why I needed details of the festival, they also did not bother to ask me why I wanted the information. I did not get any information.

Some months later, I wrote a letter to the Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Youth, National Service, Sport and Culture (MYNSSC) in Windhoek to ask for an internship position within the directorate of National Heritage and Culture Programmes (NHACP). I explained that as my research was to observe culture festivals in Kavango region, I wanted to do an internship at their office at Rundu. I also requested an official letter of introduction from the department of Anthropology and Sociology which I would present to the NHACP once they have approved my internship application. I never received any response from the Office of the Permanent Secretary or any letter from the department back at university.

When it was time to go to the field, I therefore did not have a letter of introduction from my institution or receive an indication from the directorate with regard to their support or opposition to my internship placement. My experiences in the field of research in Kavango have shown that a letter of introduction from the institution did not really matter in order to do research, as I have done various researches in the region without being asked for a letter of introduction to

⁴⁷ Ekoro or Likoro is a very important local relationship closely linked to clan affinity.

authenticate my activities. However, I was not sure in the case of seeking an attachment with the government office. Nevertheless, I went on to make an appointment at the office of the director of NACP so that I could enquire about the letter I had written and how I could perhaps get an internship. The secretary asked about the contents of my meeting and I gave her the abstract proposal of my research, she glanced at it, put it aside and suddenly scheduled my appointment with the director two hours before his planned gathering the next day. She cautioned me that the director was a busy man and I should not stay long during my meeting, because she just did a favor for me. On the date of my appointment I was preoccupied with how I would explain to him what I was planning to do during my research. I thought that it would be easy to explain what I wanted to do if the director had read the abstract of my research proposal before we were going to meet.

As it turned out, other aspects were much more important. Here is what occurred:

When I arrived on the day and time in the office of the secretary, she directed me to knock at the director's door. I knocked after his acknowledgement, I entered and greeted in *Rushambyu*⁴⁸. *Morokenu!*

Good day!

I introduced myself by name and surname only and mentioned the institution which I had affiliation with. He listened carefully until I finished telling my story. He then asked me the following:

Director: *Mona re ve?*

Whose child are you?

At that point I knew that even when I told him that I was the son of Lukas and Dorkas Akuupa; he would not know them, nevertheless I said it and kept quiet. But more questions came.

Director: *Kuni va tunga kwinya kwetu?*

Where is their settlement in our land?

⁴⁸ Rushambyu and Rugciriku languages are collectively referred to as Rumanyo.

Michael: *Vavo ne kuVambo va tunga.*

They stay in Ovamboland

Director: *KuVambo nka! Oro Rumanyo una kughamba ne weni?*

In Ovamboland! How come you are speaking Rumanyo?

When I told him that they stay in the former Ovamboland in northern Namibia, his facial expression displayed a bit of puzzlement. My knowledge of Rumanyo and origins from another area seemed to have surprised him. His successive question on how come I spoke Rumanyo made me realize at that particular moment that I did perhaps not do a good job in my introduction earlier. So I went on to respond to his question:

Ame ne muRundu na tunga. Mukamali wande mona Nanguroni wa Tandavara na Fau yaHaididira

I have settled in Rundu. My wife is the child of Nanguroni (the daughter of Tandavara) and Fau (the son of Haididira).

The Director still asked with air of disbelief.

Mona re wa kwara ve?

Whose child have you married you say?

Michael: *Mona Nanguroni and Fau.*

She is the child of Nanguroni and Fau.

Director: *Nanguroni wa Tandavara yaHaimbili?*

You meant Nanguroni the daughter of Tandavara born of Haimbili?

Michael: *Yii. Ndjewo monaTandavara.*

She is the one, the child of Tandavara.

Director: *Kaa! Kenga shi, va liro lyetu vanya. Liro lyetu lyene lyene. Vantu ne mwa hepa ku kutongonona ndi ku kombana Tamweyi⁴⁹ yande.*

My goodness, look at you! Those people are my relatives, real relatives. People should always introduce themselves properly otherwise one can get lost, my son in law.

After the above introduction we did not enter into details of what I wanted to do in the directorate or what had happened to the letter that I had written. He did not ask for a letter from my institution. The only thing he asked was how his relatives were, because he had not seen them for a very long time since he moved to work and stay in Windhoek. He then said I should go to the office in Rundu and inform the senior culture officer Thomas Shapi about our meeting and that he should give me an office. ‘Tell him the letter will follow shortly’. On my way out of his office (as he escorts me) Simon Indongo the senior clerk walked towards us and the director introduced me to him. With a smiling gesture Simon Indongo informed the director that we had met sometime before. Nevertheless the Director continued to tell him: ‘This young man is an Ovambo, but he speaks my language very fluently. He is going to Rundu and he will be at our regional office for research.’

Director: *Wa ru yiva shiri Rumanyo! Paku ku teerera na ku vhura ashi uyayhare shi ove mona vaWambo*

‘You know Rumanyo very well! One could not tell that you are a child of the Vambo people when listening to you’

We stood in the front of his office door and with his very loud voice he laughed as I made a joke of myself :

Mulyo unene nange shi kughamba liraka lyamukwarero, ndi kapi u vi yuvha omu vakughambera mumudona

‘It is very important that one speaks the language of your in laws, lest they gossip you in peace’.

⁴⁹ Tamweyi a Rukwangali and Rumanyo word which is used interchangeably in Kavango to refer to son/father or brother in law. One’s maternal uncle is also referred to as Tamweyi.

The conversation above shows that after I did proper *kukutongonona*⁵⁰, I established a new position that of a son- in- law with the Director at headquarters. I will show how my relations to my wife's *ekoro* and village clan in Kavango influenced my access in the Ministry of Youth, National Service and Sport and Culture; which became my research site. The practice of *kukutongonona* made the director know who I was and whom I was related to. As it turned out it was my newly established position as a son- in- law that mattered.

Connectedness of *ekoro* and its workings in the research field

As I learned, although it initially appeared easy to access the field and gather data; my non-adherence and observance of my in-laws local relations and connectedness of *ekoro* made it complex and difficult. Initially, I thought that it was wise for me not to involve those related to me in any way so that their relations would not affect my dealings in the field. I need to explain what *Ekoro* in Rukwangali and *Likoro* in Rumanyo mean. Both words refer to a very important communal relationship tightened by clan affinity. *Ekoro/Likoro* is a very important communal relationship in Kavango, which is used to achieve and deal with many aspects of local life. Rarely, in an average family life in Kavango does something happen without the involvement of *ekoro*.

In an attempt to speak to the above assumptions in the context of doing fieldwork at home this reflective narrative account of my personal experience in the field focuses on a communal relation locally known as *ekoro/likoro* and the practice of *kukutongonona* in Kavango, northeastern Namibia. Firstly I will explain the *ekoro* relation and later I discuss the practice of *kukutongonona* (when I present some of my fieldwork practical experiences).

Ekoro is a very important communal relationship in kinship systems of Kavango. It may be roughly referred to as an extended family, but it is more than that. It is a relationship rooted in clan affinity and it is not necessarily determined by blood connections. The clans are ranked according to seniority and whoever belongs to a junior clan, irrespective of age, is deemed 'young' by those in the senior clan. There is an expectation of a command of respect and a high

⁵⁰ *Kukutongonona* is a practice of introduction. It is an extensive introduction which does not just end with the name, but with the presentation of your extended relatives including your parents, grandparents and previous domiciles. I will explain its workings clearly in the chapter.

level of obedience from the senior clans. Other people can also become clan members by seeking allegiance due to various circumstances such as hunger⁵¹. Thus the local idiom ‘*Muntu gekoro kuparukira mo wakuauo*’ (One who has relatives lives through them) or ‘*gekoro kapi azi mu li nzara*’ (One who has relatives does not die of hunger) as explained by Kumpungu in his thesis which investigated the concept and aim of Kavango marriages. (1966: 28) Those who seek allegiance to a particular clan do so through a process known as ‘*kupirura makankara*’ whereby those who wish to be adopted enter the homestead and turn the three stones which makes the fireplace where cooking take place. That kind of relation or ‘connectedness’ (Carstens, 2000:1) is maintained as if it is constituted through blood. It depended on the circumstances in which this adoption happened and, historically, its constitution remained a secret among the clan elders especially if the adopted became slaves in the process.

On many occasions people look to their *ekoro/likoro* in the event of the death of a relative or when marriage is to be consummated. *Ekoro/likoro* is also sought when there are family disputes. Reference is made further to *ekoro/likoro* if there is a need to access a particular resource which may be unobtainable under certain circumstances. In the context of marriage the importance of *ekoro/likoro* is high, ‘because marriage creates new relations and modifies old ones’. (Kumpungu, 1966:35)

In contemporary Kavango, the ideal conception of *ekoro* has not changed although it may have changed in its practice. People enhance the idea of *ekoro* through rendering assistance to their relatives in many ways such as contributions to funeral costs, the negotiation of marriage and weddings, education and child support. Many people who have settled in Rundu, the capital of the Kavango region, still maintain their *ekoro* relations with those in their village of origin which is locally referred to as *kembo* or home. In this case Rundu is regarded as a temporary settlement for work purposes only and it is expected by those in the village for town people to come home occasionally for holidays, funerals, weddings and to also help with village work. If one does not go *kembo* or assist people at home you risk losing very important relations.

⁵¹ The word hunger in this context should not be understood in its literal sense, because the same term can also be used to refer to poverty, war and any other circumstances which may disrupt societal functioning.

In Kavango the notion of going home is of utmost importance. For example I have observed during my stay in the region that whenever someone in Rundu died, it was very rare for them to be buried in the cemetery in Rundu. Memorial services, and in many cases church services, are held in Rundu, but the actual burial takes place in the village where the deceased originated. When the death of a person that lives in Rundu happens, it is announced on a local radio program *Madiviso gonomfa* (lit. death announcements) and it goes like this:

“Apa nyame Elisabeth Haididira, na ku gava madiviso kegoro nalinye gonomfa damugara gwange Faustinus Haididira ogo ka dogorokere mosipangero saRundu. Elikwamo yimo nye li na kara ngesi, ukeleli tau ka kara poMillenium moutano kositenguko moRundu, momapeu ngurangura kokira zaRundu, povili zohambombali tatu katundilira pembo tu zekongereka Kokayengona. Konyima zoukeleli pongereka tat u kasindikila nye nakufa kembo lyendi lyokuhulilira komayendo⁵²”

“I am Elisabeth Haididira announcing to the whole ‘*ekoro*’ the death of my husband, who passed on in Rundu hospital. The following is the arrangement regarding his funeral, the memorial service will be held at Millenium Park in Rundu on Friday afternoon. On Saturday morning we will meet at the mortuary. At seven we will leave the house to go to church at *Kayengona*⁵³. After the church service we will escort the late to his final home at the graveyard.”

The excerpt above shows that although it is known that the deceased lived at Millennium Park⁵⁴ it was not considered his ‘home’, because home is where he originated; in this case this was Kayengona. In that context Kayengona, i.e., the place from whence he came before staying in Rundu, was considered his home and it, therefore, is where he was to be buried. Home in this context is not only an important reference in life, but in death as well. That is why those who

⁵²This extract is taken from the death announcement script of my father-in-law which was sent to the radio program on 29 July 2010 for broadcasting. At the time of his death, I was in Windhoek to attend a meeting with my business partners. I was informed of his death and had to quickly rush home as a son-in-law and member of *ekoro* so that I could participate in various activities pertaining to the funeral preparation.

⁵³ The palace of Shambyu is at Kayengona village.

⁵⁴ Millennium Park is one of the new housing developments in Rundu, which is the residence of civil servants mainly. It was developed at the dawn of the new millennium.

live in town maintain their links and relations, because it is people who are at ‘home’ who will later receive them in death as well. It is evident in the excerpt that none other than *ekoro* is specifically invited in the event of death. *Ekoro* in this context would make the funeral event possible especially the ritual aspect of it. As a result, many people who work and have settled in Rundu occasionally visit the village in order to maintain ties. The working of relations in *ekoro*, especially between those who are in town and those who remain in the village, is not limited to monetary assistance from Rundu. Those in the village also visit their kin in town and when they come to town they bring goods such as millet flour, meat, fish and any seasonal delicacy available from ‘home’.

In the context of my research one’s position is not really clear whether you are an outsider or insider. I suggest that it is the relations such as the above which an ethnographer creates in the field irrespective of whether they are insiders or outsiders, which influence our understanding of local ways of life and eventually access to local knowledge. Insider-ness or outsider-ness can be relative and should be understood contextually. As an insider ethnographer your access to the field is not guaranteed due to complex issues such as power relations, which specific people wield in certain areas of interest. One interesting observation emerged during my fieldwork; that one’s connectedness to *ekoro* and its (ekoro) relations/operations to other people in the field determined access to many aspects of social life in the field and outcome irrespective of one’s knowledge of the local language and conduct of other social practices such as funerals and wedding rituals⁵⁵.

One’s self presentation in the field is also of particular importance. The self in this context refers to the social “self” and is a medium in which one appears and how one is subsequently labeled or constructed by people in the field. Your self- representation and appearance in the field can also be externally defined by others in accordance with the standardized social expectations and cultural norms. In fact in this regards Anthony Cohen (2007:114) has asked whether our “self” in the field matters more than the people’, “self knowledge” we study. Such questions have

⁵⁵ Practices which makes rituals such as weddings, funerals including any other rite are locally believed to be conducted according to ‘culture’ and are thus referred to as practices of ‘culture’. I am aware of all the problems associated with the term “culture” and have elaborated on this issue in the Kavango context elsewhere. (Akuupa,2007)

brought issues like reflexivity and subjectivity of the ethnographer into serious critique, raising concerns as to whether ethnographies will not end up being about the authors while omitting the subject (the people studied). (Cohen, 2007: 114) However, I think it is important to reflect on our relations and times in the field in order to make proper sense of what we abstractly construct of the 'other'.

Having said the above, my observation is that the distinction between insider and outsider is widespread in the field. Through power relations of *ekoro/likoro* and the practice of *kukutongonona*, the distinction between the two is harmonized. In this context, in my experience factors such as education, gender, class and sexual orientation were secondary and the basic distinguishing feature of my fieldwork was how well I was connected to *ekoro* and its relations.

Generally the success of ethnographic fieldwork is largely measured by the ability to establish a good understanding and develop meaningful relations with research participants and when it fails it is generally due to a failure to both establish good relations and maintain them over time. (Sluka, 2007) These relations range from friendship to hostility, and may be influenced by ethnicity, religion, class, gender and age. (Sluka, 2007:123) In her essay on How Native Is a "Native" Anthropologist? Narayan (1993:671) has argued against the fixity of the distinction between "native" and "non-native" anthropologists and suggests that the anthropology as a discipline or academic enterprise will flourish if all view each anthropologist in terms of shifting identities amid a field of interpenetrating communities and power relations. In my view such an argument may be of value within disciplinary circles where there seems to be a virtual wall between readers of stories (thus theory driven professionals) and between narrative and analysis, but not in the field from which such stories or data are produced. In the field context where such data originates the distinction of insider/outsider is significant in terms of access to data and field. Whether people/and researchers are always clearly distinguished into insider/outsider remains a complex discussion. However, people we study have social devices which they use in order to either include or exclude us as researchers. These social devices are perceptions which people have about us and our presentation of ourself. Nationality, race, gender and age are but some of the aspects which are used in order to distinguish whether a person is an insider or outsider.

In my experience as a student researcher there were always ways used by people in the field which I thought were distinguishing. From 2005 until the time of my PhD research I have always had dreadlocks as a hair style. When I attended festivals I was always carrying a bag with cameras and a tripod, but when I went to visit any other social place I did not carry a bag. I have always socialized at the local bars and other public space in town. However, as I will show below these physical attributes and my linguistic abilities were always a distinguishing factor whether I was an outsider or insider in various contexts. There were various times when I was treated differently or with suspicion when I came to a place or when I requested an interview with people. For example when I went to visit Kayengona village which is *home* to my wife and also where I run a small *cuca* shop⁵⁶, people there did not regard me as an outsider. There are two main reasons why they do not regard me as an outsider; firstly it is because of my relationship with them as a son in-law. Secondly it is as a result of my clan's relativity to that ascribed by many as royal clan that of the *Vakankora*⁵⁷. My clan name is *Omukwanambwa* (singular), literary translated as the clan of those who "hunt with dogs". It is also the royal clan of the *Aakwaluudhi* people in western Ovambo in the present-day Omusati region from which my parents originate. Kings of the *Aakwaluudhi* people are selected from the *Aakwanambwa* (plural) clan. What it means is that I have adopted the *Vakankora* clan, because its conception is similar to that of my *Omukwanambwa* clan. However, I was also always an outsider, because of being a *Muvambo*⁵⁸. Sometimes local people would jokingly refer to me as:

*'Ame si ogo ne Muvambo*⁵⁹,

'That one is a Muvambo'

This happened, for instance, when I made a linguistic error but also when I carried out a social deed of which they approved. An example was when I was the director of ceremony at a

⁵⁶ A *cuca* shop is a small business holding which usually sells small merchandise such as traditional alcoholic beverages, sugar, salt, bottled beer and many other household needs. It also serves as social space where villagers come to relax after their long day of work. The name *cuca* is derived from the beer that was sold by the Portuguese merchants in most northern areas in the early 1970s. All the little businesses which then sold beer and small household needs became known as *cuca* shop.

⁵⁷ Refer to the myth of origin narrated in the chapter which deals with the historiography of Kavango.

⁵⁸ *Muvambo* is used to refer to anyone who is believed to have come from the former Ovamboland.

⁵⁹ My fieldwork notes.

wedding in Rundu during the December holidays. When I introduced myself I said the following:

'Ogu ana kuhuyunga ige Michael Akuupa. Ame sitenya!'

'The one speaking is Michael Akuupa. I am a son in-law!'

In, acknowledging what I have just said the wedding attendees exclaimed:

'Wee sitenya wee! Wee Muvambo Gwetu wee!'

'Wee our son in law wee! Wee our Muvambo wee!'

This anecdote shows how complex it is to make relations, let alone for research purpose. It shows that one needs not only to focus on what I call 'research relations', but on other social relations such as kinship in order to also get a understanding and access to other unsaid aspects of life. For example studies⁶⁰ in North America have showed that kinship relations are universally believed to be constituted by blood, thus leading to assumptions that biology is the foundation of the social. (Carstens, 2000) However, it is important to also note that the boundaries between biology and the social are blurred; leading to the destabilization of such relations as it could not be applied elsewhere than in societies of America and Europe. Stone (1997) has argued against the idea of universalizing patterns of kinship as it may lead to possible distortion and encourages us to consider the diverse culture contexts in which these relations are constituted. My argument is that if anthropology as a discipline is to advance to the next level in its unending evolution; it needs to consider the workings and belonging of kinship as an important resource of establishing research relations. In certain aspects of my research I had to seek⁶¹ belonging to the clan and *ekoro* in order to make my fieldwork a success.

Of course not everyone knows their *ekoro* and its networks do not always yield the expected or positive results. Sometimes one has to look for one's *ekoro/likoro* as it can also get lost due to geographical distance or a lack of contact. In the event when it is believed that *ekoro* is lost,

⁶⁰ The work of Schneider on American kinship systems is widely cited in studies of Kinship.

⁶¹ I do not imply that all researchers need to marry into the field where they will do fieldwork. In this context I was married long before I started graduate studies and it is just one of the relations which made things work for me. However, seeking allegiance and ways of belonging to clan and *ekoro* to create "research relations" may work in this context.

those who seek for it has to go through a process of “*kukutongonona*” in order to make known as to whom they are and how they are related. If you do not “*tongonona*” yourself clearly it is likely that you may not be known and this may adversely affect your intention of seeking your lost *ekoro* or any help. *Kukutongonona* can also resurrect old grudges. If it becomes evident that somewhere down the line of *ekoro* relations bad things had happened one can be ignored or receive bad treatment because of that. Observance and understanding of such relations complemented by the practice of *kukutongonona* in every social context increases or diminishes chances of the ethnographer’s entrance to and explanations of various taken for granted local cultural aspects.

Analysis of *ekoro* and its working in the research field

Doing ethnography at home has its challenges. There are two sets of commonly held assumptions that ethnographers or anthropologists on familiar terrain will gain a greater understanding than elsewhere as they are not impeded by linguistic and cultural barriers. Sichone (2001) has argued in his review of Ferguson’s *Expectation of Modernity* (1999) that only when one is doing anthropology at home can one understand that there is noise everywhere. He used noise to illustrate the benefit of knowing language in order to minimize the risk of doing pure anthropology⁶². It is also claimed that a local ethnographer gets entrée easily to privileged information unlike the outsider. (Strathern, 1987)

Although there have been some critical reflections on doing anthropology at home, mostly relating to the difficulty that a researcher may take phenomena and relationships for granted, and may therefore miss significant aspects in his or her research (Mascarenhas-Keyes, 1987; Narayan, 1993; Tsuda, 1998), the two points I briefly introduced above, are generally seen as advantages. In my fieldwork experience I found, however that the reality is more complex. It is worth to mentioning that I am not a native of Kavango and has only gone to live there as I worked there as bank clerk before I married a woman from that area. In this case my position as an insider is a complex one even if I know the local languages of the region; I settled there after I married someone from Kavango. On the other hand, I am a citizen of Namibia, of which Kavango forms a part. Like Vale de Almeida (2002) I regard citizenship as a process and not a status, a set of

⁶² Sichone (2001) in the same review criticized pure anthropology for it lacks of practical value.

rights and obligations in a formally democratic social contract practiced by an anthropologist and those he or she studies. When I did fieldwork in Kavango, I had knowledge of local ways of life and the language of my research area, but and because of this, my access to field (interviews), observations and information was highly influenced by relationships⁶³ with my in-laws (mother and father), their extended family and clan, which in turn provided a large base of connectedness locally. They were for example connected to the local elite in one manner or the other, as well as to many other people. Amongst others my in-laws, as I found out later, were related to the director of the National Heritage and Culture Programmes (NHCP), the chief executive officer of the Kavango Regional Council (i.e., the regional government,) opposition politicians and some directors (chief administration officers) in the regional government. They have relations with the Shامbyu royal family as my father -in -law was an advisor in the traditional authority council at some point in his life. Above all my wife is named after the one-time queen of the Vashambyu, Maria Shingoma Mwendere wa Mbava na Mukosho.

My conversation with the director is of interest especially when I reflect on some aspects of fieldwork which I learned during my postgraduate course work. In our research methodology training we were taught how important it is to observe certain conduct when one prepares to go into the field. The letter of introduction, for instance, was said to be one of the very important components a researcher needs to have in order to access the field. In his essay on “Ethnicity and the Anthropologist: negotiating Identities in the Field” Takeyuki Tsuda (1998) has demonstrated how important letters of introduction were during his fieldwork in Japan. According to him nothing gets done, especially in government bureau, if there are no official documents to support the intentions of a researcher. However, my experience demonstrates that while Tsuda (1998) might be right for the Japanese context, elsewhere documentation with regard to research matters only to a certain extent. The secretary to the director asked whether I had any documentation which would outline what my discussion with the director entails. She thus followed the set bureaucratic procedures. However, for the director, it was the relation I had or shared with his *ekoro* that was important. It ended there. I did not have to listen to the radio

⁶³ I use relationship in this context as a component of being ‘known’. In Kavango, being known is not an instance in which people are only aware your name and presence; it is more than that. In this case one can only be known through your relation to somebody else related to you in any form such as family, marriage or clan and who is preferably older than yourself.

for the festival details as Simon Indongo the chief clerk had suggested earlier. I was given pamphlets, circulars from previous festival seasons and other information about the festival.

My access to the director's office presented interesting dynamics. When I spoke to him in his vernacular the moment presented a sense of familiarity although he did not know who I was. As it is customary in the exchange of greetings in Kavango, the older person asks whose child you are and what your visit entails. 'You' as a being in an individual capacity at that moment did not matter very much, but who your parents and where their settlements are is of particular importance. In this context the director assumed the role of *mukondi* (an 'elder') and asked me who my parents are and whether their health was fine. My response to his question did not immediately create a sense of connection as my parents lived in another region and he had not heard about or knew them. Despite my ability to converse fluently in his vernacular and observe the Vakavango manners; my background and origin created a sense of momentary outsider-ness. I refer to this as an uncertainty rooted in the disruption of the expectation by the director that I could have been from the same ethnic group as he.

However, my added extended introduction which included information about my affinal ties and relations to Kavango was what created a sense of re-connection between the director and me, which resulted in me being redefined as an insider. My relation to Kavango in terms of marriage to people who had a kinship affinity to the director opened the field in the space of the national government. As a result of marriage relations one is adopted as a member of *ekoro/likoro* thus becoming an insider and one may become entitled to certain benefits. Those benefits are sanctioned by the Mangondolian proverb cited in Kampungu's thesis which says '*Kuvarua nomunene epundo dio mudona*' which literary says "to be born with a great person is a dwelling place for the poor' meaning 'to be related to some great person or chief is for a commoner (poor) a warrant for protection, help and [I emphasize] assistance". (Kampungu, 1966:29) One is deemed a member of *ekoro* because of one's involvement in activities of the family or clan. Involvement includes participation and assistance rendered in daily activities and rituals such as weddings, burials, and the adjudication of disputes.

The situation was not very different when I sought to have interviews with people in Rundu town and the villages nearby. Every time when I had to meet an informant to talk to in the town of Rundu I introduced myself as a student from the University of the Western Cape who is doing

research on *yompo* (things of culture). I did not need to produce a letter from the university in order to prove that indeed I was doing research sanctioned by a legitimate institution. This was due to my elongated connection and associational links with local people in the Kavango, specifically in the town of Rundu. As a result my access to that social space was fairly easy. Many local people, especially the local elite, knew me already from the time when I worked for a local bank in Rundu town, before I enrolled for graduate studies. Many people whom I had worked with and whom I interviewed during my research viewed my kinship and associational links as that of an insider. However, when I went to villages in the Kavango region (except for Kayengona), I had to do extended introductions with reference to my connections with my-in-laws, because I was not known there. Even if it was in areas very far from my-in-laws 'traditional' village domicile, I was likely to meet a person who was related to them through clan links. Clans transcend ethnic boundaries; and the same clans are found in all 'tribal'⁶⁴ areas of Kavango. In cases where I went with Kletus Likuwa, a postgraduate student in History, who was born in the Kavango region, he would introduce me not just as his friend, but as one of his in-laws married to their relative; Kletus thus indicated that I indeed 'belonged'. He would always refer to me as '*wetu*'⁶⁵ in the practice of *kukutongonona*, whenever he introduced me to people we wanted to interview. The above juggling of positions as an insider or outsider including extended introduction makes me agree more with Michael Agar (1980:52), who said that it is not easy at all to work in one's own society, because 'you cross the line between the field and home often and very rapidly'.

The situation was different when I attended festivals in various constituencies. At the festivals in the constituencies, I was introduced as '*munasure gompo*' (a student of culture) and that I was temporarily based at the culture office in Kavango. The senior culture officer, Thomas Shapi, would extend my introduction and even tell the audience that I am studying to be a 'doctor of culture'. His introduction separated me from the official status, which made me an outsider from the government staff. People were made aware that I am not employed in the civil service; however, they were also requested to assist me should I require any information from them. So

⁶⁴ Local people refer to areas which are believed to be domicile of the five ethnic groups in Kavango as tribal areas. This tendency can be attributed to the earlier colonial construction of its citizens into tribes which has since been internalized by people and hence used as somewhat 'normal' 'category' of reference.

⁶⁵ 'Gwetu' or wetu means 'ours' in local Rukwangali and Rumanyo respectively.

the senior culture officer mediated my access to the audiences which came to watch the performances.

The descriptions above show how relations of *ekoro* influenced my access to the field, but not how it may have limited my collection of research data. Although I had access to the field through connection of *ekoro*, various encounters did not yield the expected results. My interview with the director showed the extent of power and authority he had in terms of content and direction of the conversation. This authority is highly significant and it is not really influenced by the person's professional title or the office he holds, but his 'social' status of being '*mukondi*' which literary means 'elder'. The level of *mukondi* is reached when one has fulfilled certain social expectations such as having a family and the ability to act on its behalf and *ekoro*.

In Kavango the notion of *mukondi* is also used to refer to anyone who is older than you are. As a sign of respect one is required to submit to any person who is older in order to show *nonkedi* which means good manners. Such submission influenced power relations during conversations I had during my research. At times I could not ask or speak about certain things, because I had to *dira* which literary means "to refrain" from asking or speaking about them. *Dira* is a stem of the word *kudira* or *sidira*. *Kudira* is an act of refrain while *sidira* is taboo. *Sidira* in Kavango is used contextually it refers to unwritten social rules which a person has to observe in order to maintain community peace and balanced functioning.

Due to these proscriptions, my relation to the director as an adopted 'son in law' prevented me from speaking about certain topics, such as sex or any topic which he deemed inappropriate, because of the relationship of 'respect', which exists between us. It goes further and also influences the format of the conversations one may be able to have as a researcher. For example, on many occasions I tried to conduct a tape-recorded interview with him; however, he always told me that it was not necessary as I could always return to him if I wanted to know something. Although the director had undergone the same academic ritual and initiation I was going through, he holds a PhD in Religious Studies from University of Capetown since 1992, that did not change his conduct with me in terms of the etiquette of communication as that would have rendered him break the *sidira* or observe *nonkedi doVakavango*, which means the manners or ways of life of the Kavango people. So, as much as I was an insider through my relations of

ekoro and regarded as one of them there were some limitations to certain aspects of the field, because of *yidira*⁶⁶.

In his thesis on Kavango elites, Fumanti⁶⁷ (2003) demonstrated how he was treated as a ‘kid’ or a ‘student’ among the senior elites of the region. He explains that this situation made it difficult to seek access to his subjects. However, his situation changed in time when the same senior elites observed his conduct and maintenance of good manners and respect. It is evident that his status as a student and observance of local *nonkedi* influenced his access to his subjects.

The *ekoro* relation is very important and powerful, but it is not often divulged that it exists between certain groups of people. It seems to be situational; it is only invoked when there is a need. The professional status of the director did not play a major role in the relationship between him and myself after our *ekoro* status had been established. However, his professional role was of particular importance when he gave instructions to Shapi at the regional office in Kavango. For the staff in the Kavango office, his communication was ‘a directive from the director’. Those concerned would only act on official instruction. It was not necessary and perhaps not even desirable to inform the officials at Kavango office that I had a relationship of *ekoro* with the director. However such a relationship could be discovered by those who may be interested about who you are and your local relations when you *tongonona* yourself to them. In this case I became *ekoro* to some members at the office who also claimed to be related to my in laws in one way or the other. I have heard of debates in the local radio programs and elsewhere in private social settings, where practices of nepotism were discussed. For example it said that people were given jobs, because of the relations they shared with those in positions of power, but no information surfaced which was directed to any particular person in the region. It is easy to conclude that such a relationship may lead to accusations of nepotism and favouritism in the context where access to resources is competitive, especially among those who may not understand the workings of *ekoro*. However, it is essential to understand the functioning of *ekoro* as expressed in local proverbs such as ‘he who has relatives lives through them’ or ‘he who has relatives does not die of hunger’. It means that the working of *ekoro* can be situational and the primary intention is that of assistance if one is in need, when one considers the idioms I

⁶⁶ Yidira is a plural form of sidira.

⁶⁷ Fumanti was a foreign student only in his early twenties at the time of his doctoral research.

presented earlier in the text. It is important to note that it does not invoke any debt to the *ekoro* of someone who has rendered this assistance which can be in any form.

Assumed and imposed fieldwork self

In Kavango, at the Maria Mwengere Culture Centre, Josef Mbambo, the assistant culture officer, received me. My relation to Mbambo was also an important one as we refer to each other as *Tamweyi*. Although our spouses are from the same village and related through *ekoro* he preferred to relate to me as a brother-in-law. For him I was a brother in law, because I married someone from Kavango. The other reason was that I was not a Mukavango as a result I become a *sitenya*⁶⁸. In this context *Tamweyi* means brother in law. Other than that, my relationships with the other staff members at the Maria Mwengere Culture Centre were guided by bureaucratic procedures only and not by *ekoro*. The senior culture officer, Thomas Shapi, allocated an office to me and requested other officials to assist me with any questions I may have. This was an official request which was made during the meeting where I was officially introduced to all the officials at the centre. I was not introduced to the institutional workers⁶⁹ officially, and I had to do that myself by meeting them on an individual basis especially when they came to sign the register at the beginning and end of their work days.

Another interesting aspect of my field work at the office was how I got access to official documents, archives, and the like, at the centre. It can be argued that it was by means of the request which was made during the first meeting I attended that I should be assisted. But this was not necessarily the case. The point here is that, there is a danger for one to only get access to information which you ask for and nothing about anything else. Later on I learned that the majority of the office workers including the senior culture officer were all fairly new in their jobs. On the other hand some of the institutional workers had been working there since the establishment of the centre in the early 1970s. It appeared to me that they, unlike the recently appointed professional employees possessed substantial institutional memory; it was my association with them, which led me to information about which the officials knew nothing. For example, none of the official had ever heard of the Kavango anthem, which had been in use

⁶⁸ See my earlier discussion when I directed a wedding ceremony.

⁶⁹ Institutional workers are cleaners, gardeners and drivers.

during the apartheid era, but one of the older male labourers told me about it and even directed me to where copies of the anthem had been stored in the complex by officials who worked there in the past. I received much valuable information from both male and female institutional workers when I chatted with them during their tea and lunch breaks.

When you begin to do ethnography people you are studying wonder who you are and many of them were interested to know what I would be doing at the centre. Seraphina was one of the female employees at the centre. She comes across as a friendly person, a bit talkative and inquisitive. She features in many pictures I later took during the events at the centre, because she also wanted to be seen by people in the other world, as she referred to South Africa. During my whole stay at the centre she cleaned my office and always wanted to know how my family was doing. She came into my newly acquired office with a broom and a mop to clean the floors, but she did little with it as she was so busy asking me all sorts of questions; especially about my status at the office as follows:

Seraphina: *So Meneere to mu ya tujoina nye?*

‘So sir, have you come to join us?’

Seraphina: *To mu ya kara siruho so ku hura kupi?*

‘How long will you be with us?’

Michael: *Ah, na tu tara tupu. Ngano dogoro Desemba apa ngasi pwa sipito sokulcha*

‘Ah! Well we will see. I am supposed to be here until December just after the culture festival’

Seraphina: *Makura oyina ko mu fanekere to mu yi randesa ndi? Nose mwa kona ku tu faneka tu yali mone morwa TV nazo pozili*

‘What will you do with the films you captured? Will you sell them or what? You should also record us so that we can see ourselves on TV, we have one here at the office.’

Michael: *Ooh, oyina yange tupu yo ku ruganesa eyi naku tjangatjanga. Nyee ngani mu faneka tupu.*

‘Oh, those ones are just for personal use when I am writing something about them. Don’t worry I will record you as well.’

Eventually, after I had settled at the centre I became known especially among the institutional workers as ‘*ogo gokufaneka kulcha*’ meaning ‘he who photographs culture’.

The ways in which you present yourself in the field is always important. This I learned also in a different context when I had an interview appointment with Sam Nujoma, the first president of independent Namibia. My appointment was done by way of writing a letter followed by a telephone call. No one had known or seen me before I arrived at the reception of the Office of the Founding President as it is locally known. The police who manned the reception called the special assistant to Sam Nujoma to fetch me and take me to the waiting lounge where the interview was going to take place. After I had interviewed Nujoma for over 45 minutes, in Oshiwambo, our joint mother tongue, he asked me to switch off my tape recorder so that we could have a conversation off record. He then went on:

Oshinima nee shimwe ngele oto longo nomithigululwakalo omafufu goye na ga kale geli onatural ashike. Ilonga yoye iiwanawa lela.

‘One important thing is that when you work with things related to heritage your hair needs to look and appear natural. You are doing a good job’.

What I deduce from the above conversation with Seraphina the institutional worker and the statement by Sam Nujoma, as well as my observation during my visit to the office of the Founding President; it transpired that my appearance determined how my being was perceived during those moments. To Seraphina and her other colleagues I was a photographer of culture, because of the camera equipment I always carried during the festivals and at the office. For Sam Nujoma I appeared like some ‘Rasta’ individual. Rastafarians have never had a good standing in Namibia, because of their reputation for smoking marijuana. In his eyes people who smoke and ‘abuse’ alcohol are a danger to society which is why he saw it proper to advise me against keeping such very long hair as it would blur the very important work about heritage I was doing. Perhaps, one could also view it in terms of ‘traditional’ age relations of ‘young and old’ where an elder is likely to give advice to the younger person at any convenient time. It goes then

to argue that those we studied would listen to you, watch your behavior and they will draw from their own repertoire of social categories to find one that fits you. (Agar, 1980: 54)

Another interesting dimension during the interview with Nujoma was the language in which we communicated, we conversed in *Oshingandjera* and not in English the official language. This is how it occurred: While I was waiting for him to emerge from one of the doors, I sat there with one of his personal assistants whom I have met and conversed with several times in the past. Our meeting place was Nujoma's farm near Otavi. Otavi is a small town in north central Namibia, and it is regarded as the 'bread basket' area of Namibia. I had also worked in the bank at Otavi at some point in my career as a banker and that is how I met his assistant Ndoze. I had visited with him several times at the farm when I visited another friend who managed the petrol station at the premises. While I and Ndoze conversed in Oshikwambi in the lounge, Nujoma appeared unexpectedly from one of the doors and found us speaking. And the first thing he said was:

Moro comrade!

'Good day, comrade!'



He went on to greet me in Oshingandjera. It appears in that context, I was an insider of some sorts, because we spoke in the same language and I was looking for information about 'culture' a subject he claimed to be important. However, my insiders-ness was limited, because of my appearance, especially my dreadlocks, despite the formal suit I had donned for the occasion. As a result he criticized my hair style. In this context appearance was a determining factor. In fact, Goffman (1959) has argued that each performer (here: the fieldworker) is presented with the problem of communicating to his audience a particular image of himself and for that purpose he/she may make use of much kind of dramaturgical devices and materials which may include clothing, appearance, décor as well as behavior which may promote dramatic realization. Goffman's view is presented in a theatrical context, which is a significant component of how I understand the festivals, which one can however also translate to the everyday life of the fieldwork situation. I can guess that a person like Sam Nujoma might not have agreed to meet me had he known of my appearance and dreadlocks before the interview. However, one can also

argue that a great deal of what you are ‘depends, at the beginning in how you offer an explanation of what your interests are and what you intend to do’. (Agar, 1980:55)

Conclusion

The discussion above shows that self reflexivity in anthropology is critical, because our position in the field directly constitute the acquisition of anthropological knowledge. Knowledge is never found in the abstracts, but is always situated in a certain context, which is obtained from a particular perspective. This is the case when the researchers’ access to knowledge depends heavily on his or her social position in the field (Tsuda, 1998) I have observed that the course taken to get access to the field is in itself a moment of knowledge acquisition. The manner in which we present ourselves to those we study determines and (or) leads us to various levels of knowledge. It is those presentations which lead to various relations that in turn create platforms for us as researchers to work from as adopted sons and daughters or members of clan or ekoro.

Recent reflections on doing ethnography emphasise that it is at the core a collaborative effort, involving the researcher and his or her subjects in knowledge production. Our self growth in that perspective is not, as we learn, about other people’s culture only, but relates to them as they define us or our personalities. I have come to learn the importance of observing local social relations in the field for they create conditions of possibility in the field. Also, we should not only undertake to explore the ‘lived experiences’ of the knowing, but the ‘social condition of possibility and therefore the effects and limits of that experience’ which in my opinion includes social relations we come across in the field. (Bourdieu, 2003:282)

In this chapter I have tried to demonstrate that ‘anthropology carried out in the social setting which produced it has its limits’. (Strathern, 1987:16) I have shown that the two generalized assumptions about doing ethnography at home need to be viewed and situated contextually. It can never be easy, and it is not given that access to the field is guaranteed. It is through the relations that one has to observe and also create which determines the success of fieldwork. Although distinctions between insider and outsider existed in the field, the challenge still lays ahead when the fieldworker returns to the institution in order to write what they have seen. The challenge thus is similar to the one that Narayan (1993) argues against: that of the fixity of a distinction between native and non- native anthropologists. I follow her in suggesting that it is

crucial that anthropologists focus their attention on the quality of their relations with the people they seek to represent in their text and these relations need not necessarily determine research relations, any social relation (be it kin or clan) has potential increasing the depth of an ethnography.



Chapter 4: Kavango whose land is it?

Introduction

This study investigates the re-appropriation of a colonial practice and the politics of culture in Namibia in the postcolonial era; specifically, I am interested in how these play out in the Kavango region of north-eastern Namibia in order to understand the wider national politics. My ethnographic research is centered on the making of Kavango-ness and its subsequent belonging to the larger nation through the expression of culture performances during state sponsored cultural festivals in Kavango. I look at these during different, specific historical moments. In the nation-wide held culture festival, today Kavango as a political region participates like all of Namibia's other twelve regions. However, as I will show, historically Kavango played a special part in Namibian culture politics, which shapes the contemporary discourse of 'unity in diversity' as advocated by the postcolonial state.

This discussion is also motivated by the specific position of the Kavango region in Namibia's history and politics; specifically, the omission of Kavango heroes from the national narrative of the liberation struggle, which more than one local historian and member of the region's elites have intimated in conversation with me. The feeling of being left out is not only common among the elite; it is also expressed by ordinary people on the street through music⁷⁰. The case in point is how the region has participated and contributed to the struggle of liberation from the time of German to South African colonisation and its role in the very shaping of colonial rule. Kavango is one of Namibia's ethnic and political regions. Like all of the country's regions, it has been part of Namibia's historical and political metamorphosis.

Situated in northeastern Namibia the area's most prominent physical feature is the Kavango River, which runs from central southern Angola to the Okavango Delta in Botswana. The river forms the border between present day Namibia and Angola; it ends in the lower flood plains in Botswana known as the Kavango Delta. The rains in central and southern Angola normally

⁷⁰ A local musical group by the name Bsquare recently released a controversial music album which criticizes government and its programs in their songs.

begin in September or October, increasing in frequency until they reach a peak in January and continue in decreasing quantity until March or April, when rains are followed by the dry season. The level of water flowing in the Kavango River consequently rises and falls annually. Next to the river, the area still has fairly virgin vegetation and a larger number of game such as kudu, giraffe and elephants than other Namibian regions. Wild animals and birds such as hyena, buffalo, and eagle are also significant for the determination of clan names in the area. Wild trees and foods found in the area also have significant connections with particular Kavango groups and clans. Unlike the densely populated former Ovambo areas to the west, the Kavango region still has large tracks of unutilized land suitable for agriculture and cattle grazing.

Nowadays, the contemporary postcolonial Kavango region is one of Namibia's thirteen administrative regions. It neighbors the Ohangwena, Oshikoto, Otjozondjupa and Caprivi regions. Today the region's administrative capital, the town of Rundu has ± 72000 residents. Rundu has over its establishment in 1936 transformed from being just an office of the native affairs commissioner into a vibrant economic centre, which also caters for neighboring Angola across its northern border. It also has an ever growing hospitality industry, which caters for a lot of continental and international travelers. A variety of high rated lodges and tourist camps are situated on the banks along the river. Most lodge owners originate from outside the region but have entered into partnerships with local people in the vicinity of their establishments to either supply fire wood or perform 'traditional' dances for the 'gazing' visitors in the evenings.

Rundu town is also home to South African retail brand stores such as Pick and Pay, Shoprite, Pep, Jet, Ackermans and Mr Price. These are housed in the new shopping malls which have been built in Rundu since the past three to five years. Chinese retailers are also significantly evident. This economic sector largely dominated by foreign expatriates employs a large number of local people.

The main aim of this chapter is to show how different factors influenced the narratives of Kavango as a space and Kavango-ness through history. I argue in this chapter that the current central issues of Kavango-ness and belonging seem to have roots in both historical legends as well as very much the specifics of colonial politics such as the official recognition of the 'five

tribes'. The very colonial recognition seem to be continuing through contemporary postcolonial 'invention' of 'identity' politics which manifest in the culture festival under investigation. The chapter looks at how the notion of Kavango as a space came into being and how Kavango-ness was imagined during colonialism and how it is reconstructed and asserted in the postcolonial time. Drawing from oral historical accounts and archive documents it reconstructs various pre-colonial and colonial eras in order to make sense of the contemporary politics of culture. Specifically it is structured, starting with the German colonial era followed by the early time of South African rule, which culminated in the introduction of apartheid dispensation.

I start with a concise account of Kavango history, drawn mostly from oral history research and archival sources that I conducted during my fieldwork. This concise history is important especially if one is to understand contemporary contexts of 'culture' and 'identity' politics in Kavango. During the time of colonial South West Africa, the area of Kavango according to the administrators of the time was said to be habited by five ethnic groups only, namely Vambukushu, Vagciriku, and Vashambyu from the far eastern of the region and Vambunza and Vakwangali in the west; since then these five groups have been collectively identified as Vakavango. The said groups are believed to have migrated either from the Mashi⁷¹ plains or Makuzu⁷² gaMuntenda and settled on either side of the river banks depending on the climatic and political context at the time.

During a public lecture organized in 2006 by three local academics on 'the potential of economic development of Kavango', a Kavango-born academic, Professor Josef Diescho, intimated that it was only after the 1970s with the 'colonial' independence of Kavango that people of the region became united and identified⁷³ as such. The latter was as the result of the colonial Odendaal Plan which was synonymous with the group areas act and separate development of apartheid South Africa which was established by a commission set up in 1962. The commission contained several recommendations based on the concept of dividing the country into 12 ethnic homeland

⁷¹ The Mashi plains are situated in what is presently known as south western Zambia. Early Inhabitants of Kavango are believed to have migrated from that area before they settled in their current place.

⁷² Makuzu gaMuntenda is a place in what is today southwestern Angola.

⁷³ Some of the interviews I conducted with Kletus Likuwa seem to suggest that earlier people imagined themselves as either Vagciriku or Vakwangali etc. from Kavango, especially at the time when they were recruited for contract labour and not as Vakavango.

settlements. Ideally those identified as Vakavango were supposed to live in the region according to areas which were believed by the commission to be of ‘tribal⁷⁴’ ancestry. Such an arrangement would make the Vashambyu to stay in Shambyu, Vagciriku in Gciriku, Vambukushu in Mbukushu, Vambunza in Mbunza and, finally’ Vakwangali in Ukwangali. Collectively the area was proclaimed as Kavango and became an independent homeland in 1970. I will discuss the making and workings of the commission later in the chapter.

As I will discuss elsewhere in this dissertation, the issue of the ‘excluded’ groups or those which were rather not uniquely recognized by the colonial administration has serious ramifications for the notion of Kavango-ness and belonging to the region up until today. Especially during the creation of tribal trust funds in the early 1930s and after the implementation of the Odendaal recommendations they were regarded as ‘others’ or recent arrivals from Portuguese West Africa (PWA⁷⁵). Discussion about these ‘non-recognized’ groups is significant for understanding various themes⁷⁶ addressed in this study. Below I will identify briefly the groups concerned and locate them within the wider historical context of the study. The ethnic group concerned is locally known as Vanyemba and they refer to themselves as such. The Vanyemba are the most significant among the groups in the contestations in contemporary Kavango, I will introduce them in detail later in the discussion. They are concentrated in all areas of the region which were initially recognized by the colonial administration as only containing the ‘real’ residents namely the Vakwangali and Vambunza in the west, the Vashambyu and Vagciriku including the Vambukushu in the east of the area. They have also lived along the river with the ‘locals’ since time remembered. Although there is no literature on the longer-settled Vanyemba in the region, historian Inge Brinkman (1999, 2005) has dealt with the question of Vanyemba refugees who fled from Cuando Cubango⁷⁷ in southern Angola during the Unita⁷⁸ wars and have since settled in Kavango. She has argued that the refugee Vanyemba used the lack of a fixed identity as a means to become inconspicuous members of the cosmopolitan culture among other Kavango

⁷⁴ My usage of the word tribe or tribal does not in any way connote or imply that my research participants are such, but rather is the terminology as recorded from official research data and several interviews.

⁷⁵ NAT1/1/54 File 25 Official Communication dated 1937/2/21 Tribal Trust Fund: Okavango Native Territory.

⁷⁶ See discussion in chapter 8

⁷⁷ Cuando Cubangu refers to provinces in southern Angola.

⁷⁸ UNITA stands for National Union for the Total Liberation of Angola. It was a guerrilla movement in Angola which, since the death of its leader Jonas Savimbi, has been transformed into a political party after the civil war in Angola.

residents and so avoid expulsion and exclusion. The context of her study is that of the Vanyemba who fled the war and settled in the area of Kaisosi on the outskirts of Rundu town. This Vanyemba when studied, should be clearly contextualized as there are those who have been in Kavango long before and did not settle in areas like Kaisosi or Sauyemwa. I think her findings should also be viewed in the context of the period of her study, conducted in the mid-1990s. The situation has changed significantly since then. My research findings seem to suggest that there are two sets of the Vanyemba in Kavango: those who are said to have come with the other five groups to Kavango in the historical legends and those that came to Kavango during wars in southern Angola which lasted until beyond independence of Namibia in 1990 which Brinkman focused on in her work. As I will show later in this dissertation, there are nowadays high levels of Nyemba awareness among those who claim to belong to the Vanyemba; I shall argue that the situation can be understood in terms of the peaceful condition that prevails today in Namibia generally and in Kavango specifically. Such condition allows people to claim belonging and association freely. Also the work of Brinkman might reach different conclusions now that Angola has become relatively peaceful, the context which has allowed those 'Vanyemba refugees' she focused on to also claim belonging to the other side of the river. Although, the place of the Vanyemba in the social space of postcolonial Kavango is highly contested especially in the festival context which is core to this study; significant oral historical accounts indicate the longevity of their presence.

Within this group there are various other sub groups such as Vachokwe, Vangangela, Valutyazi and many others. Within the oral accounts on migration routes and settlements some people (from the Vanyemba group) are believed to have travelled together with the five groups mentioned above; those who are locally believed to be the 'real' owners and discoverers of Kavango. However, some of these oral accounts about migration and settlement in Kavango are being contested by various clans who believe they have been excluded from the mainstream history of origin. What is of interest however is that during my research I witnessed a high level of Vanyemba awareness in the social scene of Kavango. As I will show later in this chapter, the beliefs of who is autochthonous to the Kavango region have come about during the region's complex history specifically that of South African occupation. Further chapters of the dissertation will demonstrate how Kavango-ness is contested and negotiated today. Making of Kavango-ness is a significant issue in this dissertation.

A third sub-section of the population are those who claim to have been the earliest inhabitants in Kavango, namely the San⁷⁹ locally known as *Vaduni* or *Vagcu*⁸⁰. Their presence in the area has been acknowledged in various oral accounts. However, they are not presented as people who liked to settle along the river banks like the migrants. Instead they lived in areas far from the river, because their dietary needs did not necessarily include fish and they did not cultivate land like the other groups. There are also other social and political issues which dictated their way of life in terms of the anthropological old notion of culture.

This chapter is in agreement with the general conception of Andreas Eckl (2007) that relatively little is known about Kavango and its inhabitants. Eckl (2007) investigated the accumulation of knowledge about Kavango and its people by the German colonial administration during the period 1891-1911; he has argued that under German colonial rule the region was not really brought under colonial control due to its remoteness. He argues further that as a result the accumulation of knowledge was mostly limited to matters of economic value while interest in the people of Kavango remained weak. According to his perspective such limited knowledge of the region led to its conspicuous absence from contemporary public history. However, despite his legitimate claim about the absence and misrepresentation of Kavango in public history Eckl reiterated exactly the same errors for which he blamed others. He continued to essentialise Kavango as a space and presented it as an area only inhabited by five groups which were recognized by the colonial administration. Like the colonial administration, he ignored other groups such as the San and the Vanyemba who have also been inhabitants of the region for the same duration, or even longer in the case of the San.

The chapter is also inspired by an essay by the Namibian-born anthropologist Robert Gordon, 'The making of modern Namibia: an anthropological ineptitude'. Published in 2005, Gordon's

⁷⁹ The term San is commonly used by academics to refer to a diverse group of people who live in (and are believed to be the first inhabitants) of southern Africa. They were generally defined as hunters and gatherers and known as Bushmen. At the independence of Namibia, usage of the name Bushmen was discouraged as it was believed to be negatively loaded and "othering". (See Legal Assistance Centre report of the regional assessment of the San in Southern Africa published in 2001 and authored by James Suzman) Today the term San in Namibia is widely used to refer to those population groups for purposes of being politically correct.

⁸⁰ The two words *Vaduni* and *Vagcu* are used by other local population groups to refer to the San people. Even the local San in the region refer to themselves as such, although the terms may be negatively loaded according to context especially when used by other groups. In the thesis I will use the terms interchangeably.

paper documents the role of the South African anthropologist Johannes Petrus van Schalkwyk Bruwer in the creation of the then apartheid South West Africa. Gordon emphasises the usage of anthropological expertise as witness evidence at the world court in order to scientifically support the creation of apartheid in the then South West Africa.

Kavango the place or people?

Early missionary and colonial encounters with inhabitants of the region largely influenced the contemporary conception of ‘the Kavango’ as appropriated in postcolonial Namibia. Historically people in Kavango have been conflated with their western neighbours in the former Ovamboland. Kavango people were regarded as ‘simply offshoots’ of the people of Ovambo. (Grotper, 1994 cited in Eckl 2007:8) This is also evident in the colonial administrative practices of the time, especially when the two regions were jointly administered by one native commissioner under the banner ‘Ovambokavango’⁸¹. Missionaries are not an exception in the practice which confused the ‘uniqueness’ of the two groups as Kampungu (1966: 78) bemoans in his work ‘Unfortunately, there is a tendency among the Missionaries particularly those who are sent from Ondangwa, of adapting the Kwangali peoples and their language and customs to those of the Ovambos’. The case of the Vakwangali, the residents of the westernmost part of Kavango, is actually an interesting one especially in the context of the relations with their western counterparts. There is a history, for instance, of Vakwangali *Hompas* (kings, queens) seeking asylum in Uukwanyama in Ovamboland and further to the west in Uukwambi district of Ovamboland when they had disagreements at home. Some of the hompas were born in ‘exile’ and only returned later to Ukwangali to take over the reins after those who made their parents flee had died. During the time of the South African colonial administration, the Uukwambi king Lipumbu yaTshilongo who was seemingly too dangerous and holding an uncooperative stance towards the authorities was also exiled in Kavango, specifically in the Ukwangali area. So the uncertainty about the boundaries between the two groups could also be understood in terms of the relationship of the hompas who moved to and fro between the two areas. While such practices by the colonial administration were largely informed by their observable physical attributes and closeness in language, on the other hand people in Kavango like elsewhere in the

⁸¹ NAT1/1/54 File 25 Official Communication dated 1937/2/21 Tribal Trust Fund: Okavango Native Territory.

territory believed that they were different as emphasized by one of my research participants below:

‘Sene sene, vantu, yimwe ku yi tambura ko tupu.Yaa, vantu vamwe vamwe kwa ya tameka asi nomburu yido daya gaununa vantu Muvambo a kare asi Kovambo, Mukavango a kare asi Mokavango ntani Mudamara a kare Mudamara. Nyee muntu nsene osi tarurura, usili mo ndi omo mosinike? Asi nomburu di ya gaunune Muvambo, Nomuherero, Nomukavango ntani Mudamara, usili mo ndi? Ku pi day a tu gwene kumwe Novaherero, Novadamara, Novawambo? Kupi? Kevega musinke daya tu gwene? Ya! Nyaamwetu twa li diva diva omu twa genda. Mukwangali Nomuvambo sili kumwe vawiza dogoro Momakuzu. Makura moomu da tanta nonkango Mukwanyama kwa hara nyama ogu Mukwangali kwa hara kagali. Awo tava li ganda nga va ka papare oko awo ava kwa rara ka gali. Siruwo oso mburu mwato omu, Nomundoweshi si, Nomuyingilisa si. Owo va za vakasane nonyama yiyo vakakondekera kooko, ava Vakwangali ta va kara vakwamese mukuro ngororo.’⁸²

‘Actually people should just accept certain things how they are. Certain people started to say that the (boere) whites came to divide us so that a Vambo stays in Ovamboland; a Kavango stays in Kavangoland or a Damara to stay in Damaraland. But, if one critically looks into that statement does it contain some truths? Where did they find us, the people of Kavango together with the Herero, Vambo or Damara? Where was it? At which place did they find us? We know ourselves how we came along! It is true that the Vakwangali and the Vambo came together until [they separated] at Makuzu. As the words clearly say the part of the Vambo known as Vakwanyama went on to hunt game because they like to eat meat, while the Vakwangali remained behind lying on their back as their name implies. During that time, the whites had not yet arrived! Neither the Germans nor the English! Those who went to hunt went and stayed there while the Vakwangali remained and instead followed the river along.’

⁸² Interview with Rudolf Ngondo at Katjinakatji, 15 January 2010.

As oral research about legends of Kavango origin shows, the Vakavango as a generic ethnic group have always imagined themselves to be different⁸³ from other ethnic groups of the territory even when they acknowledged common origins with other groups such as the Herero and Ovambo in terms of where they migrated from. Their migration tale presents a picture of a group of people who initiated a journey and settled in an area which they believed catered for their needs exclusively; as such they believed they were a distinct group.

Most importantly for my research is that people who reside in this area and participate in the postcolonial culture festivals identify themselves as *Vakavango*. There are various stories of how the name Kavango for the space, the river and inhabitants came into being. Actually, there is currently a local debate going on whether the name Kavango referred to the river (space) or its inhabitants. There have been various theories about the name Kavango whether it referred to the river or the people; this has been debated among authors⁸⁴ who have written about the region. There is a series of extensive communication which happened between author Maria Fisch, a medical doctor cum amateur anthropologist, now retired, and Kavango-born historians Shampapi Shiremo, Kletus Likuwa and Kavango Elders⁸⁵ who seemingly have authoritative knowledge about the region; the intense debates between Fisch and her detractors concerned issues she published about Kavango during her time as a state ethnographer. One of the contested matters is the origin of the name Kavango. Fisch suggested and asserted that the name Kavango was given by the Herero to the river at the time of the Swedish explorer Anderson's travels in the region in the 1850s. Likuwa and his colleagues on the other hand argued that the name was given to the place by its inhabitants who settled in the area in the early 1700s. As I will show below, one needs to understand the name according to two contexts in order to make sense of it, namely, on the one hand, that of local historical narratives or, on the other hand, following the creation of Kavango as a colonial homeland; during the latter process the inhabitants of the region were collectively identified as 'Kavango', with emphasis given to the name's origin in space rather than in people.

⁸³ The notion of difference in this chapter should be understood according to various specific historical contexts.

⁸⁴ See one of the communication letters from Likuwa to Dr. Fisch during 31 July 2006, a copy of which is available in the National Archive.

⁸⁵ Kavango Elders is a group of local elders who are believed to have knowledge about matters of the region.

Kavango Elders constitute about six men, who have worked or served as teachers in their life. Specifically, two of them headed the Education department in the region while three others are Education officers and one is retired.

According to Likuwa (2005:50), ‘Kavango’ means ‘a small place’. The name he argues was given by early *Vakankora* (clan of the toad) clan hunters who were on trail of an injured elephant which they eventually did not kill, because it crossed the river to the other side. When they returned to the rest of the clan, they reported that they had found “*kavango ko kawa*⁸⁶” and urged further movement to the new found area. Although he does not say how the name came about for the place, his inferences suggest that those who called it Kavango came from somewhere else and found this place; and due to its resources and out of surprise referred to it as their ‘small place’ perhaps due to its unbelievable natural endowment with resources. (Likuwa, 2005)

Those who came to make Kavango *shirongo* (a ‘country’⁸⁷) found the river which had abundance of resources as Djani Kasherera narrates below:

‘There was a man from the Mbukushu people who also lived among the Vakandjadi clan (clan of the eagle) by the name of Kangumbe⁸⁸ who also met with the Jao and Canikwe⁸⁹ people and asked them where they were coming from. They told him that they were coming from Mashi area in search of land to settle but he told them that this country belongs to Mankoto⁹⁰. We, of the eagle clan moved onward until we reached Ncushe area. Nobody should ever lie to you my child that this is their country, this land belongs only to the Vakandjadi (eagle clan) who found it first. The Vakandjadi clan settled all over the land and later on the chiefs of the Vashambyu arrived too and needed the same land.’⁹¹

⁸⁶ ‘Kavango ko kawa’ literary translates as ‘a small beautiful place’.

⁸⁷ The research participants during my interviews referred to their area as *shirongo* or *sirongo* which literary translate as the country or land. They intimated that those who came at the time of migration made the environment habitable coupled with a political system which regulates its affairs.

⁸⁸ Kangumbe is the Mbukushu man who is believed among the Vambukushu to have discovered the Kavango River. Thus they refer to it as *ruwhare ruaKangumbe* (the river of Kangumbe)

⁸⁹ The Jao and Canikwe are sub groups of the San who are believed to have been moving around the area near the Kavango River.

⁹⁰ Mankoto was a leader of the household of the Vakandjadi clan which claimed to have arrived first in the area. He was not a chief.

⁹¹ Take note of the usage of the word country or land in the interview excerpt.

The notion of ‘sirongo’ or land was presented as follows by David Hausiku a local headman in Sauyemwa area in western Rundu during an interview in which Kletus Likuwa⁹² also participated to suggest that sirongo meant to refer to settled land as opposed to wild ‘wiza’ which means bush:

‘Q: When people were just moving around and fishing was that considered as living in the bush or as living in the country?’

Hausiku: It was in the country. When people moved along the river in canoes they hunted, moved further and slept at Guma. It did not really matter a lot because they lived in a country. It was the Bushmen only that were living in the bush.⁹³

People used the terms ‘sirongo’ interchangeably to refer to their domicile as country or land. It appears that ‘places’ only became countries when the royal clans with their skills in cultivation and cattle herding as Hausiku further narrate below:

‘They started to cultivate their fields. Those that did not cultivate or have the strength to do so move in with those that had lots of food and those that had lot of foods and strength to work hard were in high regard and sometimes were made chief.’⁹⁴

Historically Mashi people (as they were previously known) settled and lived along the banks of the Kavango after their arrival from the Mashi plains (in current Western Zambia) in about 1650. They were riparian people as they derived their living from the river and its resources which allowed them to live and survive in that environment. The Kavango River is a most crucial aspect in the life of contemporary Vakavango especially when it comes to the assertion and determination of local identity (Kavango-ness), hence its space in the historical legends about the origin and ‘being’ of the Vakavango. The river space as a domicile bestowed the identity of riparian to the people of Kavango as Likuwa (2005) argues: ‘The people in turn came to identify themselves not with the land within which the river was found but with the river itself. They became known as Vakavango, meaning those who belong to Kavango, the river as they refer to their early migration in the mid 1750s. It is that process of living along the riverside and

⁹² Most of my oral interviews were conducted by myself and Kletus Likuwa when we did research together. He is also doing a PhD in history with the focus on migrant labour.

⁹³ Interview with David Hausiku on 20 July 2007 at Sauyemwa in Rundu.

⁹⁴ Interview with David Hausiku on 11 April 2007 at Sauyemwa in Rundu.

identifying yourself with it by taking part in all river activities which identified you as a Mukavango.⁹⁵ (Likuwa, 2005:50) In other contexts it is important to also note that certain people from the area for example saw themselves as either Vakwangali or Vashambyu from Kavango and not just as Vakavango especially in the situation of recruiting and identifying contract workers. This contradiction of a 'Kavango' identity seems to suggest that there was no sense of Kavango-ness, until the time of the Odendaal Plan as Diescho also intimated in his speech during the public lecture. What is of importance here is the period in which people began to go on contract in the south. This was the time when the tribal trust funds were created and the situation forced young men to go and work on contract in order to afford the tax. The tax issue is illuminated clearly in the narration of Mbambangandu who had also gone on contract for various times below:

'When that tax story started they said we should all assemble to be recorded and we were given papers. They said we should keep those papers as a sign of the number of people who live in the land while it was in fact a trap. Some people started whispering to one another that they saw the same thing in Botswana and that this was the beginning of tax payment. Commissioner 'Nakare' Harold Eedes; Native Commissioner for Kavango in the 1930s, heard about this talking that was doing rounds around the Kavango and he threatened that if he will hear of any one saying that this was the beginning of tax payment, such a person will be beaten with branches or will be jailed. Well, in the end of everything, people were called again to bring along those papers they were given. They wrote on each one's paper and asked each to pay fifty cents. Tax started at the amount of fifty cents.⁹⁶

Before migrant labourers were recruited, they had to give clear information about their origin to the contract official and they were told that this was necessary for tax purposes. When tax was deducted from the employees' earnings it was supposed to be remitted to the correct tribal authority⁹⁷, thus the importance of correct information about the worker's origin.

⁹⁵ Likuwa used oral and archival sources in order to present a perspective of identity which is derived from the river. He has also relied on the minutes of the debates on the question of Kavango-ness which happened in the Kavango Legislative Council during the 1970s.

⁹⁶ Interview with Mbambangandu waShivako on 20 January 2007 at Kambowo.

⁹⁷ NAT 1/1/54 S/U-20 File -25

Although there seem to have been various scenarios and reasons for the movement of people from the river side in Kavango much of ‘their way of life’ was disrupted by colonial activities of the time. With the advent of colonialism, especially during the South African administration, people who had settled on the river banks, especially in the area of Rundu town from the villages of Nkunki, Ncwa, Nkondo etc., were forcefully moved to upper grounds away from the river during the 1950s. (Likuwa, 2005) As a result people in the area of Rundu stopped living near the banks of Kavango River, unlike in other areas where they continue to live along the river. There were also other reasons such as the administration’s attempt to curb influential political activities⁹⁸ from both sides of the river; this happened especially during the 1950s and the early 1960s; Likuwa (2005) refer to this in his study as having influenced authorities of the time to police the border extensively. People also continued to live along the river banks in other areas of the region despite fluctuating climatic conditions, which over the last decade have culminated into terrible floods during the rainy seasons.

The above brief discussion of history will enable us to understand the historical construction of present day Kavango ethnic identity from the foundation legends which I will present below. The legends show that the earlier foundations of inhabitants were predominantly clan based and that Kavango-ness is a new colonial construction and is context specific. It also becomes evident and I also argue that legends told in Kavango are about royal clan and families and not necessarily about the wider people in the region as I will show below.

Kavango in legends

Legends about Kavango show that the majority of its inhabitants, or their ancestors, have migrated to the region from elsewhere. Even the San, who are generally believed to be the earliest residents of the area, seem not to have settled permanently in the area, as they have not set permanently structures which symbolize the ‘sirongo’. Instead their settlement in the area was temporal; and it was determined by seasonal food resources and the migrations of the game which they hunted. However, the above scenario should be understood in context; although the San were moving about the region it does not suggest that they did not have relations with the

⁹⁸ There are various official correspondences during 1969 already which refer to the above activities that resulted from the inability of the Portuguese to control people in its colony. See archive documents: NAR/11/55, File 9 and Vol.3 and NAR/11/55, File 20, “unregistered confidential correspondence, 1962-1967”.

‘visitors’. Oral sources also show that the San indeed participated in the activities of the time such as trade exchange, medicine and food with their ‘visitors’. There are indications and evidence which suggests that they also intermarried with them. Below I present accounts that confirm that all the groups living in the area today are immigrants to Kavango as a space; the only exception are the San⁹⁹ whose legends are virtually non-existent in local discourse, but they are still claimed to be autochthons by the ‘Vakavango’ who claim not to have found any sign of a ‘country’ when they arrived. Thus, they were regarded as first visitors by the group known as the *Matjaube*¹⁰⁰ or the *Vakandjadi* (eagle clan) under the leadership of Mankoto which claims to have found Kavango land first before any other groups arrived.

This narrative was told to me by Djani Kasherera who is regarded as authoritative on the subject of the *Vakandjadi* clan in Kavango. Djani is a male elderly of the *Vakandjadi* clan who lives at Kambowo in Shambyu. He is one of the living *Mukandjadi* who is believed to still have knowledge about the *Vakandjadi* clan and its dealing with the royals in Shambyu. He said:

‘It was at this place where he was met by the first visitors in his land. There were no *Vaduni* or any other chief around. All other groups were by then still in Mashi land. The first visitors which Mankoto received were the *Vaduni* who were running away from the wars in the south of Africa. When he asked them where they were coming from, he was told they were running away from people who shot at them. So, Mankoto stayed there and then moved along the valley of *Ndongalinena*¹⁰¹ up to the area of *Ncushe* where he parted with his *Vaduni* visitors. After all that has happened he also received groups of *Canikwe*¹⁰² and the *Jao* people.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ In his paper on the possibility of universal suffrage in Kavango in 1967, Kampungu addressed the question of who a Kavango is. Also in later years in the Kavango Legislative Assembly a debate focused on whether the San could participate in the elections which was to be held in South West Africa territory as Vakavango or something else. (BAC-1/1/55.NAR10 File 7)

¹⁰⁰ The chronicles of the *Matjaube* is dealt with extensively in the work of Fleisch and Mohlig (2002); *The Kavango Peoples in the Past: local historiographies from Northern Namibia*.

¹⁰¹ *Ndongalinena* and *Ncushe* are valleys situated not far from the Kavango River in the present day Gciriku area in eastern Kavango.

¹⁰² The *Canikwe* and the *Jao* people are believed to be subgroups of the San population.

¹⁰³ Interview with Djani Kasherera on 20 January 2007 at Kambowo village.

While everywhere else they are presented as early settlers of the southern African region, the above account gives the San¹⁰⁴ only the status of visitors. However, what is interesting is the fact that most names in area of Kavango such as *Ncushe*, *Ncaute* are derived from San languages and that issue itself may lead to useful findings, if further researched. Another question could be as to whether the *Matjaube* are actually not one of the San groups as regarded by some of the groups which later came from *Mashi* land and settled in Kavango. Kasherera actually denied this:

‘Q: What language did Mankoto speak? I am asking you this question, because some people told me that the *Matjaube* were actually a group of *Vaduni*.

Djani: They call us *Vaduni* just because they found us living together with them. We did not live along the river, but in the bush.

Q: So then, when the other chiefs came from *Mashi* they found your clan and concluded that you were all *Vaduni*?

Kasherera: Yes! But we were not *Vaduni*; we were rather as human as them. When they came they found that we have mixed. They thought that we were *Vaduni* and they thought that this land belonged to them (*Vaduni*). But then, we are a different group, the *Matjaube* and the *Vaduni* were our first visitors.¹⁰⁵

It seems the group which claims to have arrived first in the area did not establish structures which could be recognized as that of a ‘country’ as in the case of the San. Instead they also roamed freely and lived on hunting game like their counterparts, the San, which they claim to have accommodated. However, they seem to have lost their ability to control their land from the other groups namely the royal clans of the *Vashambyu* which killed them during the fight which ensued after meeting. They also occasionally joined the San in the bushes and intermarried with them as well. The relations with the San were not limited to the *Matjaube* only, other groups such as the *Vambunza* also claimed to have had relations with them as asserted by the following response:

¹⁰⁴ I have also not done interviews with people who claim to be San in Kavango, but it is one area I will look at as a matter of concern arising from my wider research.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Djani Kasherera on 20 January 2007 at Kambowo village.

‘Yes, they (Mbunza) were co living with the *Vaduni*. The *Vaduni* could come to the river and find them or the Mbunza could also go to the field.’¹⁰⁶

The intention of the above narrative is to locate the presence of the San within the wider discourses of the origins of the inhabitants of Kavango. However, it begs for more attention. Too many questions about the origins of Kavango-ness are not asked nor answered. Generally academic works on the region have paid little attention to the San and the politics around their being. This area still needs to be explored in order to establish legends about the origin of the San and see how they relate with the current dominant narratives of other groups in Kavango. All said, it is evident that of course the San has been present in the region and various forms of interactions existed. Why they are left out of most historical accounts is a question which goes beyond the scope of the present thesis.

The royal narrative:

There are general legends which depict the ‘mainstream’, officially recognized groups in Kavango namely, the *Vagciriku*, *Vashambyu* and *Vambukushu*, *Vambunza* and *Vakwangali*, to have come from Mashi. Below are the legends as told by *Hompa*¹⁰⁷ Maria Kandambo from the *Vakankora* clan in Gciriku¹⁰⁸ area, and by *Hompa* Alfons Kaundu Mattias from *Vakwasipika* clan in Mbunza¹⁰⁹ area respectively:

‘When they came to Kavango, they only came in one group as *Vakankora* clan. When they reached in the valley of *Kalikenuke* on their way towards Kavango River, one wife of the elder family member was about to give birth. They sat down and broke down their own bow to use it to get some wild fruits called *Ntja* for the women in labour. The younger family of the clan decided to live behind the elder family and reached Kavango and found a pond full of toads and killed them and said that they have now become the chief of the land. When the

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Samuel Hausiku headman of Sauyemwa on 11 April 2007.

¹⁰⁷ The phrase *Hompa* locally used to refer to a king or queen.

¹⁰⁸ Gciriku is the area in southern Kavango between Mbukushu and Shambyu. The royal palace of the *Vagciriku* is situated in Gciriku. In post independence Namibia it has come to be known as Gciriku Traditional Authority after the traditional authorities act was gazetted in 2000.

¹⁰⁹ Mbunza is the area in western Kavango between Ukwangali and Shambyu. The royal palace of the *Vambunza* is situated in Mbunza. In post independence Namibia it has come to be known as Mbunza Traditional Authority after the traditional authorities act was gazette in 2000.

older family of their clan arrived they found the young family saying that they were not the chiefs of the land and not their older family members. They said they were now the *Vakwafuma* (famous clan) and not the *Vakankora*. But when we came from Mashi, we were all the *Vakankora* clan.¹¹⁰

‘Well we are from the chiefs’ clan of Mbunza but our clans are the same as those of Ukwangali chieftainship because of our elders Kapango and Mate za Mukuve. Kapango is of the Sientu or Kwangari family and Mate is of the Mbunza tribe. Most of what you are asking is inside that copy of the history, however following what I read is that when they were staying at *Makuzu ga Muntenda* there deep in Angola they were just one family. So Mate’s family found a pond full of fish and they started catching fish there, but they refused to give some of the fish to her sister’s children Kapango. Later in time the Kapango family found some animals that could be tamed easily, in fact they did not know that they have picked cattle and apparently this animals came from Cuito¹¹¹. They domesticated these animals and started to milk them. Mate’s family wanted to be given some milk by the Kapango family, but they refused totally. That’s where the division of the family started and Kapango and her children went further west while Mate and her children moved to the east. The cattle were animals that could be tamed easily and people just picked them. The place Makuzu was on the other side of Ukwangali area across the river. The Mbunza came here and the area was named Mbunza of fish, derived from a lot of fish known as the “nza” that was found here. In fact Mbunza means a lot of “nza” fish.¹¹²

First, the above narratives show how the royal clans migrated from Mashi to present day Kavango. I argue that the history being told is only about their specific clans; they do not cover the history of other clans, which also moved from the same area to Kavango. If I accept Likuwa’s (2005) argument about Kavango being a ‘small place’ with abundant resources which was found by those who came earlier hunting an elephant, it could have been a motivating factor for other clans to move to the area. However, they are not mentioned and only the royal clans

¹¹⁰ Interview was held with *Hompa* Maria Kandambo on 24 December 2006 at Gciriku.

¹¹¹ Cuito is an area in southern Angola which is believed in oral accounts to have been previously inhabited by the Vanyemba groups.

¹¹² Interview was held with *Hompa* Alfons Kaundu Mattias on 14 April 2007 at Sigone. Kaundu’s legitimacy as a Hompa for the Vambunza has been contested recently. He is said to be a Nyemba, thus may have wrongly been installed.

are mentioned with the exception of the *Vakandjadi* clan which also claims to have been first inhabitants of the area.

Already a form of exclusion is evident among those who claim to have been part of the early migration legends. Eventually all the above groups came to settle in Kavango, but their narrative of origins changed over time. For example the Vakwangali¹¹³ and Vambunza are believed to have come from Mashi together with the other groups around 1750 or during 1800 as narrated by Hompa Sientu Mipasi of Kwangali at the event which marked the celebration of his thirty year anniversary in chieftainship; instead of moving further south towards the Kavango river, they went westwards to what was known then as the *Handa* area close to what was known as *Nyemband* in present day Southeastern Angola. This is where the two sisters originated who the Vambunza and Vakwangali consider to be their ancestors and settled in Kavango. However, when one listens to other local migration legends from common people while considering the royal clan history¹¹⁴ it becomes evident that the current dominant narrative is that they all came from Makuzu gaMuntenda in present day southern Angola and not from Mashi, as claimed in other narratives. For example, Rudolf Ngondo who was a minister in the homeland administration and currently a senior member in the Ukwangali Traditional Authority does not speak of the two sisters who are believed to be the maternal ancestors of the Vakwangali and the Vambunza at all. In his perspective, the Vakwangali and Vakwanyama who belong to the Vambo group came together and settled together at Makuzu gaMuntenda. From there, as their names imply, the Vakwangali remained behind lying on their back (in a relaxed mode) as the Vakwanyama went on to hunt as they were fond of meat. Eventually the Vakwangali began to move along the river in search of fish. There is however a connection in terms of fish with the legend of the Vambunza as narrated by Hompa Alfons Mattias Kaundu which may have resulted in the dispute between the two groups.

I need to reiterate that there is no bold or sufficient mention of Vanyemba in the above Vakwangali chronicles¹¹⁵, although it is claimed by authors of 'Ntunguru'¹¹⁶ (J. K. Kloppers and

¹¹³ The Vakwangali royal clan is called the *Vakwasipika* which is the 'clan of the hyena'.

¹¹⁴ During his 31st anniversary as Hompa of the Vakwangali people, Daniel Sientu Mipasi in his speech emphasized that the history of his people begins at Makuzu gaMuntenda.

¹¹⁵ Even at the same occasion Hompa Sientu Mipasi only mentioned at some point they resided near the Vanyemba in what is present day Angola and did not give any other details about their way of life together.

Damian Nakare a local author) an early language text book for primary schools of Kavango in the 1980s that they lived together before a war broke out between them which resulted in the further movement east of the then Vanyemba *Hompa* Ndumba yaTjimpulu. Shiremo Shampapi (2010) also wrote about the relations between the Vanyemba and the Vagciriku in eastern Kavango between 1874-1924. He described them as relatively cordial despite the fights which happened between Hompa Nyangana of the Vagciriku and Hompa Kativa kaMutuva of the Vanyemba. Hompa Ndumba yaTjimpulu who seems to have had fights with the Vakwangali in the west appeared to have had good relations with the Vagciriku in the east as he was given a wife with several people as a token of friendship by Hompa Nyangana during one of his visits. (Shiremo, 2010:67) Interestingly, the Vanyemba came to be excluded and ended up not having any ancestral land or a *Hompa* in present day Kavango even if they had lived together with the other groups for a long period. Their ancestral land is believed to be in *Limbaranda* and *Monyemba* (Nyembaland) which is an area in the south east of present day Angola. However, one can also put the above contestations of belonging in the context of access to local resources such as land rights.

The above legends have been solidified with the advent of successive colonial administrations especially after the Odendaal Plan which established homeland governments in South West Africa. It is difficult to spot the difference between the Vambunza and the Vakwangali presently as their languages was formalized to Rukwangali (which is the language of the latter) during the colonial administration in the region. There are no longer Vambunza people who can speak a form of Mbunza language.

At the culture festival I also observed that their (Vakwangali and Vambunza) dances are similar. Both *Kambamba* and *Mutjokotjo* are common dances among the groups, but one would only be able to make a difference of origin from the lyrics sang which mostly mention the population group or Hompa. If there is no mention of such names it remains difficult to make the distinction as the dance practices are very similar

The other three groups, namely the Vagciriku, Vashambyu and Vambukushu as well as the Vanyemba in the east of Kavango, are believed to have come straight from Mashu and without

¹¹⁶ The book titled Ntunguru in the local Rukwangali was published by the South African *Inboorlingtaalburo* (native language bureau) and to be used in homeland schools.

straying into other directions came to settle in Kavango. The dominant narrative of migration as told by Homba Maria Kandambo of the Vakankora clan in Gciriku is about the Vakankora clan from which the *Hompas* of the two groups namely Vagciriku and Vashambyu were born. The same legend is told by the Vashambyu and the Vagciriku. Interestingly, unlike other myths, they include the Vanyemba people as having travelled with them since their migration from Mashi. However, they only tell you about the Vanyemba living with them when you probe carefully. As in the dominant narratives told in western Kavango the Vanyemba people continue to be on the sidelines. As for the Vagciriku and Vashambyu, (like the Vakwangali and Vambunza groups,) the boundaries between the two groups are blurred. The royal families of the two groups are all descendants of the same clan namely the *Vakankora*. It is this clan which migrated from Mashi and settled in Kavango and eventually reigned over respective areas of settlement and people.

In the contemporary postcolonial discourse of the region, there is not much said about the San or Vanyemba including their activities. In the context of culture festivals in which the state also imagines its citizens through representations, the San and Vanyemba as residents of Kavango are hardly represented at a formal level. For example the two groups features in not more than a paragraph in the 'culture booklet' which is composed by the state. Only five groups namely the Vakwangali, Vambunza, Vashambyu, Vagciriku and Vambukushu are prominently featured and narrated in detail and within the festival context it is such supposed distinctions which are asserted and contested. Despite these contestations, it is evident that, other people settled in Kavango along the river banks and they made the area home or 'country'. (McKittrick, 2008:785) As a result, the majority of the people living in Kavango region today identify themselves through their association with ethnic groups within the geographical space of Kavango or as Vakavango, whose origins are elsewhere. Altogether as I will show this situation is due largely to the role of colonialism in Kavango specifically that of the German and South African colonial administrations; and its subsequent influence on people and how they imagined 'their culture'. Below I present some historical accounts from the German through to the South African colonial periods to show how they have impacted Kavango and its people through missionary activities, academic research and the system of separate development. I will also refer to some postcolonial debates between local scholars and earlier authors on the region to contextualize the contemporary and on- going sanitization of the region's history in the national or public domain. There is little published about Kavango, the region is less represented than

other areas even in high school post colonial history text books. I view the debates below as a means to locate the history of Kavango politically in the public domain.

Early German colonial and missionary encounters

Although the region was difficult to access during most of the early colonial period, the German administration established a police post in Nkurenkuru in order to exert its presence and rule in the region. There is considerable evidence about early colonial activities such as trade and cooperation. For example, it is claimed in oral history that *Hompa* Kandjimi Hawanga of the Vakwangali in whose territory a police post was created in 1909 had a good working relationship with the German's colonial representatives. Such relations are specifically said to have been between Hompa Kandjimi Hawanga and 'Zawada', the German colonial representative. They had a memorandum of understanding signed. (Eckl, 2004) At the time of the First World War Hompa Kandjimi Hawanga personally fought on the German side against the Portuguese as Simon Kandere told me:

'Kandere: However our old people told us that he was brave and dangerous. When the Germans came to fight the mission of Nkurenkuru on the other side that belonged to the Portuguese, he (Kandjimi Hawanga) told them to wait and hold their fire while he was going on the other side for reconnaissance, because he knew them very well. So he went across and stood by the Portuguese weapons, as they went out of their camp they were all shot. Only the coloured Portuguese survived.

Q: Does it mean that Hawanga assisted the Germans in their war?

Kandere: Yes very much!¹¹⁷,

The narrator is a local elder who grew up in the Vakwangali palace of Hompa Kanuni. He worked with Native Commissioner Morris during the 1950s and is regarded by local people as knowledgeable about matters of Kavango history especially during the time of Native Commissioner Nakare and Morris. In eastern Kavango trade between the *Hompas* (especially Nyangana in Geiriku and Diyeve in Mbukushu) and traders seem to have been significant as

¹¹⁷ Interview with Simon Kandere on 28 January 2007 at Safari.

shown in the travel letters of early traders such as Johan August Wahlberg during the period 1836-1856. (Preller, 1941:87-128; Hummel, 1992:156-158) Trade was not only limited to German traders, deals were also made with Afrikaners¹¹⁸ and Portuguese who were mostly interested in slave and cattle trading as narrated by Kashera a local historian of the Vakandjadi clan below:

‘Q: Was it the will of a slave to die with the chief?’

Kashera: No! It was by force, there was no freedom of speech. If you were hard headed, you would be sold to the Portuguese for slavery.

Q: Now, did they also sell people for slavery around here in Kavango?

Kashera: Hey, hey, my child, why do you even ask that question?

Q: Tell us about who was sold as a slave and who came to buy the slaves and where they took them?

Kashera: I know of another case of a Tjimbundu speaking person who came to buy cattle for the Portuguese on this side. One day when he came, he slept in the homestead of the headman Karambuka. That Tjumbundu man asked if anyone knew a person named Haikombo of Cuni, they told him that the people use to live at that village. He asked again if people knew a man known as Haikombo of Ngoro and they told him that Haikombo Ngoro was their grandfather who once lived at that place. He also told them that he was also a descendant of him because his grandmother was sold a long time ago for slavery to go that side. When they told him that all those people you are mentioning are our family members, he took the cattle of the Portuguese to Angola and quickly returned again to settle permanently on this side. He died on this side.¹¹⁹

This narratives shows that the view of German colonialism in Kavango should not be only limited to military activities; the activities of the missionaries, specifically the Catholics and Protestants, were also important. The missionaries, whether consciously or sub-consciously,

¹¹⁸ Preller (1941) gives a historical account of the Dorsland trekkers from Transvaal through Botswana to Angola during the 1800s.

¹¹⁹ Interview with Djani Kashera on 20 January 2010 at Kambowo village.

helped to promote the colonial agenda. Kampungu (1966:75-104) gives a detailed history of missionary activities in the then South West Africa. He presents a picture of the competition which existed between the various missionary societies which wanted to create stations in the territory¹²⁰. The Catholic mission unlike its Lutheran counterparts under the Finnish did not fare well in the Kavango during the early stages of their missionisation project. They were refused settlement repeatedly by the Hompa in Kavango. (Kampungu 1966) Partly the situation could be attributed to the relationship between Hompa Kandjimi of the Vakwangali in Western Kavango area and the German colonialists, which became sour. After the relations deteriorated, the colonial administration sent a punitive expedition under over-lieutenant Volkmann 1903 which later had to be aborted because of the uprising of the Nama and the Herero in southern Namibia, which required the relocation of troops. (Kampungu, 1966:78) The Lutheran missionaries¹²¹ did not encounter serious resistance specifically in western Kavango after being received in Ovamboland from 1870-1889. After repeated expeditions, the Catholic missionaries were eventually allowed to set a station at Andara in eastern Kavango during 1909 under the rectorship of Father Krist. However this mission station was later abandoned due to disagreements¹²² between the missionaries and Hompa Libebe of the Vambukushu. The next mission was built in Nyangana also in eastern Kavango on 22 May 1910 after a successful expedition led by Fathers Joseph Gotthardt, August Bierfert and brothers Georg Russ, Johannes Rau and Konrad Heckmann. (Kampungu 1966:105) The mission at Andara was resurrected only in 1913 after repeated negotiations¹²³ and requests from Chief Libebe and the missionaries. (Kampungu, 1966:110) Other stations were built at Tondoro in Ukwangali and Bunya in Mbunza respectively.

¹²⁰ Kampungu (1966) quotes a letter from Pref. Nachtwey to the Superior General of the OMI Congregation in 1903 in which he states the importance of a second attempt to open a station before Protestants precede them as it would be difficult to gain entry after them.

¹²¹ Kampungu (1966:77-110) relates that the Finnish Missionary Society began work at Omandongo in 1870 after they had been accepted by the Ondonga chief Shikongo. The foundation stations were at Omandongo, Olukonda, Uukwambi and Uukwanyama. Within the year of 1871 they built five missions. Notable missionaries were Martin Rautanen (locally known as 'Nakambale') and Pettinen stationed at Olukonda, Nannula at Oniipa and Alex at Omulonga. The Lutheran Mission reached Kavango in 1923 and established a station at Nkurenkuru in 1929 only. The next stations were built respectively at Rupara and Mupini in the Mbunza area. The fourth was at Mpungu.

¹²² The disputes were brought about by the incident in which a missionary mistakenly shot a young Mbukushu man who was an interpreter and repeated trampling on royal graves by the mission oxen. These acts warranted a punishment which the missionary regarded as unfair and he later decided to leave the area.

¹²³ Negotiations were centered on the return of guns which were taken and kept by chief Libebe, from the earlier missionaries of previous expeditions who had died of disease in the area.

In the Kavango, the missionaries were often the forerunners of the administrative occupation. This became very intensive during the time of the South African administration, which took over the territory from the Germans in 1915 and administered it as a League of Nations mandatory territory. A case in point was the insistence of the native commissioner's for the women of Kavango to rid themselves of their 'traditional' clothing and adopt the European style. The early Catholic Missionaries followed by the Lutherans in Kavango are seen in much of the literature to have acted as colonial agents of the imperial German and South African authorities respectively. (Gibson et al. 1981:25, Mutorwa, 1994: 7, Likuwa, 2007:6) Likuwa (2007) in his response to Eckl, (2007) presented at the history conference argued that the work of the missionaries to pacify the Africans and force them into devotion and submission served as a tool to clear the path for colonization. A founding father of Catholic mission scholarship, J Schmidlin¹²⁴, for instance wrote in 1913 (as quoted in Hunke 1996:10):

'The mission is one that spiritually conquers our colonies and assimilates them internally. The state may have power to conquer and annex the protectorates at the external level; yet the deepest goal of colonial policy, the internal colonization, must be implemented with the help of the missions. The state could well enforce physical obedience through punishments and laws, yet it is the mission's duty to bring the natives to spiritual submission and devotion. In this context we may reverse the phrase pronounced by the secretary for colonies, Dr. Solf, at the Reichstag, 'to colonize is to do mission work' and to 'to do mission work is to colonize.'

Despite repeated refusals by the *Hompas* in Kavango to allow missionaries into their 'countries', later they permitted them to built stations between 1909-1910 for the Catholic mission in eastern Kavango and in 1922 for the Finnish to work in western Kavango. (Mutorwa, 1994:6) The introduction of the new religion encouraged people to regard traditional religious beliefs as 'ungodly' and as associated with paganism and evilness. (Mutorwa, 1994: 7) On the other hand, the missionaries were perceived by locals as different people with a strange culture. (ibid.) In his publication of the history of the Roman Catholic Church in Kavango, Mutorwa (1994) argued that mission work altered the norms and values of the people of Kavango significantly. As a result their teachings influenced the world view of the Africans on religion and general well

¹²⁴ J Schmidlin was a German Catholic priest.

being. Lukas Dikuwa, who was just a young boy at the time when the missionaries set up camp at Andara in Mbukushu narrates:

‘Q: So then, if you already knew about God before they came, why did you accept the missionaries again?’

Dikuwa: That is what I am telling you. They said we do not know God in the same way as they knew him. So they wanted to lure us to be a part of their sin of having killed God. We told them, we know God already, they said no you do not, and God is like this and that. They wanted us to be part of their offence of having killed the son of God.

Q: But, what benefits did the missionaries bring along to the people?’

Dikuwa: The only benefit is helping us to know what was going on in the world. The missionaries were the only ones who said that we should live peacefully together.¹²⁵

This exchange shows that teaching of submission to the Christian God and subsequent to the earthly rulers was emphasized. It also suggests that the Kavango were constructed as different from their Ovambo counterparts. For example people of Kavango have been represented in travel and official accounts as those who ‘lack self confident and are less provocative¹²⁶, while ‘their inclination to steal is less apparent¹²⁷, than their counterparts in the former Ovamboland. (Laubschat 1902, Bericht 32 as quoted by Eckl 2007:29) Harold Eedes, who was the Native Commissioner for Kavango during the 1930s, time and again recorded in his official documents ‘people of Kavango as being lazy and not willing to participate in contract labour.¹²⁸ (Laubschat 1902 Bericht 32 as quoted by Eckl 2007: 30) The inhabitants of the region were compounded with, and sometimes compared to, their western neighbors of Ovambo when authorities identified them. Eckl (2007:30) who has reconstructed the official historical colonial account of the German administration argues that ‘less important groups were subsumed under their more important neighbors.’ However, he does not show in which aspects the importance is located.

¹²⁵ Interview with Lukas Dikuwa on 09 July 2009 in Mbukushu.

¹²⁶ Information about people of Kavango as accounted by a certain Laubschat (1902)and quoted by Eckl (2007:).

¹²⁷ Information about people of Kavango as accounted by a certain Laubschat and quoted by Eckl (2007). The same perception continues to be used by labour recruiting agencies during the latter years of apartheid and colonialism.

¹²⁸ See NAT,1/1/54/S/U-20/File 25; A PhD thesis by K L Likuwa on labor contract in Kavango is forthcoming, in which he deals with certain historical issues on why the people of Kavango did not really see the reason to go on contract.

Although the people of Kavango were presented as apprehensive and lazy in various published accounts, their resistance to invasion and missionary conversion has not been recorded. As Kampungu (1966) and Shiremo (2005) have shown a case in point is the conflicts between *Hompa Nyangana*¹²⁹ of the Vagciriku and traders from Germany which resulted in the confiscation of belongings, capture and even some deaths. The repeated refusal to give permission for German missionaries to enter and establish a mission in Ukwangali by *Hompa Himarwa* is another. (Kampungu, 1966:77-104)

Additional evidence is presented in a history of the Roman Catholic Church in Shambyu in Kavango authored by Maria Fisch; she claims that the church and the administration of the time struggled very hard to convince the ‘locals to rid of their traditional ways of life’. (Fisch, 2005:66) Further evidence is to be found in the official correspondence between the native commissioner Harold Eedes and the Secretary for South West Africa, in which Eedes reports what was believed to be ‘child marriage’ and ‘child prostitution’¹³⁰, in Kavango. In another, but related communication Native Commissioner Harold Eedes addressed the issue of female head dress with the Roman Catholic priest as follows:

‘As pointed out by Father Frohlich, there is no law which compels native women on accepting Christianity, to remove their head-dress. Missionaries could, however, use any influence they may have to induce native women to discard their filthy head-dress, and in this way the women would be able to, by this outward sign, show that they had accepted Christianity.’¹³¹

Obviously, the missionaries found the situation difficult to deal with. Father Frohlich responded to Native Commissioner Eedes:

‘With reference to our conversation at Runtu in January 1937, I may be allowed to inform you that a girl of one of the nearest locations, who had put off her dirty head-dress last year, now at her maturity went back to the old custom of wearing cords. Still more as the wish of

¹²⁹ For a detailed historiography of *Hompa Nyangana*, see Shiremo (2009).

¹³⁰ NAT1/1/54 File 25 Official Communication dated 1937/2/21

¹³¹ NAT1/1/54 File 25 Official Communication dated 1937/2/21

the girl herself it was that of her father, mother and grandmother. In consequence also other girls are willing at their maturity to begin again with this habit.¹³²

The refusal of the locals to 'rid their ways of life' as recorded in correspondences can be read as assertiveness against foreign influences. It is evident that the Native Commissioner was on a serious mission to 'change' and thereby to 'civilise' the people of Kavango in line with conventional Christian norms. Unlike his predecessor the Ovambo Native Commissioner, 'Cocky' Hahn¹³³ who encouraged people in Ovamboland to display their 'traditions' such as '*efundula*' for official spectacle and his visitors, and 'opposed attempts to promote Christianization, monogamy and the wearing of Western Clothes' (Hayes, 1998:80), Eedes¹³⁴ was not at all in favour of 'old' customs. However it is worth noting that there is no significant published research done on the impact of colonial policies on local power relations, ideas of 'tradition', gender, and generation in Kavango to date except the work of Becker (2006) on comparative perspectives on gender and chieftaincy in Namibia.

The historical accounts present evidence that Kavango people were not lacking self confidence or unresponsive, as claimed by early visitors to the region. Instead, there might have been a difference in politics between Ovamboland and Kavango administrations (apart from personal styles and convictions of the officials). Ovambo was regarded as a major source of migrant labour, whereas Kavango only played a minor role in this endeavour. However, I think that the above situations should be viewed within the historical contexts in which they happened; such that Christian teachings and successive administrative coercion contributed to the creation of negative perceptions about the people in Kavango, who were presented as being lazy; the truth may be rather that they were not willing to participate in contract.

While the missionaries were initially closely linked to colonialism, later they began to oppose the colonial activities together with the local people. This was especially the case for the Lutheran missionaries, whose church was organized in a 'fused' ethnic identity. The people in Ovamboland and Kavango were religiously conflated under the Finnish missionary banner

¹³² NAT1/1/54 File 25 Official Communication dated 1937/2/21

¹³³ For detailed reading on activities of Cocky Hahn see Hayes (1998).

¹³⁴ Hahn, on the other hand, who was responsible for the two regions is celebrated by some sections of the people in Kavango, as he is believed to have brought freedom for the commoner against the traditional leaders of the time who were said to have been rude and difficult in their dealings with the subjects.

OvamboKavango. The ‘OvamboKavango Church (ex Finnish mission)’ operated in the two northern homelands of Ovamboland and Kavango and the ‘Evangelical Lutheran Church (ex Rhenish mission)’ which worked in southern and central Namibia, together wrote an open letter in 1971 to the then South African administration attacking it for not fulfilling the United Nations mandate. (Hunke, 1996:63) The church in northern Namibia established and identified itself according to the geographic and ethnic population served by its work. The name OvamboKavango does not seem to suggest a hierarchy of some sort between the ethnic populations concerned. I locate the above practices within the colonial political administrative strategy and discourse which shaped the social sphere at the time.

In the remaining sections below I outline the activities of the South African administration in Kavango with the specific focus on the proclamation of native reserves in the 1930s followed by the Odendaal Plan of the 1960s under which homelands were created in South West Africa. In the section I also pay attention to the academic discourse of the time which informed the creation of the Odendaal Plan and its subsequent activities. Finally I show how the Odendaal Plan created an important social space of interaction (namely the ‘colonial culture festivals’) between the colonial administration and local people. Now I pay attention to the colonial creation of Kavango as native reserve.

Kavango the Native Reserve

Colonial occupation, especially by South Africa in the later years gravely disrupted local people’s ‘traditional’ norms with their systems of control. As a result people had to move and settle in new areas in order to make way for new developments such as the creation of borders, appropriation of the system of tax payments and eventual adaptation to the practice of the Europeans. Largely local people had to rid or modify their ‘ways of life’ in order to fit in. At the same time, however, the South African administration purportedly supported local ‘traditional’ structures.

A good example was what started as a method to control, in order to regulate what was known as tribal trust funds¹³⁵ and mobilization of black's labour power in the white economy; which culminated in a system of separate development and apartheid later. The proclamation of Ovamboland as a 'Native Reserve' for the sole use and occupation of the Ovambo in 1929 was followed by Kavango in 1937. By 1939 about seventeen reserves altogether had been established. (Du Pisani, 1987:19) After colonial rule was imposed on the Kavango area in the early 20th century, colonial policy 'rezoned' ethnic settlement areas in order to implement what became known as tribal trust funds during the 1930s.¹³⁶ Some of the Vambukushu people (the easternmost of the Kavango groups) were forcefully moved from the Western Caprivi Zipfel (east of the Kavango region) to the southern banks of the Kavango River. At the same time, the western border of Kavango was shifted eastwards in order to accommodate settlers from Ovamboland in the former neutral zone between the two territories. When the tribal trust funds were implemented, five tribal groups were officially gazetted as the original inhabitants of Kavango (Vakwangali, Vambunza, Vashambyu, Vagciriku and Vambukushu). Other groups living in the area, including those known as Vanyemba and Vachokwe, were declared recent arrivals from Portuguese West Africa (PWA), today's Angola. As a result groups like that of the San and Vanyemba are nonexistent in the earlier literature of the region and the blame could squarely be placed at the feet of missionaries, colonial officers and anthropologists such as Lentz (2000:107-115). The creation of the native reserve and subsequent formation of the tribal trust fund and the gazetting of the 'five tribes' is crucial for understanding the contemporary contestations of 'who belongs' in Kavango. Although the creation of Kavango as a reserve and the formation of the tribal trust fund was apparently solely for the management of the natives and collection of tax, the practice had serious mental implications for how Kavango and belonging to it were imagined subsequently. My ethnography of the festival which is the centre of investigation in this thesis presents evidence of how people in Kavango imagine Kavango-ness as per ideology which underlies the construction of the notion of 'Kavango' during the colonial era. The creation of reserves and tribal trust funds preceded the Odendaal Plan of 1964, which

¹³⁵ The trust fund was meant to collect tax revenue from the natives; and it would be used to run and manage reserve affairs. The practice was understood by the authorities as a method to reduce the excessive reliance of reserves on central coffers.

¹³⁶ NAT1/1/54 File 25 Official Communication dated 1937/2/21 Tribal Trust Fund: Okavango Native Territory

was engineered at the University of Stellenbosch in the department of *Volkekunde* by Professor Johannes Petrus van Schalkwyk Bruwer, who had undertaken a study tour of the territory in 1954. (Gordon, 2005:26-30) The inclusion of *Volkekunde* in this discussion will illuminate the argument I made earlier in the chapter that academic research and academics of the time informed colonial makings such as homelands and how they were imagined. As a result, below I will pay attention to the *Volkekunde* its writings and how it informed the colonial ideology of uniqueness and separateness.

Volkekunde Anthropology and Kavango

In this section I will present what I call the ‘Kavango studies’ below in order to provide a sense of what has been written about the region: The anthropological studies of Namibia in general and Kavango specifically especially during the time in consideration, cannot be understood without the mention of Professor Johannes Petrus Van Schalkwyk Bruwer. During his role in the South West Africa affair (as discussed by Robert Gordon, 2005:30-35), Bruwer was the *volkekundige* (Afrik: ethnologist) regarded as the ‘expert’ by the South African state on the *volke* (peoples) of Namibia, especially during its case at the International Court of Justice. The South African administration was taken to court by Liberia and Ethiopia for not having fulfilled its mandatory obligation as outlined by the League of Nations charter and demanded that its mandate be revoked. He was the advisor of the state on South West Africa issues and in the process made numerous suggestions which would define and shape the territory in later years. His concern at the time was the development of the political situation which was inspired by SWAPO propaganda and how it would affect the workings of the state and its image abroad. (Gordon, 2005) He had also suggested to the state that an agricultural show be held in Uukwanyama and the construction of the Uukwanyama Tribal Council in order to keep people from participating in political activities and have some sort of political forum.

Bruwer recommended the need to mobilize goodwill and reiterated the need for a well-organised plan of development for the territory. (Gordon, 2005:32) He also pleaded for the Commissioner General of the territory to be an experienced ethnologist who could liase and promote the plan of development among the natives. He would become the Commissioner General to South West Africa affairs. It is not far-fetched for Gordon to emphasise the importance of Bruwer in the

affairs of Namibia. He even attracted and sponsored a number of students who undertook fieldwork in the densely populated northern areas of the Kavango and Ovambo regions. I will briefly discuss three studies sponsored or co-supervised by him and completed just before the implementation of the plan which would later be led by Odendaal the then administrator of Transvaal.

One of the studies was done in 1961 about the territory by M J Olivier. His focus was on the mandate of the territory and the role and management of the inhabitants by the South African state. His study also dealt with the history of the people and how it informed the social setting of the time. It recommended the territory to be the mandate of South Africa until the time, it was able to deal with its own affairs; however he is not specific of the duration of the mandate period. In hindsight he advocated for permanent mandate. (Olivier, 1961:413-416) In his recommendations he also advocated for the separate treatment of the native as set out in the Natural Administration Act of 1927. That was seen to '*beskerm Bantoebelange*¹³⁷'. (Olivier, 1961:416) As one of Professor Bruwer's earliest students, his thesis was very important in the legal sense as it informed administrative ideology at the time.

The next thesis was on the northeast of South West Africa by Johannes Lodewickus Bosch in 1964 and was submitted to Stellenbosch University. The study of Bosch (1964) was in Volkekunde and was focused on the matrilineal orientation of people in southern Africa. Still under the old anthropological research influence of 'bounded' 'other' less known 'tribes' Bosch did an ethno-historical study among the people of Shambyu in north eastern Kavango not very far from Rundu town and recorded socio-historical information about the Vashambyu. His study presented the Shambyu as a distinct ethnic group in Kavango whose matrilineal arrangement was under threat of switching to patriliney. He argued that such changes were informed by outside influences such as Western languages and other social factors.

On the sideline was a study by Kampungu (1965) sponsored by the Roman Catholic Church whose focus was on the Kavango marriage customs. He paid specific attention to the culture of the Vakwangali. Kampungu was the first local university trained intellectual and a Catholic priest. He later also served in the Kavango Legislative Assembly. Although his thesis was

¹³⁷ "Protect the Bantu interests"

submitted in the faculty of law at the University of Propaganda Fide, his work was anthropological in nature as his published and unpublished essays show. In fact it is apparent that his and Bosch works were done almost at the same time as is evident in certain correspondence between himself and N J van Warmelo, a South African government ethnologist, recorded in his unpublished thesis (Kampungu 1966:4) As a local intellectual his work is of particular importance especially his unpublished thesis volume as it provides a wide ranging history of the territory (South West Africa) and its peoples and not only of the Vakwangali which is the focus of his publication .

Kampungu's work was followed by Van Tonder's ethnological study in 1966. Van Tonder, like Bosch a student of Professor Bruwer, produced a study implicitly influenced by the theory of the cultural anthropologist Herskovitz which he used to vehemently criticize British Anthropology for its lack of conformity in terminology such as social process, ethnography and ethnology. (Van Tonder, 1966:2-3) His study was done among the Vambukushu in Kavango in order to inform the course of action which was sought by government and administration authorities of the time. This study meant to elevate perceptions of white supremacy, discourage opinions which suggested the contrary and relegate the Africans to the category of tribe. He advocated for the retribalisation of Africans which he suggested would enhance social cohesion and functionality.

A later publication on the 'Kavango peoples', was published in 1981 by Gibson and colleagues, but actually it seems to be, in numerous ways, a replication of the works of Bosch and Kampungu. Their comparative work emphasized the distinctness of their subjects of study treating them as 'tribes'. They argued that since there was less interference from outside influences, their culture also remained significantly unaltered. As such they strove to reconstruct the 'unaltered' Kavango culture and attempted to compare them. While their study focused on people on the lower Kavango River, they excluded the groups such as the Nyemba and Ngangela who were also resident in their area of research.

Both Bosch (1964) and Van Tonder (1966) were students of Professor Bruwer. Their work demonstrates the political agenda of the time clearly and as envisaged by Professor Bruwer was conducted in conjunction with the state. These studies preceded the anticipated planning development and policy matters of the Odendaal Plan of separate developments in South West

Africa. Emphasised in all these studies is the distinctness of 'tribe' and its functionality during the political context of the time.

The category tribe and its uses and reference to the subject of anthropological study especially in Africa have been widely criticized in Anthropology. Archie Mafeje in 1971 criticized the notion of tribe including its usage and relegated it to an ideology of intent in his essay titled *The Ideology of Tribalism*. He maintained that anthropologists may have been right in insisting that traditional or pre-colonial African societies large or small may have been tribes. Especially if the usage of the term tribe is restricted to specific forms of economic, political, and social organization that can be fixed in space and time. However, he argues that if the society has been penetrated by European colonialism that has successfully drawn it into a capitalist, economy and a world market it was a serious transgression to continue using the term. However, while Mafeje issued a harsh critique of the use of the concept 'tribe' in earlier anthropology, he did not adequately address the context where lay people and politicians use the term tribe in reference to identity and culture at the times of his essay writing. Lay people and governments do not care much for the anthropologist's dilemma with the concept of and the term tribe; they will continue to use the term because it is a useful simplification to social processes as Peter Skalník (1988) argues. In his chapter almost twenty years later he argued that indeed tribe is a colonial category which has proved to be 'particularly resilient in anthropology, for the general public in the West and for the people to whom the term has been applied'. (Skalnik, 1988:69) As such Skalnik (1988) suggested that as anthropologists we formulate better concepts whose usefulness could be tested in understanding and explaining social processes, to the benefit of both science and public life.

The most notable research on the region is the work of Diescho (1983) which is an analysis of the Odendaal Commission of enquiry into South West Africa Affairs 1962-1963, with specific reference to its findings, recommendations and implementation in respect of Kavango. His work which was submitted for a MA degree in the Department of Political Science at Fort Hare University was followed by Mbambo (2002) whose study was about indigenous knowledge systems with the specific focus on traditional healing and its relation to religion among the Vagciriku in north eastern Kavango. In his study he has argued that traditional healing served a social purpose of belonging to the social structure of the Vagciriku. His thesis is about

indigenous knowledge of healing in Kavango, but he over relied heavily on early *volkekunde* sources and thus does not seem to appreciate the changing nature of social life among the subjects of his study thus presenting them as distinct people who live homogenously.

The study on making youth elites in postcolonial Kavango Namibia done by Mattia Fumanti in 2003 is the latest critical Anthropological engagement from the region. Fumanti (2003) critically analyzed the politics of elitism in various social spaces where it is performed by the youth of Kavango. Elite making creates senses of belonging and it involves a great deal of performance and in that particular context the debate of performance in my study relates to his study. His work is contemporary critical anthropological study in comparison to the earlier works of the likes of Van Tonder and Bosch of the 1960s.

It appears that research and related activities were highly encouraged at the time of the creation of homelands authorities and the subsequent administration thereof. In the 1960s a number of anthropologists works on *volkekunde* emerged from Kavango with particular focus on the Vashambyu, Vagciriku and Vambukushu people respectively specifically the Department of Volkekunde of Stellenbosch University, the 'Afrikaanse Universiteit Van Die Witwatersrand' presumably the university known as Rand Afrikaanse Universiteit, (RAU), today. The University of Johannesburg also seems to have played a significant role in a circulated memo which requested for the collection and donation of artifacts for its museum through the magisterial districts of the 'Native Areas'. The collection request for artifacts was supposedly for educational and tourism purposes¹³⁸. Specifically the theses by Bosch (1964) and Van Tonder (1966) and later the work of the German linguist Mohlig (1967) about Kavango without doubt assisted in the construction of the imagined colonial Kavango identity and nation as the following excerpt from the communication between the Native Commissioner and one researcher shows:

¹³⁸ NAR/155 File N1/12/6 dated 1967/10/25 Official Communication from Afrikaanse Universiteit Van Die Witwatersrand

Today I have the pleasure to send you a copy of my thesis under separate cover. I hope to be able to continue my investigations among the Dciriku in the near future and to forward further publications on the language and the culture of that interesting people¹³⁹

We are working on developing the traditional tribal governments into self-rule for the whole of Okavango area. Your work, therefore, appears at a most appropriate time and will be of the greatest value. May I take the liberty to suggest that you also present copies of your thesis to the Dciriku Tribal Authority and the Chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner, in Windhoek. The latter now has an Ethnologist, Mr Budack, on his staff. Mr. Budack shows great interest in the tribes of the Okavango and since he has to advise the Government in regard to cultural and traditional political matters, your work will benefit him greatly.¹⁴⁰

The above letters were written at the time when the recommendations of the Odendaal Commission were being implemented. I have not been able to locate his thesis, but according to reviews it is about a description of Bantu language namely Dciriku which is currently spelled Gciriku. His thesis was completed just before the official department of education was established in the homeland. (Westphal, 1970:294) After the above communication was made, it was not long before a movement of local *hompas* from various ethnic groups in 1968 seeking for the recognition and teaching of vernacular languages in school emerged; and the idea was highly encouraged by the state despite the lack of sufficient resources to address all requirements by the administration.¹⁴¹ The demand by the *hompas* was treated as a necessity and addressed with urgency by the Native Commissioner; as a result the authorities also took advantage of the situation in demanding loyalty and allegiance for their services rendered in return¹⁴². It seems the authorities did not doubt in their dealings in order to implement any action that was proposed by the Odendaal Plan. Some of above studies were commissioned in support of the idea of Odendaal Plan which was the brain child of Professor Bruwer. Below I will discuss the Odendaal Plan's implementation with the specific focus on Kavango as a homeland.

¹³⁹ NAR/1/55 Letter dated 1967/10/29 to the Bantu Affairs Commissioner in Kavango from Dr. W Mohlig in Germany

¹⁴⁰ NAR/1/55 Letter dated 1967/11/09 to Dr. Mohlig in Germany from the Bantu Affairs Commissioner of Kavango

¹⁴¹ NAR/1/55 File N1/12/7/2 Letter dated 1968/05/11 to the Chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner detailing the demands of the Vagciriku King Shashipapo for recognition and teaching of Rugciriku in schools.

¹⁴² NAR/1/55 File N1/12/7/2 Letter dated 1968/05/11 to the Chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner detailing the demands of the Vagciriku King Shashipapo for recognition and teaching of Rugciriku in schools.

Kavango after the implementation of the Odendaal Plan

Later colonial activities, in particular the proposals of the Odendaal Commission for a system of separate development, were informed and shaped by earlier administrative mechanisms, such as the Tribal Trust Fund of the 1930s, which established a specific version of indirect rule in the Kavango area.

In the early 1960s, the Odendaal Commission propositioned that:

As far as practical a homeland must be created for each population group, in which it alone would have residential, political and language rights to the exclusion of other population groups, so that each group would be able to develop towards self determination without any group dominating or being dominated by the other.¹⁴³

Similar to the discourse which accompanied the establishment of the South African system of separate development, the Odendaal Commission claimed to have investigated the social welfare of the people in the then South West Africa and recommended how their lives could purportedly be improved. Following the Commission's recommendations, ethnic-based homelands were created in South West Africa with a political system of differentiation and exclusion.¹⁴⁴ During colonial Kavango only five groups¹⁴⁵ were recognized by the administration as the only 'real' inhabitants of the region while others were generally regarded and treated as outsiders. The earlier 'exotic' studies which seek to present people as distinct and homogenous did not treat the situation differently when it came to Kavango, instead they emphasized uniqueness and

¹⁴³ NAR/1/155 File BB/0276 SWA- A Five Year Plan- for the development of the Native Areas

¹⁴⁴ For more details on the Odendaal Commission and the creation of the Kavango 'homeland', see Nambadi (2007), Likuwa (2005), and Karapo (2008). These historians have looked into the pre-colonial history of Kavango and its inhabitants, the colonial conquest and finally the conception of Kavango as a homeland and the role of traditional authorities.

¹⁴⁵ This happens dominantly after the implementation of the recommendations of the Odendaal Commission of 1962-1963 which suggested the restructuring of the colonial state ideology and institutions from the conventional colonial racial hierarchy of 'white' and 'non-white' into eleven statutory 'national groups' such as 'the Herero', 'the Kavango' etc. with '*intra national*' groups such Vakwangali, Vashambyu, etc. (Gottschalk, 1987:30)

difference as conceived by the administration of the time. (Bosch, 1964; Kampungu, 1965; Van Tonder, 1966; Mohlig¹⁴⁶ cited in Gibson, et al. 1981)

The above proclamation was aimed to mainly control movement and regulate black contract labour. The South African policy of apartheid was introduced into SWA especially in area of education, influx control, the Immorality Act, the Mixed Marriage Act, separate residential areas and amenities. The introduction of ethnic administrative structures in the various homelands was introduced and strengthened through the implementation of ethnically based second tier governments. (Du Pisani, 1987:20) The legacy was based on the outcome of the Odendaal Commission Report of 1964 which propagated for the system of separate development and self government of the native nations in South West Africa. (Du Pisani, 1987:20) The legacy was a decreed restructuring of institutions and ideology from the conventional colonial racial hierarchy of 'white' and 'non-white' into eleven statutory national groups' such as the Herero, the Kavango, the Damara etc. (Gottschalk, 1987:30) Gottschalk argued that the Odendaal Plan was in that context also used to counter-act the fast developing political activities of the time inside and outside the country.

In the process various other activities such as the deployment of 'parastatal pseudo parties', such as *Ejuva* in Hereroland, *Etango* in Ovamboland and *Ezuva*¹⁴⁷ in Kavango, was used to counter the revolutionary politicization which was being advocated by SWAPO. (Gottschalk, 1987:31) My study will shows in chapter five that the activities of *Ezuva* in Kavango were aligned with the Department of Education and the military in order to counter the propaganda of SWAPO at the time. Teachers and students more particularly were the targets of *ezuva*. Although activities of *ezuva* are widely narrated by people in Kavango, few of those who participated were willing to speak about their experiences in the organization.

The Odendaal proposals were going to be meaningless unless legitimated, as a result Kavango Legislative Council was declared in 1970 and Rundu as its administrative district according to Act 54 of 1968. However, the council only got its full powers to operate three years later on the 9th April 1973. As a semi-autonomous state, it also had its Volk anthem and citizens were

¹⁴⁶ Mohlig's early work in Kavango is not readily available locally however he has of late with a local author Karel Shiyaka Mberema published a Rumanyo dictionary in 2005.

¹⁴⁷ *Ezuva*, *Ejuva* or *Etango* literary means 'sun'. I will speak about *Ezuva* in detail in the following chapter.

comprised of five population groupings namely the Vambukushu, Vagciriku, Vashambyu, Vambunza and Vakwangali respectively and they were expected to register in order to become full members of the ‘Kavango Volk’¹⁴⁸. As per legislation that was passed by the Legislative Council of Kavango, a member of the Kavango Volk¹⁴⁹ would be:

- Any black person born in Kavango before or after the legislation
- Any black person who has since settled in Kavango
- Any black person who could speak any of the Kavango languages
- Any black person who share the culture or have family relations in Kavango.

Upon registration they were to receive certificates with which they could claim ‘belonging’ to the ‘Kavango Volk’ This classification was further characterized by things such as physical attributes or appearances; any person who was believed not to meet the above criteria was deemed not a member of the Kavango Volk and would thus be excluded or fined if found to be in the territory of Kavango. In April 26th 1974 Jannie De Wet the then Commissioner-general of Native Affairs handed over the flag¹⁵⁰ of the Kavango Volk to Prime Minister Alfons Majavero who later became hompa of the Vambukushu people in 1983. At the ceremony preceded by ‘cultural’ dances the Commissioner-general said:

“Here on the southern point of Afrika lives a Kavango Volk:

- A Volk with its own origins
- A Volk with its own traditions
- A Volk with its character
- A Volk with five tribes united in one mighty Kavango nation”

As evidenced above, the administration of the time constructed Kavango as a ‘nation’ which comprises of five tribes which are distinct, unique with its own traditions. This task proved to be difficult for the Administration of Kavango¹⁵¹ especially when other population groups such as the San and Vanyemba were not legally acknowledged to be Kavango people despite their

¹⁴⁸ NAR/1/155 File F002-JX10006- KAVANGUDI (1973 April) homeland official newspaper published by the Department of Information.

¹⁴⁹ NAR/1/155 File F002-JX10006- KAVANGUDI (1973 April)

¹⁵⁰ NAR/1/155 File F002-JX10006- KAVANGUDI (1974 April)

¹⁵¹ The possible exclusion or inclusion of the San was debated later in many sessions of the Kavango Legislative Council just before the universal suffrage was to be held in the homeland in the 1970s.

historical ties to the land in question. The five groups whose settlement in the area had been officially acknowledged, had their histories of origin and settlements along the Kavango River disputed in contemporary Kavango; leading to the assumption that the identity of Kavango-ness would not be an amalgamation of these five ‘tribes’ only. This was questioned in certain quarters of the homeland then. I show later in chapter seven that such colonial identity constructions which were internalized became a subject of serious contestations in post colonial Kavango region of Namibia.

Later in 1977 on the 2nd of February the first signal of the local Kavango radio “Ezi Radio Kavango”¹⁵² (This is Radio Kavango) was heard. The radio was created for purposes of informing, educate, entertain and political propaganda¹⁵³. Kavango as a homeland actively participated in the activities of the time, especially administratively. Like all other homelands it had a way to represent and identify itself through a national flag and anthem as I discuss in detail in the following chapter. The anthem presented people of Kavango as a unique different nation which is situated near the Kavango River. In the anthem there is a metaphor of the river of darkness through which light breaks and bring hope. The nation on the banks of this river are presented as primitive and got light through hope which flows in the dark stream. It is this former colonially imagined ‘nation’ and various forms of ‘cultural’ representation then and now which forms the crust of this study in the post colonial moment. During my research and stay in Kavango, I have not heard or seen people singing the Kavango Anthem.

Kavango in contemporary discourse: a historical sanitization project

The notion of Kavango-ness continues to be contested in contemporary Namibia at all levels of society. As I observed during my fieldwork, such contestations seem to be oriented and rooted in matters related to access to resources and association to those in positions of power. To make sense of the above assertion I refer to ‘the Nyemba question’. The ‘Nyemba question’ in the context of local association and belonging is interesting and vital to understand the making of contemporary Kavango-ness. While being a Nyemba and belonging to Kavango-ness can be a reference point and observable evidence as I will demonstrate in the following chapters of the

¹⁵² NAR/1/55 File AP/7/1/1 Jaarverslag (Annual Report) 1978 Departement Van Onderwys- Kavango Regering

¹⁵³ The radio later becomes an important tool through which local ‘culture’ is contested by local inhabitants in contemporary Kavango as I will show in chapter eight.

thesis, local authors on Kavango such as Shiremo (2005; 2007; 2010), Likuwa (2006; 2007), and Kavango Elders (2007) suggest it is important to understand current debates and the political standing of the region according to historical perspectives which they argue has been influenced and shaped by various factors. Their focus is on the role of early European scholarship of history, ethnology and traders who visited the region during the initial stage of colonial conquest and periods thereafter. They argue that historical records were misrepresented and biased. As such they have contributed to the imagery of how Kavango is imagined in contemporary times.

This widely held perspective among the local academics and authors on the region was lately emphasized and debated after an article on the history of Kavango was published in 2007 in the *Journal of Namibian Studies: Reports from 'beyond the line'*: the accumulation of knowledge of Kavango and its peoples by the German colonial administration 1891-1911 by Andreas Eckl, a German historian. He has argued in his essay that the German colonial influence on the area was minimal and as such it can be argued that the region did not experience colonialism. Eckl (2007) emphasises that Kavango was always a region which still had to be brought under control, but actually never was. His arguments were based on archival documents of early German colonial officials' journals and correspondence about the region. While his article presents various examples and evidences about the colonial activities in the area until 1915, he argued that there was no influence which can really be argued to be colonial. The general deduction from Eckl's argument is that Kavango was not colonially subjugated, like other parts of South West Africa in the police zone, because Germany had less interest in the area and its people in the economic and political sense. Although Eckl (2007) argues that German interest in Kavango was mostly limited to its economic value rather than political domination, in fact his essay and sources¹⁵⁴ contain enough evidence to show otherwise.

It was partly this essay which led to a responsive conference¹⁵⁵, held in the Kavango region, and sponsored by the National Archives with funds from the Archives of Anti-Colonial Resistance and the Liberation Struggle (AACRLS) themed 'Recording and Restoring our Part in the Past'. The conference was organized by two young local historians Romanus Shampapi Shiremo and

¹⁵⁴ Debate between Shiremo, Likuwa and Fisch also contain sufficient evidence with regard to the colonial role of Germany in Kavango.

¹⁵⁵ I was also invited to present a paper in this conference. My paper was titled: 'Independence Day in Rundu, Northeastern Namibia: Representations of local and national culture'

Kletus Muhena Likuwa whose presentations detailed documentary and oral perspectives of the German colonial influence and argued that interactions and cordial relations existed with certain local chiefs and these only became sour later in time. Eckl¹⁵⁶ was also invited to present a response to the debate in the conference, but he did not make it. Among those who presented papers on the history of Kavango at the conference was the current Minister of Home Affairs Rosalia Nghidinwa whose paper was on the South African occupation and Karel Mberema Shiyaka who spoke on the role of German missionaries and the Catholic mission. The role and influences of the German colonial presence during the late nineteenth century in Kavango specifically became the focal point of the debate. Essays by local authors, including those presented at the 2007 conference, present evidence to the contrary; they showed that there was significant colonial interest in the area such as attempts to convert local people to Christianity and eventual use of labour services in the envisaged farming industry near the river. (Mutorwa, 1994; Shiremo, 2005; Likuwa, 2006; Shiremo, 2007; Shiremo, 2010)

Officially the area came under German colonial rule after 1886 when the German colonial administration signed an agreement with Portugal on the demarcation of spheres and the Kavango River was defined as the border line. (Hangula, 1991:118-124 as cited in Eckl, 2007) At present the German colonial role and impact in Kavango is being disputed in the debate, although it is unquestionable and there is considerable evidence that the area has indeed been immensely affected by foreign influence from the first contacts of colonization. (Eckl, 2007:10-12)

The debate¹⁵⁷ about the colonial influence in Kavango did not spare the former state ethnologist Dr. Maria Fisch who has written extensively on the region. Fisch as the colonial ethnologist was widely regarded as an authoritative source on the culture of Kavango during the colonial time. The accuracy and scientific credibility of her work, or rather the problems associated with this, forms part of the debate ongoing between Fisch and historians from the Kavango region. One major bone of contention was the role and influence of German colonialism in the area of Kavango as debated by Eckl (2007), (see, Shiremo and Likuwa 2007. The other issue was the

¹⁵⁶ According to the conference organizers he told them that he could not make it.

¹⁵⁷ The debate about colonial control and influence in Kavango had been ongoing between Shiremo and Fisch on the sidelines before the article by Eckl was published in 2007.

more general question as to whether ‘whites can write our history?’¹⁵⁸, as contained in one of the letters from Likuwa who responded to the discussion between Shiremo and Fisch. Likuwa’s letter to the debating parties advocated the objective representation of historical perspectives irrespective of whether the authors were white or black.

On the first point, while Eckl suggested that German colonialism had only had minimal colonial influence in the area, Shiremo (2007) and Likuwa (2007) argued that the influence was significant and has contributed to the current image of Kavango and how it is imagined. This interaction was mainly between Fisch and Shiremo a historian from Kavango and it was in the form of letters. These communications¹⁵⁹ were sent to people perceived to be knowledgeable about matters of Kavango by the two actors and thus referred to as Kavango Elders. The debate between Shiremo and Fisch in 2006 ended short of being taken to court for adjudication, as Maria Fisch did not take the engagement kindly.

Subsequently Shiremo enrolled for graduate studies at the University of Namibia and produced an MA thesis on Kavango hompas and their relations with the early Germans, British and finally South Africans in 2010. His focus was on the reign of Hompa Nyangana of the Vagciriku and neighbouring kingdoms. In his thesis he argued and presented Hompa Nyangana to have been protective of his territory’s sovereignty against outsiders and not just a blood thirsty tyrant as presented in various travelers’ accounts who visited that part of Kavango. His investigation also dealt with the relationship between Hompa Nyangana and Catholic missionaries whom he invited to set mission stations in his area and present it as evidence of German colonial influence and interaction with people in Kavango.

As a ‘would be author’ on Kavango I agree with local perspectives that the current imagination of Kavango is informed by earlier authors of the region and the current generation of scholars will do the same. The role of academic authors in any historical context is of particular importance and those who write always have an agenda. However the same can be said for the contemporary writings of the region. To date the region remains excluded from the academic debate especially in history. History is integral in young democracies specifically in the context

¹⁵⁸ The letter is dated 31 July 2006

¹⁵⁹ Correspondences of the debate and subsequent legal action between those concerned, primarily Shiremo and Fisch, were deposited in the National Archives of Namibia and are available for perusal.

of creating national narratives of belonging. Even in this time of independence¹⁶⁰ the region is constantly in a struggle to locate itself within the national discourse of belonging and public history. A historical publication in the project 'Trees never meet' in 1998 is a good example to illuminate the above assertions. Although the project meant to address research and publication gap on Namibia, it in itself just created another dilemma. Even though the book title presents a perspective which suggests representation of the whole country, it has omitted a large constituency which makes a Namibian history. Notable absentees are histories of Kavango, Caprivi, and San. Editors of the book were apologetic about this omission, and presented the publication as a beginning of more to come, although nothing more of that came.

Conclusion

In the first half of the chapter I discussed the representation of local history in myths and legends and how it is appropriated in the contemporary Kavango. I have shown how they are used to signify contemporary notions of belonging and difference especially among the ethnic groups which were previously officially recognized and those that were not. Contestations of these historical narratives are not only limited to those who were not recognized, but even amidst those who were recognized and claim to belong to the Kavango.

The above narratives show an imagined Kavango according to the Odendaal Report as land with its distinct population with its own language and traditional practices which are different from others within South West Africa. The idea was also to be signified by the various apparatus such as delimitation of borders, anthems, flags and subsequent sensitization through various 'cultural' activities such as festivals which are the core of this study. The above quotations show how the ideal citizen of Kavango was made in colonial South West Africa. Such makings were useless unless they were internalized by citizens through social practices such as gatherings to celebrate what was locally known as 'independence day of Kavango' or the 'day of the flag'. On the day of the flag, Kavango was presented as a distinct 'nation' with unique traditions and character composed of only five tribes by the Commissioner-general. In the political context of the time such occasions of pomp and ceremonies with full representation of colonial authority were used to emphasise the ideology of difference and awareness of unwanted communist influences from

¹⁶⁰ Local people in Namibia refer to the postcolonial period as independence time.

outside the borders of South West Africa. Before and after Kavango was declared a homeland various expeditions of missionaries, traders, colonial officials and academics happened and my argument is that they had everything to do with the future shape of Kavango identity. Missionaries' work supported colonial administration in terms of providing information about the 'natives' and their way of life the future colonial activities including the Odendaal plan. The above discussion has demonstrated how the various administrative politics and historical social formation has influenced the Kavango and its people. In the following chapter, I discuss the making of the colonial sangfees and its transition towards the introduction of the postcolonial Annual National Culture Festival.



Chapter 5: The making of the colonial festival: ‘sangfees’

Introduction

In this study, I investigate the creation of the colonial festival known formerly as the ‘sangfees’ in Kavango and the transition towards the introduction of the postcolonial Annual National Culture Festival in Namibia during 1995. I will show through presentation of memory narratives and official archival sources that the colonial festival contained a public discourse which underlies politics of difference and belonging that created a sense of distinctness among the people of Kavango. In the postcolonial context when the festival was introduced and held in all thirteen regions of Namibia it pursued the creation of a celebration of ‘unity in diversity’. As I have observed from my research sources, the new festival follows the colonial model of representation. However, I must state that although the postcolonial culture festival is modeled in part on its colonial predecessor; it is different in conception and ideology. As shown elsewhere in the dissertation, the postcolonial festival was created in terms of a narrative that tolerates ‘diversity’ in accordance with the constitutional democracy, unlike the sangfees which was meant to enhance the distinctness of the ‘homeland population’ and its relationship to other Bantustans homelands of South West Africa. Significantly, the research data appears to show the festival in all historical contexts to be a social space where belonging and difference were expressed and represented through a process of performance. I emphasize that we should comprehend these notions of difference and belonging-ness within the social and political contexts that created them.

In this chapter, I use the memory narratives of my research participants and archive sources to sketch the inception of the culture festival which was officially known as the ‘*sangfees*¹⁶¹’ in colonial South West Africa; my discussion will focus on the late colonial Kavango homeland. I pay attention to the Department of Education and the Division of Youth in the homeland administration of Kavango as producers of the festival in order to show their role in the construction of the ‘Kavango identity’ through culture activities. I describe some of the

¹⁶¹ Sangfees literary translates as Song festival in English.

activities, which were held at Maria Mwengere Camp¹⁶² locally known as *Ekongoro*¹⁶³ during the late colonial period only, as I deal with activities of the postcolonial period which happens at the same space in the following chapter. Maria Mwengere Camp¹⁶⁴ was built on a prime 300ha piece of land near the stream of Nua not far from the Kavango River, and donated in the late 1970s by Shambyu Hompa Maria Mwengere to the administration for the construction of a new building. It was locally believed that Ekongoro was a mythical water serpent living in that stream. However, there are conflicting accounts as to whether Hompa Maria Mwengere was approached by the Department of Education or the South African Army to provide land for the envisaged ‘youth’ activities. As I argued in the preceding chapter, this festival at Maria Mwengere Camp signified the type of Kavango-ness that the colonial administration envisaged in the invention of the earlier tribal trust fund, and the Odendaal Plan. Here I argue that the colonial festival was a response to the fast-growing politics of struggle/emancipation led by the Swapo movement inside and across the border.

Secondly, I focus on the introduction of a postcolonial festival which I previously discussed in chapter two. I analyse the making of the postcolonial festival as a response to public discourse of difference and belonging that emerged immediately after Namibia attained its independence. People in Namibia expressed sentiments of difference and belonging in radio chat shows and other media. This expressed desire of difference and belonging was not in line with the envisaged popular ‘One Namibia, One Nation’ slogan before independence and shortly afterwards.

In Namibia, I argue that political issues such as the Basterland question in Rehoboth and a failed succession attempt in the Caprivi region in northeastern Namibia, access to resources and recognition of people in civil institution of the state served as important indicators to the state

¹⁶² The Department of Youth held custody of the Maria Mwengere Camp. The name was changed to Maria Mwengere Culture Center after the postcolonial festival was introduced.

¹⁶³ Ekongoro is a mythical serpent, believed to be staying in the Kavango River. The word is also locally used to refer to the rainbow. The contemporary notion of Ekongoro as a rainbow referred to the number of ethnic groups resident in Kavango and united.

¹⁶⁴ One of the senior culture officers who had worked at the centre for some time and whom I cannot identify asserts that it was the army which came up with the idea of requesting land from the hompa under the guise of organizing “youth activities” which were vaguely explained. The real intention for the state to request land it can be argued was to construct a centre which would be used to launch a political and psychological warfare which would influence young people to be against SWAPO movement and its ideals.

about the need to adjust its nationalism discourse from ‘One Namibia, One Nation, to ‘Unity in diversity’. The two scenarios in independent Namibia are generally believed to be motivated by the politics of ethnicity. First, during the first decade of independence in Namibia certain sections of the population groupings in the Caprivi under the leadership of traditional and political leaders such as Chief Boniface Mamili of the Mafwe and Mishake Muyongo of the United Democratic Party advocated for the secession of the region from the rest of Namibia, but their first military attempt was foiled by the state in 1998. Secondly, in Rehoboth, the former Baster leaders under Kaptein Hans Diergaardt who served in the second tier local government within the colonial framework, refused to be part of the new national government in 1990 and even went to court in order to prevent postcolonial state processes such as the constitution and new land delimitation. (KjÆret & Stokke, 2003; The New York Times, 1990; New Era, 2009; The Namibian, 2009) The two scenarios above are not absolute and authoritative contexts; there are other social spaces in postcolonial Namibia where sentiments of belonging and association are expressed. For instance Becker (2011) in her essay on commemorating heroes in Namibia, reports that many of her interlocutors were concerned with the memorial association with ethnicity and regionalism. Her research focus was the Heroes’ Acre built to celebrate and commemorate the heroes of Namibia. She argued that the war aftermath was not able to establish national symbols that would foster national identity. In her analysis Becker 2011 suggests that the postcolonial sites do not specifically resonate with Namibians from the central and southern regions of the country who had little direct experience of the armed struggle.

It is also evident that culture festivals were introduced due to the lucrative heritage industry which was gaining momentum during the 1990s as reported by Fairweather (2001) in Namibia and the Comaroffs (2009) in a more general southern African context. The postcolonial state encouraged its citizens to participate in the heritage industry which was emerging fast in relation to the tourism sector. Fairweather’s (2006) focus on the northern regions of Namibia shows that cultural tourism as the state’s strategy for development required the articulation of local identities with reference to a global tourism market that seeks to construct contemporary postcolonial subjects as dwelling in a homogenized traditional past. In the following section I present the outline of and analysis of the administration of education in Kavango as a colonial homeland, with the focus on the conception of the sangfees at Ekongoro.

The Department of Education, Administration for Kavango

Under the pre-independence homeland dispensation, government departments with executive powers such as finance, works, home affairs, health and education were created in Kavango. My interest is the Department of Education, which was the vehicle through which Kavango-ness was asserted. The Department of Education was headed by Rudolph Ngondo as a minister in the then homeland (multi-party) government. It was administrated by Louis Burger who served as the secretary of the department. The Department of Education created a Youth Division which I will discuss later within the context of the colonial sangfees.

Although Ngondo was the political face of the homeland administration, it was Burger who managed the Department of Education as secretary. Ngondo¹⁶⁵ was not only a minister in government, but also a prominent business man and farmer in the region. Burger on the other hand is narrated in my interviews as a planner and educator whose ideals shaped the educational discourse of the time.

In 1974 the Kavango homeland administration issued a legislative directive¹⁶⁶ on the possible institution of a ‘youth¹⁶⁷ movement’. In accordance with the legislative directive of the time the movement would give the youth an opportunity to “know” their (Volk) nation. The envisaged movement would keep the youth occupied in many aspects of their lives and as result they would not be easily influenced by foreign factors. The document outlined all the possible activities of the youth movement and how the youth of Kavango could become involved in them. Activities such as weekend workshops in which the youth would be taught needlework, nature

¹⁶⁵ At the moment he is involved in matters of the Ukwangali Traditional Authority where he serves as chairman of the Traditional Council.

¹⁶⁶ NAR/1/55/ File F002-JX10006 KAVANGUDI (May 1974)

¹⁶⁷ Mufune (2002:179) who writes in the postcolonial context suggests that youth is an elastic concept and it is socially constructed. The social construction of ‘youth’ is determined by various rites and initiations which people undergo in their life time. In Namibia the social category youth is used variably by those who are in positions of power including the ruled. Although there are no clear indications of induction into age systems, the category youth in this context was used to refer to a portion of population which fell under a particular age group. This particular population group had to be managed differently from the rest of the citizens, because of its social character. In the context of this study and historical period concerned the youth was deemed volatile by the authorities of the time. Thus due to complexities of exactly determining who the youth is, it is just fair to regard it as part of the negotiations and contestations of the cultural process. In the colonial context under discussion it was necessary to have a legislation which would regulate activities of the youth.

conservation, woodwork, agriculture, ‘traditional’ medicine, ‘traditional’ dances and their ‘culture’ would be held. Bible studies and history were also part of the workshops, purportedly to enhance the love of the Kavango nation and its culture. Most importantly it was stipulated that youth be made aware of the negative influences of foreign ‘cultures’ and the importance of embracing and nurturing their own culture.

The above ‘youth’ activities are worthy of consideration. First of all, these activities were designed according to the perceived needs of each homeland; in this case Kavango and its people. The population in the homeland needed to be aware of their identity and that they belonged to the Kavango ‘nation’. Such awareness was created through teaching the youth how to sing the Kavango Volkslied¹⁶⁸ (Kavango anthem) and appreciate other symbols such as the Kavango flag which was meant to signify belonging and allegiance to the homeland. The Volkslied was sung at all official occasions. The Volkslied signified the Kavango River as a very important space, which brought hope of civilization to the people of the homeland and woke them from the slumber of doom. The singing of an anthem constructed an image of a distinct and separate people in Kavango, different from the rest of the population in the South West African territory. Other activities such as ‘tribal’¹⁶⁹ dances, nature conservation and woodwork created a sense of essentialism, primitiveness¹⁷⁰ and being close to nature. Bible studies and history were instrumental for the operatives of the homeland administration especially in the activities of *Ezuva* which was covertly presented as a ‘youth movement’ in legislation. I will discuss *Ezuva* and its activities in detail shortly. The Bible and its teachings were seen by the authority as a necessary instrument to secure the submission of the inhabitants, specifically the youth, to their parents and especially to the ‘tribal’ authority and the state.

Through participating in ‘tribal’ activities the youth were meant to learn about the workings and rules of their ‘tribe’ and to respect its authorities. The youth which would participate was categorized in three age categories from 7-11 junior groups, 12-15 senior group and 16-20 to be known as the Kavango Youth Organization. It was from the latter group that future soldiers, police officers, nature conservation officers and firemen were to be sourced.

¹⁶⁸ See the Kavango Volkslied.

¹⁶⁹ Authorities at the time refer to leaders of specific ethnic groups as tribal leaders, and since then the term has been locally appropriated. In this study I use it according to that context.

¹⁷⁰ See the Kavango Volkslied.

As I mentioned earlier, the directive under discussion cannot be viewed in isolation from the political situation of the time. The period between 1970 and 1978 saw the SWAPO¹⁷¹ movement intensify its propaganda and ideology of liberation and independence inside the country as the official year report of the administration in 1978 shows:

‘Met die opbouende politieke onrus oor die grense was ‘n vol program vir die jaar georganiseer. Saamtrekke is vanoor die hele gebied (gehou) waar die jeug dan vir ‘n volle week onnderrig ontvang in onderwerpe soos gesondheid, nasionalisme, eerstehulp, padveiligheid, ens. Dit dien ook as saamtrekke vir groot sangfeeste wat op nasionale basis gehou word. Groot getalle ouers en belangstellendes woon hierdie feeste by en hierdie belangstelling is baie verblydend.¹⁷²’

‘Given the tense political developments across the borders, a full year programme was prepared. Gatherings will be held in the whole territory where the youth will attend workshops and be taught on topics such as health, nationalism, first aid, road safety etc. These rallies will also serve as sangfees (festivals) which would be held nationally. Large numbers of parents and other interested people attend these festivals and this interest is pleasing.’

The above period as noted by the administration at the time marked an exodus of young people leaving from South West Africa to Angola. They went into exile to join SWAPO, which through its political ideology of liberation and independence attracted a lot of young people. The majority of young people in the homelands of South West Africa became sensitized about the SWAPO movement and began to cross borders into neighboring Angola, Zambia and Botswana respectively so that they could join the SWAPO movement which at the time led a liberation struggle from outside the country¹⁷³.

The homeland administration also designed a counter-process inside which included the introduction of festivals then referred to as *sangfees* at school level and other movements such as

¹⁷¹ SWAPO stands for South West Africa People’s Organisation. It was a liberation movement which was transformed into a political party in 1989 just before the elections which preceded the independence of Namibia. It has since become the Swapo Party.

¹⁷² NAR/1/55 File AP/7/1/1 Jaarverslag (Annual Report) 1978 Departement Van Onderwys- Kavango Regering

¹⁷³ NAR/1/55 File AP/7/1/2 Jaarverslag (Annual Report) 1978, Kavango Regering (TOP SECRET)

Ezuva with activities which targeted young people. The *sangfees* that I will deal with shortly was of particular importance within that historical context as it became a social space which the state mediated, and through it the political agenda was advocated. The report above indicates the importance for the state to organize gatherings and workshops for the ‘youth’ so that they were kept busy and did not become involved in political activities across the borders. One can suspect that the tense political situation referred to was (inter alia) the brutal 1978 massacre of people carried out at Cassinga, a SWAPO refugee camp in Angola.

However, I argue that the creation of the *sangfees* was not initiated without the involvement of local people, as I have shown elsewhere in the postcolonial context. Local people at the time, especially those who were in the civil service, and students were encouraged to participate and support the envisaged *sangfees*. As Robert Mukoroli, a local artist and former employee of the Camp, and Irma Jericho a former student and teacher at the time said in an interview:

‘Kwa kaliro ira mpo yetu kuna kufa, makura lighano lyakurambwita mpo yetu lya tovalire. Lighano linya lya tovalile.’¹⁷⁴

Our culture was seen to be dying, and it was a good idea to have culture performances and tradition revived. It was quite a good idea.

‘Soos ek, ek het daar gegaan maar nie met die weermag nie. Ons het daar gegaan met onse skoolhoof. En ons het bybel studie en ander dinge gaan doen en vir die hele week daar gebly. Ons het bybels en gesang boekies saam gevat. Ons het ook nuwe liederere gaan leer. Ons het ook politiek gaan leer. Die jong seuns het gaan leer hoe om te paradeer.’¹⁷⁵

Like myself, I went to the youth camp but not with the army. We went with our school principal. We did bible study and other activities and stayed there for a week period. We took our bibles and song books with and also learned new songs. We were also taught about the politics of the time. The young boys were trained how to parade.

The above quotation shows how people in Kavango perceived the idea of the *sangfees*. Although the inception of the *sangfees* was an administrative idea, local people participated in its

¹⁷⁴ Interview with Linyando Manfred Mukoroli, joined by Kletus Muhena Likuwa at Safari, Rundu, 16 January 2009.

¹⁷⁵ Interview with Irma Jericho at Tutungeni, Rundu on 18 December 2008.

realization. They were not passive, as Mukoroli shows above. That is why when the idea was initiated in the late 1970s to establish youth camps in the various ‘tribal’ authorities namely Kwangali, Mbunza, Shambyu, Gciricku and Mbukushu, ‘traditional’ leaders supported the initiative. In hindsight I view it as a welcome step for the so called ‘traditional’ leaders¹⁷⁶ who then became unpopular among the young people who felt that they supported and were loyal to the colonial administration. However as I will show shortly in the section of *Ezuva*, there was an official element of secrecy which was not made known to all participants in this state project. For instance young male students and teachers who went to the camps did not know that they were to receive paramilitary training. Participants encountered certain practices that were not communicated to them prior to their participation and it was such new revelations that raised suspicion among people. Local people thought and believed that if the younger ones went to the camps they would be taught what their culture was, that they would grow better as people with identity and a sense of belonging, as Karel Shiyaka told me:

‘The aim of organizing the youth and camps as we were told was to educate them about their traditional, ancestral culture, lest they forget their culture’¹⁷⁷.

The idea of creating awareness of difference and belonging were not confined to planning documents or directed only at the youth. Older people were also targeted when they attended functions sanctioned by the state as I show now. The ceremony in question featured cultural performances, when the flag¹⁷⁸ of the Kavango Volk was unveiled and hoisted for the first time in 1974. Jannie de Wet; the then Commissioner-General of Native Affairs had this to say:

‘Here on the southern point of Africa lives a Kavango Volk’¹⁷⁹:

- A Volk with its own origins
- A Volk with its own traditions
- A Volk with its character

¹⁷⁶ When the various tribal governments/authorities were established local leaders were collectively referred to as chiefs or traditional leaders and not a kings or queens.

¹⁷⁷ Interview with Karel Mberema Shiyaka, Maria Mwingere Culture Centre, Rundu, 23 September 2008.

¹⁷⁸ The color of the flag was green

¹⁷⁹ “Volk” is hard to translate into English. It is “people”(in the singular), as in “ethnic group”, but also has the connotation of “nation”.

A Volk with five tribes united in one mighty Kavango nation’

The above quotation is very interesting. Firstly, I notice how the administration utilized cultural performance as a resource to disseminate its ideology and emphasize its imagined ‘nation’ to the local people. While cultural performances at gatherings such as the one referred to above were conceived by local people as an attempt to resurrect their ‘dead culture and tradition’ and a learning experience for the young people as described by Mukoroli, the authorities regarded the events as a social space in which it could express its ideas of belonging to the Kavango nation and homeland as imagined and created in the Odendaal Plan. For the young Jericho then, it was a school-related project in which they participated and enjoyed as she further told me in our discussion. Although the talk of the then Commissioner-general shows a picture of a distinct nation with its character, I think the authorities saw it as a ritual of association and belonging. However, it is the type of association and belonging that we should contextualize historically and politically. In fact Rudolf Ngondo who at the time was the Minister of Education in the homeland administration interprets the commissioner-general’ opening address as follows:

‘Nasinye sina kwa kere ekambadaro lyo kutura muntu omu gahamena¹⁸⁰,

‘It was an attempt to place people where they belonged’

His inference suggests that the emphasis of the notion of ‘Volk’ by the state was an effort to illuminate the imagined difference and uniqueness which existed between the various homelands and people within. In the process people would internalize the idea of belonging and believe that they belonged to a particular ethnic group and in that way, it was a required outcome, as stated in the homeland’s annual report for 1978. While local people and student participated in the state projects of homeland nationalism, there were those who shunned and defied these efforts. Two former students¹⁸¹ of Rundu Secondary School at the time told me in a mocking manner that after the Cassinga massacre of 1978 when SWAPO exiles were attacked by the South African forces, they secretly planned a commemorative demonstration at school. However, their plan was uncovered and reported to the authorities at the time. The Minister of Education as expected

¹⁸⁰ Interview held with Rudolf Ngondo, 15 January 2010 at Katjinakatji.

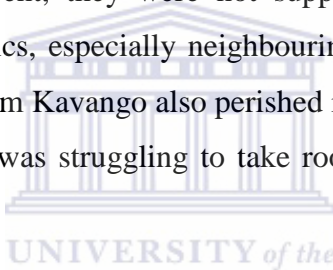
¹⁸¹ I will not reveal names of these students here for ethical reasons.

came to address the students and urged them not to participate in the planned demonstration. In this gathering of the minister he asked the students:

‘Yilye gweni mwa diva ka kafire Kokasinga? Yilye? Mutumbureni paapa ngesi! Walye omuli vonga vonga moyininke yaana divilisa. Tengureni muze kosure mu la lironge!’¹⁸²

‘Who do you know that is related to you was killed in Kasinga? Who is it? Mention him now! Why do you want to involve yourself in matters which you do not know and do not concern you? Go back to school and study!’

As a state official and representative, he implicitly enforced the ideology of difference in that regard. SWAPO’s political matters were commonly believed to be rife and concentrated in the Ovamboland area. For Ngondo, as long as students were not able to mention the names of their relatives who had died in the event, they were not supposed to be concerned with issues informed by other homeland politics, especially neighbouring Ovambo. Apart from significant evidence suggesting that people from Kavango also perished in the Cassinga massacre, they were fellow Namibians: a concept that was struggling to take root in the extant political and social climate.



In the next section I look at the creation of the colonial sangfees in the Division of Youth in detail. The Youth Division was an important arm of the Department of Education. It produced activities targeting the young people at the time. As I will show, young people were a very important population target for the administration, especially during the mounting political tensions in South Africa (as the administrative centre,) and the South West African territory. The administration designed a “Hearts-and-Minds” campaign that had secret roots in the army, as I will show in the discussion of Ezuva as one of the projects designed for that purpose.

Division of Youth and Culture Affairs:

A Division of Youth and Culture affairs was created within the department of education. It was headed by Elrich Pretorius. He was assisted by Robert Mupiri from 1974. Pretorius, a white Afrikaner, came to work as a teacher in Kavango homeland; he was later promoted to senior

¹⁸² My research field notes.

officer in the Division of Youth and Culture Affairs within the Department of Education. He also had a background training of some Volkekunde at university level¹⁸³. He was the son-in-law of Louis Burger who was the secretary of education in Kavango at the time. It was rumoured among those who worked in the department at the time that Pretorius was given the position, because of his relationship with Burger.

Mupiri was appointed as 'youth' officer. He was a qualified teacher. However, he was not given a teaching post at a secondary school in his 'tribal' district Gciriku as he wished, because of his refusal to take up the position of youth officer to which the administration wanted to appoint him¹⁸⁴. The administration already wanted to appoint him as secretary of the Kavango government while he was still doing secondary education; a position he refused to take, because of his ambition to become a teacher. He stayed in the Division for six months and resigned to join the radio service of Suid Wes Afrika Uitsending Korporasie (SWAUK) in Kavango. He worked for the corporation until he was later promoted to be a chief of radio and television services of Ovamboland, Kavango and Caprivi respectively.

The first youth camp was built in Mbunza and named after Hompa Leevi Hakusembe; however, the centre of activities became *Ekongoro* which was built in Shambyu on the outskirts of Rundu and also named after Hompa Maria Mwengere of the Vashambyu people. The Youth camp was regarded by the colonial administration as a space where young people would meet and learn about the 'culture' of Kavango. As I will show later in the discussion, the youth camp had rules and regulations to guide the young people attending cultural activities at the camp.

Three other camps were constructed in Ukwangali (named after Hompa Kandjimi Hauanga) in Gciriku (named after Hompa Linus Shashipapo) and in Mbukushu (named after Hompa Frans Dimbare). It appears that these camps were given the names of the traditional leaders in the homeland in order to give them prominence and significance among the local inhabitants. District leaders responsible for camps in various traditional areas were recruited and trained how to recruit and organize the young people, and to manage the camp environments in their respective districts. The organization and recruitment of young people entailed visiting local schools and selecting students who would participate in the *sangfees*. District leaders also had to

¹⁸³ Personal communication with Elrich Pretorius at Maria Mwengere Culture Centre Rundu during 2008.

¹⁸⁴ Interview with Robert Mupiri at Tutungeni, Rundu on 19 October 2008.

facilitate teacher training and workshops on activities of the sangfees such as the composition of songs for a *sangbundel*¹⁸⁵ (song collection).

The schools brought the student groups¹⁸⁶ that won to perform in the finals at Ekongoro in Rundu. The songs in the *sangbundel* were the Kavango anthem, Christian hymns and choir songs. The *sangbundel* also incorporated so-called ‘traditional songs’¹⁸⁷, which participants sang in order to get points. It was the duty of the state official at the four camps, under the leadership of Elrich Pretorius, to collect and record songs and stories about the inhabitants of Kavango from people in their surround. The intention was to have a collection of ‘traditional songs’ which represented and reflected the image and style of the five so-called ‘tribes’ in Kavango. The camp also organized competitions in the five ‘tribal areas’ from which the best items would be selected for the museum¹⁸⁸.

In the course of 1978, the Maria Mwingere Camp was upgraded to a fully-fledged functional culture center with a museum, botanical garden, dormitories, kitchen and dining hall, administrative office block and a house for the senior youth officer. The center was run by Elrich Pretorius¹⁸⁹. Future youth visitors at the center would be accommodated in the dormitories. Later the center also served as a sanctuary to house injured wild animals such as lions, hyenas, birds and reptiles such as snakes and crocodiles. An amphitheatre with about 300 seats was erected a few metres from the stream of Nua. Constructed out of limestone, it had a stage area where participants would perform their dances and songs. A stage on ‘wheels’ was used for the choirs, which were organized along the lines of voices and tunes. The museum¹⁹⁰ at the centre housed a collection of ‘traditional artifacts’ such as fish traps, baskets, snakes found in the Kavango, milk containers, clothing and etc. The Kavango museum never really opened to

¹⁸⁵ NAR/1/55 File AP/7/1/1 Jaarverslag (Annual Report) 1978 Departement Van Onderwys- Kavango Regering

¹⁸⁶ My wife who was part of the school children who came to Ekongoro at the time recounted some of the events which happened at Ekongoro especially towards the final years of colonialism in Namibia.

¹⁸⁷ The officials at the centre selected the type of songs to be performed and bound them in the *sangbundel*.

¹⁸⁸ I will expand this discussion in the next chapter.

¹⁸⁹ By the time the camp became operational, Robert Mupiri who was supposed to assist Pretorius had already left the division of youth.

¹⁹⁰ There were other museums countrywide at the time as documented by Schildkrout (1995), in towns such as Tsumeb, Rehoboth, Windhoek, Swakopmund although their display narratives were about landscapes, colonial economy, natural minerals and local histories of early white settler. Some of them had ethnographic exhibits that show the “traditional” African culture displayed either in the ethnographic present or in conjunction with the stone tools suggesting the ancient sub-strata of human occupation in various regions.

the public; however its collection¹⁹¹ started to disappear one by one, as some local people borrowed items and never returned them. The officer in charge of the museum during 2008 intimated to me that the change in management after the departure of Pretorius and a purported lack of interest among the staff members contributed to the gradual disintegration of the museum¹⁹².

Staff at the various camps were requested by the head of the camp to suggest and advise how a traditional Kavango homestead was to be erected in the museum¹⁹³. In a form of a plan, they had to present a Kavango homestead with key aspects of the five 'tribal' groupings such as the main courtyard, the husband and wife's court, boys' and girls' courts and a kitchen area, to serve as a model of the traditional Kavango house or village. All these artifacts were catalogued and the oral narratives collected during research were summarized succinctly in booklet form to supposedly provide visitors with an abstract idea of Kavango culture. The 'culture book'¹⁹⁴, as it is officially known still today contained background stories of the origin and settlement patterns of the five tribal groupings of Kavango. It was authored by the culture officer at *Ekongoro* and the model continues to be used in postcolonial Kavango.

The centre was operated according to ten laws of Ekongoro which I discuss in detail shortly. The laws are printed on an A8 hard copy paper. This document also contains the emblem of Ekongoro which was a brown eagle with its prey engraved in the homeland colour of green. Beneath the eagle and its prey in claws was the motto: *upampi moyirugana yaKavango* which literary means 'to be hard working and committed in/to the works of Kavango'. The laws were printed in Afrikaans as following:

1. 'n Lid van Ekongoro is 'n gelowige.
2. Hy ondersteun Wet en orde.
3. Hy is altyd eerlik en opreg

¹⁹¹ Several items were borrowed by local teachers who used the artifacts as teaching aids at schools. A museum in Netherland overseas also borrowed items for exchange from the museum during my stay of research at Maria Mwangere Culture Centre. As I was left the centre, preparation were being made to ship the artifacts.

¹⁹² My field notes.

¹⁹³ Interview with Linyando Manfred Mukoroli, joined by Kletus Muhena Likuwa at Safari, Rundu, 16 January 2009.

¹⁹⁴ However, the currently booklet used unlike its predecessor includes the Vanyemba and Vachokwe and the San groups which were previously excluded. I will speak about the 'culture booklet' in detail in chapter 6.

4. Hy is vriendelik en behulpsaam
5. Hy is hardwerkend en spaarsaam.
6. Hy is n liefhebber van die natuur.
7. Hy respekteer die ouers
8. Hy eer sy volk¹⁹⁵ se kultuur.
9. Hy het erns met sy studies.
10. Hy is vriendelik.

The above is literary translated as following:

1. A member of Ekongoro is a believer
2. He supports law and order
3. He is always honest and sincere
4. He is friendly and willing to help
5. He is hardworking and economical
6. He is a lover of nature
7. He respects the elders
8. He honours his nation's culture
9. He takes his studies seriously
10. He is friendly.



Anyone who wanted to be part of the Ekongoro activities had to conform to these principles. This shows clearly what kind of citizens the administration wanted to create in Kavango. One interesting feature of the above rules and expectation was the manner in which they (rules) were written; in a masculine form. And when I relate the rules to the legislative directive which was passed during the 1970s about the possible creation of a ‘youth movement’, it ties in with the idea of grooming civil servants, police officers and soldiers who were predominantly male at the time. One can safely argue that females were not yet readily recruited into the state services especially the police and the army¹⁹⁶. What also stands out in the rules of Ekongoro were rules

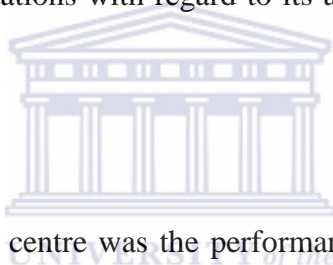
¹⁹⁵ “Volk” is hard to translate into English. It is “people”(in the singular), as in “ethnic group”, but also has the connotation of “nation”.

¹⁹⁶ The young men were also encouraged to join the South African army or the homeland police services. For example see the advert shown in the quarterly newspaper of the Department of Education which was edited by

number 3, 7 and 8 respectively. Rule number 7 and 8 can be read in connection to what I said earlier above about the deteriorating relations which existed between ‘traditional leaders’ and the young people at the time. The above rule would make the ‘youth’ submit to what the ‘elders’ had to say in order to be seen to honour their nation and ‘cultures’, a situation that would also bring them under the control of the traditional authorities. With the above infrastructure in place the centre was open to the public and indeed attracted a lot of visitors. Parents could also bring their younger children to Ekongoro for weekend outings to come and see the animals kept at the centre. They were also taken on a museum tour especially during the early days of its existence. Through these and related activities Ekongoro was made attractive to all among the young and old people of the time.

Next I will focus on the sangfees as a main important activity at Ekongoro in order to show and discuss its model and local contestations with regard to its alleged connectedness to Ezuva and its subsequent demise.

Sangfees at Ekongoro



The most important activity at the centre was the performance of traditional dances and songs which were presented during the annual *sangfees*. Participants were winners from schools in various ‘tribal areas’. The performances were held in a competition form. A detailed circular¹⁹⁷ was annually circulated to all the schools and district leaders at various camps inviting and urging them to attend the *sangfees*. It also contained the details of the compulsory song item which every group ought to perform at the sangfees. The finals were held in the amphitheatre of the Maria Mwengere youth camp. The gathering at the amphitheatre was always large.

The dance was performed on stage before judges and spectators. The main judge was always the chief¹⁹⁸ of the *Ekongoro* camp. He had powers to change the ruling if he disagreed with the ruling of other judges. At the occasion, the Minister of Education or any senior administrative

Pretorius the chief of the Youth Division. See archive doc: NAR1/1/55 File JX/0256 KAVANGO ONDERWYSNUUS (1983 December)

¹⁹⁷ In the circular it was outlined that every group would perform a compulsory hymn and they received the lyrics in advance for them to practice. A duet, quartet, a traditional song/dance and finally an open item was also on the list of items to be performed.

¹⁹⁸ The young Elrich Pretorius served as the main judge at Ekongoro during one of the sangfees gathering.

official of the homeland addressed the gathering. Senior community members with expert knowledge about local tradition and culture were at times invited to judge as well. There was prize money for the group that emerged victorious. This money was donated by the local business community and it was distributed to those that won first, second and third place in the competition and the amount ranged from R1000 to R350. The prize money was not spent or shared among the group members, because it was seen to change the perception and purpose of participating in the event. People could start participating in cultural activities for gain and not for the love of culture.¹⁹⁹ This was an interesting contrast to the postcolonial context where people are encouraged to sell 'their'²⁰⁰ culture and heritage as I will show in the following chapters. The information I have used above shows us the role of the Department of Education in Kavango as pivotal in the making and strengthening of the local ideas of belonging through its activities at Ekongoro which were not only limited to the sangfees, but also through media such as a quarterly newspaper and local radio. The Department of Education and its Division of Youth managed to bring the people of Kavango together in the space created for the sangfees and used the festival space to assert the imagined Kavango-ness which it had constructed through collecting the histories and oral narratives of Kavango people. This type of festival also happened in other parts of South West Africa such as in the Caprivi and Ovamboland²⁰¹. An event of similar nature was held in Caprivi, dating back to 1966. Bennett Kangumu, a local historian and academic, reflected on similar culture festivals held in Caprivi in relation to their appeal to homeland-making and subsequent conflicts between the Mafwe and Masubia ethnic groups in the region. (New Era, 2006) This long-standing conflict²⁰² I refer to when I deal with the making of the post colonial festivals. However, the account below shows that public perception about the *sangfees* between the last colonial period and the dawn of Namibia's

¹⁹⁹ Interview with Jan Bradley, Tutungeni, Rundu, 20 September 2008.

²⁰⁰ The postcolonial state is promoting cultural tourism by granting concession of conservancies to local people so that they can improve their cultural trade. The Ministries of Education and Environment play a particular role in this exercise. Lodges owned by local people and the state invite traditional dancing groups to perform for their overseas visitors for a fee. At the moment the construction of a cultural village is envisaged in the Mbunza traditional authority with funding support from the Millennium Challenge Account²⁰⁰ to be locally known as Munyondo gwaKapande. This cultural village will serve the tourist gaze and proceeds derived from incomes will be shared among the community members who are part of the project.

²⁰¹ See my discussion in chapter four on the earlier works of Professor Bruwer and his role as colonial officer in the Ovamboland just after the implementation of the Odendaal Plan.

²⁰² This conflict may not be a definite cause of the postcolonial secession attempts in the Caprivi region as I mentioned earlier, but it had some influences to it.

political independence had shifted due to the suspected complementary covert activities of *ezuva*²⁰³. In the following years, around the mid-1980s the sangfees at Ekongoro became unpopular among the local attendees, because of some activities the organizers included in the usual programme as narrated by my research informant below:

‘Mberema: Vakatako va 202 Batallion navo ka vaya. Olyo ndyo lipuro ngoli. Apa twaya vidimbuire ngoli. Nakuvhuruka ashi mu 1985 items mbiri dakaliropo. Yimwe yo kwartet ndi duet yinya? Ya kuyimba muami umwe wamukuwa ntani vaami vavili wovatipu vatatu. Ndi kani vi vhuruka panya, ndi na shimbi tupu kashete uya teerere nawa. Oyo ne nayi kwatere pakashete. Mpili ou monande Hunke kee pano a yenda mushihauto shande ndje waku paturura ndjoyo. Makura ku tanta ashi item sha yo ya mukuwa na vatipu vavili. Ntani pwa ya item yimwe ya va ami vene vene ngoli yinya ya kuyimba shosholoza, nambike dawo na ninke omu vana yimba. Ya! Nawo nka na item yawo paprograma.

Mberema: The soldiers from 202 Battalion also came to the sangfees. That was a big question. I remember that in 1985 there were two items on the program of the sangfees. One was what used to be called a quartet or duet, I am not so sure. It was sung by one white soldier with two black others. If I remembered, I could have brought the tape I recorded so that you can listen to it. I recorded it on the cassette. Even my son Hunke likes to listen to that song whenever he got into my car. The other one was a troupe of real soldiers in uniform and they sang that song shosholoza. They had picks in their hands and other implements as they sang. They were also on the programme.

Michael: Makura mpo ngoli mwa dimbuire ashi vyuma vya kara po ndi?

Michael: Was that the time when people started to realize that there was something else in the festival?

Mberema: Ya, ya ya. Mpo twa vidimbuire ngoli. Shauviri eshi twa dimburutire, ame shi evi na ku timwitira vya mu1985! Mu 1984, kwa renkire ashi; navantje vakaliro pa lys, principals school, inspectors of schools, ntani nava official va ku ruwana kumbereo; mu

²⁰³ Ezuva is a local Rukwangali word which means sun. Ezuva as a name was given to the “youth movement” which was created by the South African Defence Force.

kuyenda kwa mwaka 1984 ku ka yenda kunya kuliundo ndi weni mu kava twenya nga ko, ku yenda ku Andara va ka rute munya musheli ku kamba ya kuvadeura na slogan yinya ya kurenka ashii “ose kuna kurwira emanguruko lyousiri”. Which means shi, limanguruko oyo vana ku mukonga vano vomusheli ashii ne limanguruko nga va kuyita olinya ka pi shi limanguruko lya ushili. “Ose kun a ku rwira emanguruko lyo usili.”²⁰⁴

Mberema: Ya, ya ya. That was when we realized that there was something hidden. The second thing we realized was as I just narrated the events of 1985, that there was a list circulated in 1984 from the office of education that all school principals, inspectors and officials had to go to one place across the river near Andara. There was a camp at which they would be trained as para-military. They also attended a workshop themed: We are fighting for genuine freedom (independence). It meant that the freedom we were being told by people across the river (SWAPO) was not a real one. Thus the slogan we are fighting for the genuine freedom was used.’

It shows us that although the colonial sangfees was organized and held on the theme ‘to preserve the culture and tradition of Kavango’ it was actually a political space where communication between authorities and homeland citizens happened through performances. In this space the authority transmitted its message of propaganda which discredited the SWAPO movement in exile, while it signified its soldiers present at the sangfees and emphasized their authority. I think this was also an attempt for the state to show that its forces were friendly to local people and hence could participate in civil activities, unlike their counterparts in exile.

Despite the discontent on how the *sangfees* was organized and what was included on the programme in Kavango continued unabated until Elrich Pretorius left the homeland between 1985 and 1986. The uneasiness about the festival was brought by the inclusion of the army in the sangfees and the calculated introduction of *ezuva* which I discuss in detail shortly. His premature departure amidst controversy left a leadership vacuum at *Ekongoro*. According to Pretorius²⁰⁵ there was tension between him the army chiefs and senior education administrators who wanted to promote the activities of *ezuva* during the sangfees, a strategy he opposed. He claims that this refusal led to his removal as head of the camp. Pretorius’s assertions of the

²⁰⁴ Interview with Mr. Karel Mberema Shiyaka, Maria Mwengere Culture Centre, Rundu, 23 September 2008.

²⁰⁵ Personal communication with Elrich Pretorius at Maria Mwengere Culture Centre during 2008.

disagreements between him and the authorities were confirmed by Karel Shiyaka Mberema a local historian who was also an inspector in the Department of Education as follows:

Pretorius fell out of favour with the authorities. There was no cooperation between him and some teachers. In 1985 when there was a lot of soldiers here at Ekongoro, that was when we realised that the *sangfees* may have taken a different course. At that time as I said earlier that Ngondo was the Minister of Education, in their deliberations it was decided that Pretorius should leave Kavango. It was actually sad, because they fired him. He left with a sore heart.²⁰⁶

On the contrary, claims by locals with regard to Pretorius removal tell a different story. Local teachers, some of them now retired told me that many parents of pupils were against these cultural activities taking place at Ekongoro because of the army's involvement. His successor who shared the same last name also left after a short stint at the camp. Major activities at the centre halted and theft of property was reported at the time when the camp lacked leadership.

Ezuva for the 'Youth'

During the 1980s the war of liberation intensified and the spirit of freedom and independence was heightened. The administration focused its attention on the young people and mobilized them to join a movement known locally as *ezuva*. *Ezuva* means the sun in Rukwangali, a local dialect. *Ezuva* is casually defined by local people as “*mbunga za yeeyi yovadinkantu*”²⁰⁷. *Ezuva* as a movement ran workshops on 'culture' for teachers and the youth of Kavango.

The making and purpose of *Ezuva* as recorded in the local newspaper Muruli Nuusblad Vir Kavango in 1986 is supposedly to promote youth and 'culture'²⁰⁸ as the following statements of the movement show:

‘Kry die jeug aan jou kant, dan het jy die hele wereld.’²⁰⁹

Get the youth on your side, and then you have the whole world.

²⁰⁶ Interview with Mr. Karel Mberema Shiyaka, Maria Mwendere Culture Centre, Rundu, 23 September 2008.

²⁰⁷ It directly translates as “the group of things for the youth”.

²⁰⁸ NAR/1/1/55 File JX-0257 MURULI NUUSBLAD VIR KAVANGO (January 1986)

²⁰⁹ Interview with Karel Mberema Shiyaka, Maria Mwendere Culture Centre, Rundu, 23 September 2008.

“Ons die jeug van Kavango kies vrede”²¹⁰

“We the youth of Kavango choose peace”

Such statements²¹¹ were used in the official propaganda media such as newspapers and local radio to sensitize the young people about the imminent election and ‘freedom’ which was being negotiated at another level of administration, and to also encourage them not to throw away what the state had already worked hard for. The usage of Afrikaans and the tone of the message in the documents of *Ezuva* are of particular interest in this context. It sounds very similar to the South African notion of ‘diens plig’²¹² or ‘volk diens’²¹³ which targeted young males and compelled them to join the army in order to defend and serve the ‘nation’. In South Africa the state mobilized and sensitized the young men about the importance of the nation and the need to protect and belong²¹⁴. A similar template seems to have been applied to South West Africa, but according to homeland specifications, thus the insertion: ‘We the youth of Kavango choose peace’²¹⁵.

Ezuva seems to have been sanctioned as an unwritten secret policy, because I could not find anything relating to the movement in any official colonial documents. Secrecy surrounding *ezuva* made it a sensitive issue among those who participated in its activities especially in the leadership positions. There was no office which was known to house the activities of *Ezuva*, but there were office bearers who met on an ad hoc basis in any government venue to discuss matters of *ezuva*. I was told in confidence that indeed the army was involved in the operatives of *ezuva* albeit in the background. Those who attended the *ezuva* camps near Andara confided in me that it was only when they were at the camps that they realized that the army was involved, because they facilitated the training and workshops. Teachers and students in the homeland were the primary focus of the movement.

²¹⁰ NAR/1/1/55 File JX-0257 MURULI NUUSBLAD VIR KAVANGO (December 1984)

²¹¹ NAR/1/1/55 File JX-0257 MURULI NUUSBLAD VIR KAVANGO (January 1986)

²¹² “Diens plig” is Afrikaans equivalent for “compulsory service”.

²¹³ “Volk diens” is Afrikaans equivalent for “nation/national service”

²¹⁴ There are widespread websites about “diens plig” and “volk diens” with stories written by South African men who served in the South African army.

²¹⁵ NAR/1/1/55 File JX-0257 MURULI NUUSBLAD VIR KAVANGO (December 1984)

During my research, it was not easy to obtain information on *ezuva*. One day I was searching through pictures in the local archive of the Ministry of Information in Rundu, and innocently asked the senior information officer whether he knew anything about *ezuva*. He denied knowledge about the doings of the movement and rather referred me to another person locally known to have been a member of *ezuva*. On another occasion while searching newspapers²¹⁶ about Kavango homeland in the national archive, to my surprise I came across a picture of the Kavango homeland executive committee of *ezuva* in which he is shown to have been the chairperson.

Because people who were in the local management of *ezuva* still do not feel at liberty to speak about it, I could only speculate that they fear victimization and the loss of their jobs should information about their activities become public in this new time. When I raised the matter with a former member of the Kavango Legislative Council, he was not willing to speak about it on record. However, he confirmed that *ezuva* was organized by the military personnel with the assistance of a psychologist from South Africa and the purpose was indeed to influence the youth to side with the activities of the state. Many people who participated in the activities of *ezuva*, especially those I spoke to, shared the details of their daily itinerary when they went on field trips freely. Participants went on field trips where they had bible readings, played hide and seek games in the bush while dressed in paramilitary uniforms, and on the last day of the trip were made to take an oath of allegiance to *ezuva*.

It is not clear how *Ezuva* and the Division of Youth cooperated, because there are no official records that attest to that. However local narratives about the activities of *ezuva* and Ekongoro sangfees appear intertwined and it is difficult to separate the two. Discontent among the local people in Kavango is claimed to have everything to do with the manner in which the sangfees was conducted during the 1980s and its murky relations with *ezuva*. Obviously the involvement of soldiers in the activities of Ekongoro and those of *ezuva* could be a factor in understanding the unhappiness of the local people.

Jan Bradley of Pretoria became the last senior administrator at Ekongoro during 1987, for the final years of the South African occupation. He also did a lot of research in Kavango which later

²¹⁶ NAR/1/1/55 File JX-0257 MURULI NUUSBLAD VIR KAVANGO (January 1986)

shaped Maria Mwangere Culture Camp especially the reintroduction of a postcolonial cultural festival. He refers to himself as an ethnologist. When Jan Bradley took over at Ekongoro in 1987, the young people who participated in activities at the camp were no longer interested in singing choir songs or items other than performing ‘traditional’ dances. The categories choir, duet and quartet were mostly performed by 202 Battalion members. This category was scratched from the list of categories performed at the *sangfees*, because of the stigma it had as hype for the soldiers. Instead he spent most of his energy and time on reviving the traditional dances and remobilizing people to participate, the task proved to be very difficult to implement especially when one takes the political context in to consideration²¹⁷.

There was mounting pressure from local people to stop the activities at Ekongoro which were deliberately fused with those of *ezuva* and the army. The claims by officials that they were either moved or demoted if they were unwilling to cooperate with *ezuva* activities could be justified. The secrecy and lack of ownership of youth activities at the time make the whole issue about *ezuva* and the *sangfees* complex. The above events gave the activities of Ekongoro including the *sangfees* an unfavorable political status leading to its demise and abolishment subsequently during the last years of political struggle. In the above context the role of the army which participated in the *sangfees* was no longer viewed as that of a protector, but an unwanted one especially among people who supported the politics of liberation. I thus argue that the youth movement was systematically organized under the guise of song festivals and various workshops so that it countered SWAPO propaganda while supplying strategic human personnel for the administration such as the army and police. This newly created situation was seemingly a measure to curb the exodus of young people that was crossing the borders and joining SWAPO abroad. Although the *sangfees* was discontinued at independence, it was not long before it was reintroduced and reclaimed, albeit with a renewed meaning as Sam Nujoma attested below during our interview:

‘Onda kala nda mona kutya, omithigululwakalo dhetu odha ka la odha lyatelwa pevi na I hadhi popiwa nokuli. Odha ka la dha kelelwa. Ngele owa uvika to popi ooHendrik Witbooi, ooMaharero nooMandume nenge Iipumbu yaTshilongo mboka ya kala taya Iwitha eembulu ota kutiwa ou na eendunge dha puka, na oto vulu oku ka patelwa mo

²¹⁷ Interview with Jan Bradley at Tutungeni 20 September 2008.

nenge udhipagwe nokuli. Opo nee nda ka mona kutya otwa pumbwa ku kala tu na oMinistry ndjoka tayi pyakidhile nomidhigululwa dhetu nokudhiumitha komeho momapekaapeko.’²¹⁸

‘I realized and saw already that our traditional cultures have been undermined and they were not even talked about. It was even prohibited, if the authority became aware that you spoke about issues dealing with Hendrik Witbooi, Maharero, Mandume or even lipumbu yaTshilongo who fought the Boer administration, they could lock you up or even kill you. So I realized that we needed a Ministry that will deal with and develop our culture through doing research.’

The interview excerpt above show claims to a new meaning to be about making a national narrative of the liberation history of Namibia and creating what could be viewed as a national culture of belonging. In this case the state revived the culture festival which would fill the void that was left by its predecessor namely the *sangfees*. The postcolonial culture festival as I will show below and in the chapters ahead, was not significantly different from the *sangfees* as a model. However, it has a different purpose and meaning.

Postcolonial Annual Culture Festivals

At independence in 1990, festivals and all related activities which were seem to promote division or remind people of the country’s ugly past were discontinued by the new national administration. However, five years into independence activities promoting ethnic identities such as local ‘traditional’ initiations, heritage tourism and festivals gained prominence in both the public sphere and official discourse. (Becker, 2004) It has been a trend with postcolonial African states to shun ‘ethnicity’, ‘tradition’ and ‘culture’ in the early periods of independence and only to embrace them later in their quest for nation building. ‘Tradition’ and ‘culture’ were associated with backwardness and seen as an obstacle for progress, but from the 1990s the situation was different. (Bayart, 2005; Eyoh, 1998)

²¹⁸ Interview with Sam Nujoma, Office of the Founding President, Windhoek, 25 November 2009.

These postcolonial festivals are different in conception and ideology. While both the colonial and postcolonial festivals were meant to preserve ‘culture’ and ‘heritage’ this time the hosting of the event was meant for the enhancement of ‘social cohesion and dialogue’ in the democratic process as expressed by various many state representatives²¹⁹ during such celebrations. However, this is just the state discourse. In order to make sense of the making of the postcolonial festivals, as with the colonial ones, we need to clearly investigate the context in which they are made and the possible factors which may have influenced their making. In the Namibian context as I said in the introduction, I pointed to the issue of secession attempts in two regions of the country which were in the making during the early years of independence. Later political events such as the need for the commemoration of heroes, and development of the heritage industry, as suggested by Becker (2004, 2008, and 2011) and Fairweather (2001, 2006) may have also influenced the recent culture festivals. Most importantly, I think it also reflect what people said: what they spoke about in the media and in other social settings. In Namibia, the radio programs such as the national chat show in English, Ewi Iya Manguluka²²⁰ (Free Voice) and Mudukuli (Expose) broadcasted by the national broadcaster are among some of the media which had a platform for callers to express ideas about nation building and democracy. In hindsight, I say that the festival was introduced by the state to counter divisive tendencies which were undesirable for nation building. What is interesting is the manner in which the ideas which were deemed divisive were incorporated in the new national narrative of ‘unity in diversity’. This was a narrative, which would tolerate and enhance ideas of diversity in a context of democracy.

Becker (2004, 2007) on this argument shows that new developments in Namibia during the mid 1990s included the tentative embrace and references to local, traditional practices in contrast to their earlier reluctance in that regard. Another aspect of her theory is, as the memory of the colonial regime’s use of cultural difference began to wane; debates over the values of the national and local community increasingly embraced notions of tradition and heritage. This theory is watertight with regard to the waning memory of colonial regime, but one needs to also

²¹⁹ Some of the recent statements made by the Minister of Youth and Culture at the institutional cultural festival (Polytechnic of Namibia), that “it is important to celebrate the diversity of our culture”, New Era 09 August 2006.

²²⁰ The two programs National Chat Show and Ewi Iya Manguluka has been taken off air countless times as they were generally deemed by politicians and the public to spread ideas of tribalism and regionalism.

look into the dynamics of global politics such as the media and movement of people as suggested by Appadurai (1996) in his global multiculturalism discourse. Her ethnography on the re-introduction of *efundula*²²¹ in northern former Ovamboland during the period 1995 and 1996 which was also screened on national television is of particular importance to understand the postcolonial Namibian discourse of preserving tradition and culture, even though her work was directed at making sense of the postcolonial discourse of gender and sexual identities. She has argued that the new national public discourse mirrored shifting local strategies. Local people began to speak about culture in various contexts. She and Ian Fairweather (2001) saw the inclusion and screening of the initiation ritual on TV, as well as regular, regional and national cultural festivals organized by government as a means by which the Namibian state sought to engender national unity through the incorporation of distinct local cultures. Fairweather (2001:4) has further argued that these nostalgic expressions were in response to the developing industry in cultural heritage. What is important to me in the work of Becker (2004) and Fairweather (2001) is the periodisation of postcolonial performative representations.

The media and the movement of people in many forms such as refugees, expatriates and tourists may also have led to an increasing consciousness of national identity developing among Namibians and their leaders. Several television productions from neighbouring regions such as Kabanana from Zambia that were screened on national TV in the early 1990s portrayed the pride of various characters who embraced their 'traditional way of life' while settling in cosmopolitan areas. Another television production on national TV was a film from Ghana which was given prominence in the local discourse of witchcraft. The sense of identity and pride portrayed by people who came to Namibia to work or visit could be one of the factors that may have contributed to the local desire for a national or individual identity. Appadurai (1996) has also written about the influence of ethno and mediascapes in global networks and their operations that become socialized and localized through complex and deliberate practices of performances, representation and action. I argue that these complex and deliberate practices did not guarantee the sole role of the nation state in the politics, but instead it grew to be considered as just one of the players in an interwoven global order. Other social issues which affect the citizens

²²¹ Efundula is a female initiation ritual which is practiced in the northern regions of Namibia. The practice was discouraged during the early colonial time, especially by the missionaries who regarded the practice as evil and not in line with Christian teachings.

specifically such as HIV/Aids, land, service delivery are also dealt with in this arena as I show in the following chapter.

In another context, albeit on a different continent Guss (2000) observed how transformed cultural landscapes in Venezuela (South America) focused on the reappearance and appropriation of what used to be contaminated visions of a primitive paradise, as alternatives to modernity. His insights are important in understanding the unexpected 'reclamation of culture' in postcolonial Namibia. Guss observed the celebration of San Juan, one of the oldest of all church festival in Venezuela. Using concepts such as 'creolization' (Hannerz 1992) and 'public culture' (Appadurai 1996) he argued that forms of behaviour previously condemned to immediate extinction once released from the airtight environments said to have produced them, are now being granted new meanings and even more complex lives. These forms not only dissolve into the market-driven global cultural landscape, but enlarge its semantic fields, where meanings of the said forms are multiplied instead of being reduced (Guss 2000:4). In Namibia, the postcolonial state introduced the Annual National Culture Festivals (ANCF) and it was officially launched in 1995. The ANCF is produced by the directorate of National Heritage and Culture Programmes (NHCP). This division is led by a director. At the time of my research field work as I discussed in chapter three Herbert Diaz Ndango was the director of NHCP. The directorate has culture offices in all thirteen regions of the country. These regional offices are led by senior culture officers. As I discussed in the introduction chapter, offices in the regions organize culture festivals at circuit and regional level, which then culminate in the annual national festival held in December.

In the context of Kavango where I did fieldwork, groups from the region also participate in culture festivals. Individual groups from the region participated in local and international festival fairs. However, in these festival contexts, groups were identified as Kavango groups and not as individuals. Their participation in the culture festival produced by the state has yielded countless trophies and accolades for the region. Due to these achievements and perhaps within in the more general historical imagination of it being backward and distinct as I discussed in chapter four, Kavango region has earned a reputation of being the true custodians of 'traditional culture' and being the 'hub of culture' in the country.

As I said in the previous paragraph, groups from the region have also participated in international culture festivals and other official local contexts such as those performed at ceremonies to welcome government dignitaries. In order for a group to perform at any official ceremony or at the international festival, the invitation to such events is facilitated by the directorate (NHCP). The directorate invites groups that have excelled during the annual national culture festivals to participate in official engagements and international culture festivals. Groups from Kavango region have participated in many such festivals especially outside the country, because of their winning record in the national culture festivals. However, the outstanding performance of the region and its participation at the international level was not without its fair share of controversy with accusations of nepotism from officials at the directorate featuring in the local media²²². The director of NHCP, Dr Dias, who warmly welcomed me as a ‘son-in-law’ as I described in my discussion of kinship and fieldwork in Chapter 3, was accused of favouritism and tribalism for selecting only groups from Kavango to represent Namibia internationally and on various local official occasions.

The Namibian post colonial situation is interesting, and it cannot be understood in isolation from other global politics of difference and belonging, or ongoing contemporary politics of cultural difference and regionalism in Namibia²²³. At the same time, when considering past and present politics of cultural difference one cannot overlook the problems related to the politics of ethnicity on the African continent. As is well-known, these have at times resulted in situations where life and property were lost in conflicts fuelled with ethnic tensions. (Bayart, 2005; Geschiere, 2009)

I thus argue that the postcolonial reclaiming of ‘tradition’ and ‘culture’ by the state helps to enhance social identity and the idea of belonging. The postcolonial state realized the importance of ‘tradition’ and ‘culture’ as crucial resources to use in order to carry out its nationalism project.

Unlike colonial festivals and in addition to the current state-sponsored festivals some other cultural festivals are also independently held in regions of Namibia. These festivals are context driven and are shaped by local histories. In that context Kossler (2007) has argued that the

²²² See Informante newspaper 11 February 2010. Complaints were also aired on the national radio program the 9th hour. The radio program is a phone-in program on topical issues.

²²³ After a decade and half of Namibian independence a new wave of political parties emerged from various regions in the country. A party was also formed in Kavango region. Most of the parties were denounced by the ruling Swapo Party as promoting regionalism and tribalism.

mnemoscape on a national scale is fragmented and memorialisation practices differ between those that are state sponsored and those that are not. Among the latter again, between various groups, it is for the most part ethnically defined. He further argues that among other memorial activities, annual celebrations or festivals are of particular importance as they take cues from key events such as colonial wars and the resilience of Namibian communities. These festivals are independently organized, but supported by the state in many ways, albeit not in monetary terms.

Amongst the festivals held in Namibia, the Witbooi Festival at Gibeon in the south-central Hardap region, the /Ae //Gams Festival in the capital Windhoek, the Damara Annual Cultural Festival in Erongo in the western part of the country, the well-known annual commemorations of the Herero Otjiserandu ('troop players') at Okahandja and the Lusata in Caprivi region are some of the commonly held festivals. The Herero Otjiserandu was a social space to express nationalist aspirations and also celebrate the commemoration of the homecoming of the late Samuel Maharero the chief of the Vaherero since 1924, while the Witbooi festivals commemorate the death of Nama chief Kaptein Hendrik Witbooi who was killed by German soldiers during the Nama-Herero uprising of 1905. (Dierks, 2003)

The University of Namibia, Polytechnic of Namibia and various teachers colleges²²⁴ also hold annual culture festivals. These higher education culture festivals are not held in the same manner as those organized by the state. The festival is about showcasing 'culture' and is seemingly held to create diversity awareness among students at tertiary institutions. This awareness is not only focused on the local diversity, but it also includes international association in the narrative. (Polynews, 2011) For the purpose of this discussion I will briefly detail the making of the two festivals namely the /Ae//Gams Festival and The Witbooi Festival.

The /Ae //Gams Festival²²⁵ has been organized and sponsored²²⁵ by the City of Windhoek in conjunction with the private sector since 2001. It is a magnificent event in itself, because it happens over a period of a week. The event is dubbed "a tourist gaze" by the City of Windhoek and it takes place during the month September which is officially the beginning of the tourist season in Namibia²²⁶. Besides inviting local culture groups and artists to showcase their talent to

²²⁴ All the teachers colleges has been incorporated in the University of Namibia since last year.

²²⁵ Interview with Selma Negumbo the tourism officer at the centre of tourism, City of Windhoek in September 2008

²²⁶ Interview with Selma Negumbo at City of Windhoek 29 October 2008.

the tourists and local people, international culture groups are also invited to participate in this forum. The festival provides a panoramic view of Namibian cultures, but also creates an identity for tourists that they can expect to encounter during their visit. The state also supports the festival principle of the city council, through representation. Usually the head of state or the prime minister officiates during the launch of event.

The Witbooi festival is held annually during November at Gibeon. This historic event can be traced back to the 1930s. (Kossler, 2003) As I have shown in the previous chapter, the festival has transformed from being centered around the church and cemetery into a political manifestation of the struggle of liberation of Namibia and the Witbooi aspirations to regain what they consider their legitimate heritage, which was suppressed by colonialism (Kossler, 2003). The Khowesen traditional authority which constitutes the Witbooi clan, together with other stakeholders, organize the festival. The event is held to celebrate the heroic deeds and death of the Nama Kaptein Hendrik Witbooi against the early colonial settlers in the area. The event is characterized by horse riders wearing hats covered in a white cloth to symbolize the officially adopted image of Kaptein Hendrik Witbooi. The march as I observed consisted of the national police and military brass band, the vehicle carrying the Chief Hendrik Witbooi and horse riders on both sides of the road and it began from the junction of the bitumen between Mariental and Keetmanshoop towards the fountain discovered by Kaptein Cupido Witbooi- IGamemab in 1861. At the fountain the history of the Khowesen is narrated by the sister of the chief. Water is taken from the fountain and shared among the people who are gathered to symbolize its founding by the predecessors. This festival is an elaborate one; it begins on Friday at the gathering at the fountain and ends with a church service on Sunday. The Witbooi festival presents a local narrative of heroic resistance against the colonial German authority. In this narrative other chiefs such as Mandume Ndemufayo of the Vakwanyama and Samuel Maharero of the Vaherero are also included through the display of images on the banners at the festival. This gathering can be interpreted as an extended celebration of heroes that are nationally observed, but in this context it is given a local meaning and perspective. Kossler (2007), in the context of the above celebration has argued that although the Witbooi festival is a clearly marked occasion, the voiced concerns of the community transcend to the leadership. In the process the leadership attempt to address problems of land reform and restitution of communal land.

I used Stuart Hall's (1996) perspective of 'new times' and Guss' (2000) investigation of San Juan celebration to explain the above unexpected introduction and shape of various culture festivals within a changing political era. This introduction of state sponsored culture festivals should be interpreted as 'new times' where social and political changes shape the material and cultural conditions of existence including the context in which they occur. Colonially 'invented' culture festivals are re-appropriated and old notions such as 'protecting the native and his culture' which placed Africans in a backward position are given fresher perspectives of modernity through the reinvention of tradition, and development of ownership.

In Kavango specifically it appears that the reintroduction of the postcolonial culture festival opened a space of local intra-identity assertion and contestation. This emerging identity contestation is what locates the region within the national body politic. Kavango participated in all the Annual National Culture Festivals organized to date and won in 1995, 1998, and 1999. The Kavango region has on many occasions represented Namibia at various international events. Such outstanding performance led to the region being seen by other people especially through the media, as a cultural hub where culture is 'properly' preserved and showcased. During my research and recently employees of the Ministry of Youth, National Services and Culture alleged that a group from Kavango received preferential treatment, because it undertook more international trips than groups from other regions. The director of National Heritage and Culture Programmes who also come from Kavango was said to have had a hand in such arrangements. (Informante, 2010)

I argue that at a local level, the post colonial culture festival seems to have created a space for the making and remaking of new ideas of belonging and differentiation through performance. Local identities that were initially legally suppressed during colonial Kavango have started to emerge. At present we see how various identities that were previously officially recognized become contested and given new meanings in this new space. The constitution guarantees the right of expression and association and has in this way opened new spaces where such identities are asserted and expressed. One example is the unexpected assertion and awareness of the Nyemba identity which did not have a place in the public sphere after the implementation of the Odendaal Commission and throughout the colonial occupation. The other example is the envisaged construction of the Cultural Village at Kapako in Mbunza traditional area, initiated by a group of

young people with the aim of creating employment in the constituency and showcasing the culture and tradition of the Vambunza in Kavango. (New Era, 2010) Such identity assertion was observable in the festival through representation of songs and dances.

During the early phase of my research there were various public debates in the local radio about the need to introduce Runyemba²²⁷ as a language in the education curriculum. Certain local people some of whom are in high positions of the regional education administration and claim Nyemba identity, want their children to be educated in the mother tongue. The above instance was coupled with a demand from some Vanyemba headmen who serve under Hompa Matumbo Ribebe of Vashambyu that they also be allowed to have their own hompa. These demands or utterances were not favorably received especially by the Shambyu Traditional Authority which removed the entire Vanyemba headmen as a result. The bone of contention was how they could want to have a chief if they did not even have land in Kavango. Although oral historical sources show that Vanyemba were believed to have migrated from several areas in Southern Angola into Kavango for various reasons²²⁸ they are not recognized as ‘real’ locals. These and related issues are germane to my study.

Currently, there are clear signs of the development of Nyemba awareness on Face Book, the social network site. A group of young Nyemba adults have created a network on Face Book called ‘Vanyemba Vangangela’ and it has attracted a lot of followers from those who identify as such. It seems that anybody can join the network. On this site there is brief information about the Vanyemba which is rather academic in nature. It would be interesting to find out the source from which they derive information. As I observed, conversations on this network are of a general nature and vary from topic to topic. Although the writing is in Runyemba, it is significantly fused with English and Afrikaans terms which are appropriated as slang in the language. I have discussed this tendency elsewhere, where I have demonstrated how the young people in the History Club of Rundu Senior Secondary School switched and coded their language with English and Afrikaans. (Akuupa 2006) Notable on the page are the contact details and information about the head office of the Vanyemba which is said to be Kaisosi in Rundu. The Kaisosi settlement in Rundu is locally believed to be dominantly inhabited by the

²²⁷ Runyemba is a generic word to refer to the languages spoken by the Vanyemba people.

²²⁸ I have elaborated the issue of migration including the Vanyemba in detail in chapter 4.

Vanyemba. It is situated in eastern Rundu not very far from the University of Namibia Rundu Campus; it came about after various relocations were initiated by the state. At the time of her study in 1991, Brinkman suggests the total population of Kaisosi to be about 4855, as per the census count with 50% counted as Nyemba.

Interestingly Brinkman (1991) has classified the population group in question into two categories namely: *vandambo* (familiar) and *vatywayuki* (refugees). Those who are believed to have settled along the Kavango River and came across for longer periods before they migrated to the Namibian side, are referred to as *vandambo* while those who came to settle in Kavango during the war in Angola are referred to as *vatywayuki*. I take issue with her, because the notion of *vandambo* or *undambo* of Vanyemba cannot just be read in terms of the period of the war. The Vanyemba and other groups in Kavango has been *vandambo* in the Mbunda area or Limbaranda long before they came to settle along the river²²⁹. The area north of Kavango River which stretches from western Kavango until Mbukushu going northwards is known as the Mbunda area or Limbaranda by Kavango people. Hompa Maria Mwengere for example always visited her relatives in Limbaranda which was the place they initially settled before moving southwards and eventually across the Kavango River. They had been together before the Portuguese war in Angola and later in South West Africa/Namibia this link was intensified. Those who are likely to be classified as *vatywayuki* are the Vimbundu who are not known to even share the same historical origin as Kavango people including the Vanyemba. These are people who are part of the unforeseen exodus that arrived at the river banks in 1975 after the outbreak of the civil war in Angola. I refer to the exodus as unforeseen, because despite numerous measures which the Portuguese authorities and their southern counterparts had in place to control movement of people, it came as a surprise²³⁰. However, the South West African authorities had to move these refugees to a camp outside Rundu in order to prevent their assimilation with the locals.

Another perspective to analyze this intricate issue of the Vanyemba as *vandambo* or *vatywayuki* is to use the other local notion of “othering”: *ugeni*. *Ugeni* can be literary translated as stranger, and he or she who is regarded as a stranger in local terms is *mugeni* (singular) or *vageni* (plural). I would view differentiation in Kavango in the context of *ugeni* especially when it is directed to

²²⁹ Interview with Shidonankuru at Ndiyona 24 December 2006.

²³⁰ NAR/1/155

the Vanyemba. Bearing Brinkmann's perspective in mind the Vanyemba are not necessarily seen as *vatywayuki*, but as *vageni* as they have not run or fled persecution as is the case of those who would be referred to as *vatywayuki*, who fled in order to settle in Kavango. They are and have always been part of those perceived as 'real' Vakavango since time immemorial, but despite their shared history, they have always been kept on the sideline and been regarded as strangers. So, this differentiation has to be understood within the various historical contexts through which the Vanyemba together with other groups in Kavango have lived. Generally, it seems people in Kavango settled on either side of the river. They would cross the river, because of a dispute in a family and community and only to return later when the situation had stabilized. Sometimes people crossed the river to seek proper grazing for their animals. There is also a long history of intermarriage between the Vanyemba who stayed along the river and the Kavango people, as a result of which kinship developed on both sides of the river. As a result of this intricacy one cannot neatly distinguish who is a Nyemba and who is not; because of the history and social interaction the group has had over the years with the other groups in the region.

Conclusion

The above discussion demonstrates that the assertion of identities make a difference in any political processes. During colonial South West Africa Namibia the administration of the time emphasized various ethnic identities as distinct and united them against others. In the process they invented the *sangfees* of culture festival as a space where people could display their identity. Through the principle of divide and rule the political processes was successful in its own way, especially by synthesizing difference, and the sense of belonging to various ethnic groups. It was a colonial 'identity project' invented in line with the early recommendations and guidelines of separate development: the creation of Bantustans or homelands by the Odendaal Commission of 1962-1963. The subsequent creation of the homeland state and its machinery strengthened and legitimated the imagined Kavango identity which seemed to differ from other ethnic groups in South West Africa. In order to realize the plan the South African colonial administration had to organize the *sangfees* as a social space through which it could easily construct the colonial Kavango-ness. Although the *sangfees* was organized and intended for the youth and 'protection of traditional culture' it had an impact on the wider population of the region in various ways, especially the contestation of Kavango-ness during the postcolonial period.

To a certain extent this ‘colonial unity’ became the bedrock from which contemporary identities have sprung and are now asserted and negotiated in Namibia and specifically Kavango. Finally, I argue that the *sangfees* tradition is a colonial invention that was later reinvented with new meanings in postcolonial Namibia. As a result culture festivals that are context-specific emerged in contemporary Namibia, all cued to the national discourse of unity in diversity. In the following chapter, I present and discuss the ethnography of the museum at Maria Mwengere Culture Centre in Kavango. I also pay attention to the postcolonial festival booklet as produced by the state and the subsequent national dialogue and narrative as it reverberated through song.



Chapter 6: Kavango: Reclaiming colonial ethnicity in a postcolonial context

Introduction

Firstly, in this chapter I present the ethnography of Maria Mwengere Culture Center with specific focus on the Kavango Museum as an official space in which local ‘culture’ in Kavango is officially produced and appropriated in the postcolonial context. In this context I pay particular attention to the management of the museum at the centre and the perceptions of culture officials of the capacity of the museum to produce and transmit local ‘culture’ in the region.

Secondly, I discuss and analyse the concept of the state commissioning the postcolonial ‘culture booklet’ (which is presented during the culture festival to the judges and festival participants) and its content. During the circuit, regional and national festival rounds, officials who are responsible for culture programs nationwide encourage festival participants to produce and compile booklets in which they present their ‘culture’ and ‘tradition’ from their own perspective. Participants in various groups prepare their booklets, especially during the circuit and regional festival contexts, and material presented by the groups that qualify for the national level is officially compiled in a single master narrative.

In his exploration of nationalist discourse in Quebec of Canada, Handler (1988) concluded that fairs and festivals contain ‘modes of objectification’. In this context elements of what is perceived to be ‘culture’ are treated as indicators of identity. When such indicators are absent in what is represented or imagined as ‘culture’, it becomes contested: as I show in chapter 8 with reference to the manner in which Kavango dances are represented at culture festivals in Kavango. In the following discussion I present incidents that I argue to be ‘modes of objectification’ (to borrow from Handler). Specifically I am interested in what began as a colonial project to represent the inhabitants of Kavango as the ‘objectified other’, in relation to other homelands through the fixed imagery of the Kavango Museum; to the postcolonial period in what is now officially termed a ‘culture booklet’ at the Maria Mwengere Culture Centre²³¹ as contemporary modes of the state’s attempt to make post-apartheid nationhood. As I illustrate, unlike the museum the ‘culture booklet’ that the Namibian state inherited from the colonial

²³¹ The Maria Mwengere Culture Centre was initially known as the Maria Mwengere Culture Camp or Ekongoro. The name has since been changed, however local people continue to refer to it as Ekongoro.

dispensation has become an important means and resource through which it re-imagines colonial identities and by contrast emphasizes an ethnicized Namibian-ness. I argue that although the state is highly involved in the production of national identity through projects such as museums, heritage hunts and the construction of culture villages, it does not operate in isolation from the citizens. Heritage in contemporary Namibia is understood to be what ‘connects us’ to the past (that went before the successive occupations by South Africa, Britain and Germany); by implication, it incorporates tangible and intangible cultural materials.

There is a museum with ‘Kavango artifacts’ at Maria Mwendere Culture Center. However, the museum is not open to the public. Also at the centre, officials compile a booklet with historical information on the ‘cultures’ of Kavango. Officially, the museum and the culture booklet are believed to store and preserve the ‘cultures’ of Kavango people. The format, content and the changing nature of the culture booklet and the museum activities are central to my analysis in this chapter. What interested me most in the production of the state-sponsored culture festival was the ability and extent to which citizens (participants and public audiences) were involved in representing and interpreting ‘national culture from their perspective’ while making the culture booklet. While participants in the context of the festival represented and interpreted their ‘culture’ and ‘tradition’ through songs and drama in the booklet, content in song and drama shows that at least to a certain extent participants presented their ‘culture’ as evolving and not fixed as represented in the museum narrative.

The dance and melody is essentialised in concept, while song content is constructionist in approach. The content of the songs and drama is also of an advocacy nature. As I have observed, the focus of songs composed and sang by the cultural groups are context-driven. Thus the content of songs differed significantly from one area to another in the region, and in the national context. Consequently, songs are viewed as ‘messages’ by festival participants and composers. When they compose and eventually present the songs through dance, the participating groups are keenly aware of what they would perform for which kind of audience and they can more or less anticipate the reaction to their representations. They know that through representation of song, dance or drama they create awareness, caution, advocate, praise and criticize through that particular medium. I argue that while ‘culture’ and people in Kavango are imagined as fixed by the state in the context of museum representation, participants in the

festival not only view the 'culture booklet' as an object in which local identity is asserted, but also a space for dialogue specifically directed at those who represent the state and the general audience.

Before I delve into the ethnographic details of the Maria Mwengere Culture Centre, it is important to acknowledge what has been said already with regard perceptions and production of national cultures in postcolonial Africa. Authors such as Flint (2006), Askew (2000), and Van Binsbergen (1994) have demonstrated how the state participates in what is perceived to be the production of national culture in postcolonial Africa. Such participation in the production of national culture is realized in the form of sponsorship of cultural troupes, organizing arts performances and competitions. While the above authors generally argue that such participation of the state in the activities entails the production of national culture, I want to single out Van Binsbergen (1994) who in his investigation of the Kazanga Festival in Central Western Zambia takes the argument further that such demonstrations should be seen as instances in which cultural reconstruction with emphasis in ethnicity radically transform local historical cultural forms towards a global idiom of performance, inequality and possibly the commodification or folklorisation of culture. Contrary to Van Binsbergen's argument on ethnicity as cultural mediation and social transformation, Flint's focus on the Kuomboka Festival in Western Zambia presents a different set of dynamics displaying inner ethnic contradictions and challenges in representation of the past history and heritage of the Lozi people. Although the above two festivals are locally organized by the traditional chiefs and people they have attracted the state's attention in the processes of culture 'retrieval' (Sonyika, 1990:114) and this has since influenced such activities.

Askew (2002) through her documentation and analysis of specific dances organized under the auspices of the National Arts and Language Competitions in Tanzania shows how the state and public produce and display national culture. She recorded and explained the contexts of the various songs and dances of the groups she observed, also in different social spaces outside the orbit of the state, such as weddings. However, her analysis emphasizes the role and dynamics of state involvement in production of the dances and the music productions, rather than the public or audiences at the events she observed. Askew, unlike Van Binsbergen (1994) who brings out a nuanced analysis of ethnicity politics of Zambia and its possible role of consolidation of Nkoya

as an ethnic group in the Kazanga Festival, has mentioned how the dances assert ethnic identities in support of state nationalist projects (albeit in a limited manner), as well as identities against it. He has shown how the festival attendees influenced the making of the Kazanga Festival through their specific participation in the event. In the section below I discuss the perceptions of the state agencies on how it (the state) not only produces an imagined national culture for its citizens, but also how together with its citizens it participates in the assertion of ethnicity through the production of the culture booklet and other activities such as the museum at the centre.

On the search for ‘tradition’ and ‘culture’ in Namibia

Initially my focus below will be on the states pronouncements on the ‘preservation and promotion of tradition and culture’ of its citizens through curation in museums (most of which were inherited from the colonial dispensation), the organization of cultural festivals and how they are conceived at the Maria Mwingere Culture Centre. (Culture Policy:GRN, 2001) Like most postcolonial states in Africa, during the 1990s in the first five-year term of Namibian independence the government embarked on a national awareness campaign to preserve and promote tradition and culture. Through the medium of television the state-funded Namibian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) aired ‘traditional’ weddings, dances and food in culture magazines such as Tataleni²³², Boma Namibia, Kalanami and currently, Culture Paradise. Tataleni is an informative magazine programme: it airs popular culture, food, health issues and music, live on television. Boma Namibia (the predecessor of Kalanami and current Culture Paradise) has since been discontinued and replaced with Culture Paradise. Culture Paradise like its predecessor showcases the various Namibian ‘cultures’. During the 2008 Annual National Culture Festival in Kavango the production team of Culture Paradise was there to record the proceedings. When I asked the producer why they recorded the event she told me that the corporation was doing it in order to show, entertain and teach Namibians about their ‘cultures’. She remarked:

‘It is important for people to know who the Kavango or the Ovambo are. And this we can make possible when we record such activities and ask elders to explain certain things such as clothing,

²³² Tataleni means “Let us see”.

utensils and rituals²³³. In our conversation with the producer²³⁴ of the Culture Paradise Kandali Nangolo, she said that they follow culture festivals country-wide in order to collect material for the programme. According to the official schedule it is aired on Thursdays at 10 in the morning, and again that evening. On this programme, images recorded during the culture festival are shown followed by a commentary that sounds somewhat essentialised.

On radio, the broadcaster has dedicated three hours on its daily schedule to programmes such as Namibian Hour, Culture Connect and Learn a Namibian Language, which are all said to “feature aspects of Namibian cultures with the aim of promoting the national ideal of unity in diversity and thus the ultimate object of building a ‘One Namibia, One Nation’²³⁵”. On the radio programmes, the producers invite people who they deem knowledgeable on ‘traditional’ subjects such as birth, burial and wedding rituals; and interview them live. During these discussions local ‘culture’ is mostly presented as fixed. These programs though, do not give a platform to the audience to call in and participate in the discussion. The above intentions of the national broadcaster are evidently similar to those expressed in the national culture policy which came out in 2001- as discussed in chapters four and five.

The above quote by Nangolo, an employee of the national broadcaster, can be understood in the context in which cultural characteristics supposedly mark the distinctive ‘differences’ of population groups in Namibia. (Akuupa, 2010:103) Her assertions implies that ‘traditional culture’ as recorded at the festival is essential and fixed. The search and promotion of Namibian ‘tradition’ and ‘culture’ by the state is not only limited to radio and television programmes, it is implemented through directorates in the Ministry of Youth, National Service, Sport and Culture (MYNSC). The two directorates, namely those of Arts and National Heritage and Culture Programmes are responsible for matters related to art and heritage. As discussed elsewhere in the dissertation the directorates have established offices in the thirteen regions of the country that run centers such as the Maria Mwegere Culture Centre, which is the focus of this chapter.

²³³ Personal communication with Kandali Nangolo at the Annual National Culture Festival held in Kavango during 2008 December.

²³⁴ My fieldwork notes.

²³⁵ Namibia Broadcasting Corporation: National Radio Grid 2010 obtained from www.nbc.om.na 2011/08/11.

The Ministry of Youth, National Service, Sport and Culture (MYNSC) not only organizes culture festivals, it also supports financially and conceptually a project known as the Heritage Hunt implemented by the Museum Association of Namibia (MAN). MAN receives funding from the state so that it can run and facilitate museum projects country-wide. One of its widely-reported activities is the ‘heritage hunt’ campaign to identify sites and graves that can be turned into national memorial monuments. In this project, MAN has successfully utilized history students to form clubs at high schools nationally and do research on heritage sites in respective regions through a competition known as SCAM-X (School and Museum Exhibition). SCAM-X provides a fund of N\$2000 for the research project. As I have observed during my research in 2005 and 2007 students at Rundu Secondary led by a history teacher chose a topic that they considered historically significant in the region. The students did research interviews in town or nearby villages. After they had researched their topic, they prepared an exhibition for the national SCAM-X gathering. An exhibition usually consisted of presentations from thirteen regions of the country of which the best was chosen. From this annual event the best exhibitors had the opportunity to participate in the annual spring school organized by the Robben Island Museum in Cape Town, South Africa.

In Kavango the history club under the mentorship of Kletus Likuwa a history teacher then at Rundu Senior Secondary School was selected to participate during 2007: their exhibition was about ‘cultural’ and memorial sites and unknown graves of SWAPO fighters in the region. The group took pictures of unmarked Swapo fighters resting places in the area of Mbukushu in eastern Kavango. These graves were not officially known, but pointed out by local people in the area. The group also took pictures of early colonial landmarks, like the official house-cum-office of native commissioner Harold Eedes.

In a different context regional governments have also, at times, encouraged people to embark on a ‘heritage hunt’ of for sites to be included in the government gazette and marketed for human development. I suggest this should read ‘cultural tourism’, which has become a favoured economic activity of the national state. Its potential to generate income for the communities has been recognized by the state, which as a result has included such initiatives in its media marketing campaigns. As the governor of the Kavango region said in his speech at the Kavango Regional Culture Office:

‘Finally, ladies and gentleman I would like to use the opportunity to call upon the Directorate of National Heritage and Culture Programs to identify important heritage and cultural sites in Kavango particularly and Namibia in general for the fulfillment of the culture policy. Culture and heritage should be regarded as an important aspect in human development; we want to see a nation that is proud of its culture, a nation that has identity and promotes its culture²³⁶’.

The call by the regional governor of Kavango shows how heritage hunting at the regional context is emphasized for the purpose of enhancing a regional ethnic identity, which I have referred to earlier as Kavango-ness. The narrative shows how the national state has embarked on a well devised national project of cultural awareness through strategic projects at schools, exhibitions, festivals, radio and television broadcasts etc. However, as I have observed throughout my fieldwork, such official pronouncements on how to preserve ‘culture’ and ‘tradition’ are appropriated variously in all thirteen political regions. It depends on those who officiate during the festivals, judging from the content of speeches²³⁷.

I turn my focus on Kavango Museum at Maria Mwengere Culture Centre in the following section.

Kavango Museum

The existence of Kavango Museum is known and remembered by local people in Rundu, but it was never opened to the public. Actually, many people I have spoken to have not even bothered to find out where the museum is situated although they may have heard that it is at Ekongoro. My observation during my stay at Maria Mwengere Culture Centre was that the museum was not regarded as the best tool to promote and perhaps brand local ‘cultures’ like ‘traditional’ dances and stories performed at the culture festivals. Although it was mentioned in official meetings I attended prior to the opening of the museum, no proper attention was afforded to it. Instead of preparing a vigorous campaign to have the local museum renovated and eventually opened to the public and tourists, the local culture office in Rundu seemed to focus its energy on ‘traditional’

²³⁶ Speech by John Thighuru the Regional Governor of Kavango Region, delivered during the Kavango Regional Culture Festival held at Maria Mwengere Culture Centre in Rundu during 13 September 2008.

²³⁷ See my discussion in chapters 7 and 8.

dances and the collecting of oral stories that could be used by groups preparing ‘culture booklets’ and composing songs for the culture festival. Below I discuss my stay and interactions with the officials at Maria Mwangere Culture Centre in order to show how in its quest to ‘preserve and promote’ the Kavango ‘cultures’ as per culture policy of the state, the local office in Kavango region privileged ‘traditional’ dances devised for and performed at the festival, over the museum. Research for historical information on the migration and origin of people in Kavango and rituals was encouraged instead, because the collected information formed centre stage for the ‘culture booklet’ as I explain in the chapter.

When I arrived at the Maria Mwangere Culture Centre, senior culture officer Thomas Shapi had been away on official business but upon his return he sanctioned a staff meeting immediately. I was invited to be part of the meeting. He likes to address people in English, the official language, and rarely speaks Rukwangali or any other local language in the office. As a former teacher, he always wears a suit and hardly ever would you find him without a tie to complement it. Shapi’s office is arranged in a manner that displays elevation and authority. He chaired the meeting from his desk while we sat around the table joining him from the front. Before he introduced the meeting agenda, he introduced me to the colleagues officially. Shapi outlined the projects at the centre in the following manner:

Shapi: ‘Mr. Akuupa, we have a lot of things going at our centre. We have a project of collecting stories about our traditional rituals in the community. It has been quiet for some time now, because we are very busy with other things such as the festivals and meetings. We are doing research so that we can assist our groups in the festival with information for their presentations. We also have a museum that has never opened to date. We need someone to assist the official responsible for the museum. I do not know what is happening with those senior people in the ministry, because they keep on promising that they will hire somebody to run the museum and that is still to be seen. Myself, I am very busy with many other things, but I will support any idea related to the museum. So see in which area you can also assist us. Mrs. Kazanga you are responsible for the museum, you can ask Mr. Akuupa to help you in what he can. If you want to collect stories about the rituals you can just request for a car and a driver so that you can be taken there to do interviews. We can think of how we can sort out other issues such as

the S&T for the driver. Donaveltha, ask Saraphina to clean that other office for Mr. Akuupa.²³⁸

I could only thank the senior culture officer for welcoming me to Maria Mwengere Culture Centre. The meeting was very short and at the end he announced the date of the next meeting to focus on the preparation of the next circuit festival, which was to be held at the centre. My immediate impression of the environment was that this was a good place to work, because of the senior officer's approach and description of the centre activities. I was welcomed wholeheartedly and there was a clear sense of direction at the centre. From my understanding of the statement by the senior culture officer, he implied that my services would be required in the dealings of the museum and collection of oral narratives in the villages.

Immediately after the meeting was adjourned, Valesca (Mrs. Kazanga) convened another meeting in her office with me so that we could deliberate on how to get the museum off the ground. Valesca is a qualified teacher who has since left her teaching job to take up employment in the directorate. She told me on one occasion²³⁹ that, it was because of her love for 'traditional' dances that she decided to join the NCHP directorate. She is a member and leader of a cultural group Tukulikeni²⁴⁰, which performs in the youth category. She is not a qualified museum curator, but has attended various workshops on museum management, organized by MAN. She took out her lever arch file containing all the documents about the museum and showed me what had been going on.

We toured the museum building. It was in a dilapidated state and the roof leaked; generally the building needs serious overhaul. The paint on the walls is pale like a bleached cloth. There is poor lighting and ventilation. Birds and creepers, lizards and spiders were running all over the building. It was actually scary just to be inside the building. At the entrance of the building, there is a box full of cards used to catalogue the artifacts inside the building long ago. As you entered on the immediate left you saw dirty display glasses with few artifacts such as bottled snakes found in Kavango, *marudeve*²⁴¹ and *vihho*²⁴². On the right hand side, there is an elevated

²³⁸ My fieldwork notes

²³⁹ My fieldwork notes.

²⁴⁰ Tukulikeni is a Rukwangali expression for 'lets grow' in the literal sense.

²⁴¹ Marudeve (sing: rudeve) is clothing made of reeds which grow along the Kavango River. The reeds are cut into pieces and joined together with a string and tied around the waist like a skirt.

space made of cement and covered with sand. This space formed a large part of the building area and was where the envisaged ‘traditional’ Kavango homestead²⁴³ was planned but never constructed. Instead other artifacts such as fish traps, pestle and mortars, milk containers, baskets, wood, countless clay pots, calabashes, reed mats, storage containers, chicken containers, bows and arrows, hoes, and spirit distillers were arranged according to type on the sand floor. I also noted objects that were important during the homeland administration, namely the mace and pulpit although in a broken state. However, these artifacts were very dusty since no one was willing to go and clean inside as one of the cleaning staff intimated to me. She told me that the place was too frightening to work in²⁴⁴ it.

The idea of the museum as I discussed in the earlier chapter was conceived at the time when the centre (a camp then) was constructed during the late 1970s. The museum was a part of the centre; it was never an independent entity. The senior administrator was to be the curator of the museum. As per policy directives of the time it was a move which would encourage people to protect and know their ‘tradition’ and ‘cultures’. This would then create and emphasize ideas and feelings of distinctness among the inhabitants of the homeland²⁴⁵. The ideology of the time seemed to present museum artifacts as fixed ‘traditional’ reference points as stated in the homeland culture policy. Currently, at least as I have observed during my time at Ekongoro, the idea beneath the intention of one day having the museum open seemed to be the same as the colonial one as Valesca expressed once that: ‘if the museum opens, people will be able to see and know the Vakavango tradition²⁴⁶’.

The main problem about the museum that she identified was its lack of affiliation to the Museum Association of Namibia (MAN) an umbrella body that assists various other museums with resources and the training of personnel. She wanted us to request funding from the directorate so that we could register the museum with MAN. She also suggested a regional drive to procure items for the collection because the existing collection was gradually being damaged by insects, owing to a lack of maintenance.

²⁴² Vihoho (sing: sihiho) is a form of female headgear. It is a long snarl that hangs down to the female’s shoulders and is made of tree inner bark.

²⁴³ See my discussion in the previous chapter with Linyando Manfred Mukoroli.

²⁴⁴ My fieldwork notes.

²⁴⁵ See my discussion in chapter four and five.

²⁴⁶ My fieldwork notes.

After various meetings with Valesca, we finally drafted a submission letter to the office of the Director of the NHCP Dr Diaz to inform him of the intent to open the museum to public. In the letter we also requested the N\$200.00 fee required to register the museum with MAN and possible renovation of the building. The senior culture officer who signed the letter appeared skeptical about our effort, but he signed it anyway. We also revived the former local board of governors of the museum so that they could continue the project. Despite the two or three meetings we had with the board on how to proceed, they also appeared skeptical as to whether this attempt would get the museum off the ground.

For a month we did not receive any response to our submission to head office. Valesca called the office of the director to find out what had happened to the letter, but was disappointed as she was sent from pillar to post without any clear response. She was not happy at all as she complained on the way to her office:

‘I knew the director was never interested in the museum, he just said I should call the deputy director at the office of national museums as they are the ones to deal with museums. I don’t know what it is lacking, this museum belongs to Maria Mwendere and it does not fall under the jurisdiction of national museums. They must give us the money²⁴⁷,

From the report that Valesca gave me it appeared as if there was no clear indication of jurisdiction over the museum. It was not clear whether the museum was to be operated by the centre or a separate directorate that deals with museums nationally. In my personal interaction with the director of NHCP, he had told me that the museum was to be treated like any other in the country and that it should benefit from the Museum Association of Namibia (MAN). MAN receives funding from government in order to ‘build capacity²⁴⁸’ in museum management nationally. The impression from my communication²⁴⁹ with the director was that the museum in Kavango should benefit from MAN since his ministry provided financial support to it. However, the question of it being an independent entity like other museums in the country or a part of the

²⁴⁷ My fieldwork notes

²⁴⁸ MAN- Three Year Development Plan 2009.

²⁴⁹ My fieldwork notes

centre seemed to be one of the issues forestalling its operation. At present it seems no one at higher management level is willing to take responsibility for the museum, let alone the centre.

The museum story did not just end there. I suggested that we focus on the Museum Association of Namibia. Two executive members in the MAN committee namely the Vice Chair Aaron Nambadi and another voting executive Kletus Likuwa are residents of Kavango. Nambadi was a graduate student at the University of the Western Cape and currently worked for the City of Windhoek as a senior curator and archivist. Likuwa had been a history teacher at Rundu Senior Secondary School for some time before he started graduate studies at the University of the Western Cape. He is an active local historian among his peers, who had all been notable followers of the museum story. I asked them how the association could assist the local museum. My informal e-mail conversation with the Nambadi follows:

‘Q: Another question since you are in an influential position now: what can you do for the region’s museum?’

A: My friend, there are only two problems with the regional museum first, the officials and the politics of that house (office). Secondly the requirements for the positions are higher in relation to remuneration

Q: I know. Can you arrange for some funding then and probably get someone who can train those officials?

A: Yes I can, but take note that MAN has already contributed N\$40 000 for two Planning Workshops, so it will be difficult to ask them again, but it is possible. What do you think of the Kavango Museum; I’m sure you spent some time in the Kavango and what is your input, especially with the senior officer?’²⁵⁰

My interaction with the vice-chair of the museum association, albeit in various contexts did not yield the required results. Although they (both officials of MAN) indicated the importance of the museum and their willingness to assist, they were always skeptical about the attitude of the senior culture officer and chief of the centre who they thought were not serious about the museum. The two executives also sounded discouraged by the unresponsiveness of the centre’s

²⁵⁰ Electronic mail communication with the Vice Chair of MAN on 19 October 2009.

management. As I had seen in Valesca's lever arch file no action had been taken after the two workshops Nambadi was referring to. I must also mention that at the time of the workshop, Valesca was not yet an official at the centre. The workshops referred to were about planning the path that would lead to the opening of the museum. One of the major aspects of the workshop was to train the curator on how to manage the museum and catalogue artifacts. It appears there was no officially appointed curator at the time, so no one could implement what was offered at the workshop. For the rest of my time at the centre the museum was not registered with MAN, because there was no N\$200 forthcoming from the directorate. Although the centre also collected money through various services it rendered to the community, it seemed the senior official was not keen to part with money and always referred the museum official to the over-elaborate standing orders for utilizing state funds. Despite the above obstacles Valesca has been determined to make the museum work, as demonstrated below.

In one of our meetings²⁵¹ we resolved to have the Kavango 'traditional' homestead constructed in its initially intended space at the museum. She organized the institutional workers to prepare the sticks and build small-scale model huts that would be thatched and installed inside the museum. It was done, but she encountered a problem when the workers requested grass to thatch the huts. Valesca requested money from the petty cash account, so that we could purchase grass. This request was made two months before preparation for the Annual National Culture Festival to be held at Rundu early in 2008. She had spotted an opportunity to open the museum to the public and festival participants during the occasion, even in that dilapidated state. The matter was also brought up during the second last preparatory meeting²⁵² for the festival. I was asked by the office to present the matter for discussion during the meeting. It was presented for discussion but received scant attention, except for participants who wanted to know at what time of the day the museum would open so that it did not interfere with the activities of the culture festival. Valesca was eventually given money and we had to go and buy grass and reeds from the villages not far from the river. We brought grass and the workers at the centre did the work but it was not sufficient and only two were completed. I thought this a step in the right direction, but it was not motivation enough for Valesca, who felt that her project was being sidelined.

²⁵¹ My fieldwork notes

²⁵² Minutes dated 10 November 2008: The 14th Annual National Culture Festival Preparation Committee meeting held at Maria Mwengere Culture Centre.

The Kavango Museum is less known in Rundu and one would not hear it being spoken about in other social spaces or media like the festival. During my stay there was no person that came to enquiry about anything related to the museum. Although the senior official professed his desire to support the museum initiative I think he did not live up to it. He did not pursue the matter with the same passion as other activities such as cultural festivals and the management of some buildings etc. His personal interest seems to have been in the dances.

After two months at the office, I requested for a driver and a car so that I could go and do some interviews in the two villages in the east. My request was promptly addressed, the senior culture officer instructed his driver to take me to the villages, but not without adding what I should not forget to ask.

‘Shapi: Mr. Akuupa, do not forget to ask about the rituals as well.

Michael: Ok, sure! But which rituals specifically?²⁵³’

Shapi’s main emphasis was on research and anthology and not really the museum. He was more interested in the collection of short stories that could be turned in to plays and songs. The above excerpt from my fieldwork shows that the senior culture officer was an advocate for the creation of a collection on the histories and traditions of Kavango people, which can be accessed by those who seek information during the festival preparation. He suggested that various groups that participate in the festival could use the resource information to improve their dances and songs. On the other the board members would not have been dormant for such a long time if they were committed to the project. I think with his blessings as the senior officer at the centre the committee and whoever it was who acted as the museum official, there might have been some activities of the museum.

In a related context: when regional culture festivals have taken place and participants to the nationals are confirmed, some officials go out on field trips to visit and coach various culture groups. They meet with the groups during their rehearsals and explain to them what is expected of them, how they should keep time and prepare their aids during presentations. Such trips do

²⁵³ My fieldwork notes

not encounter funding objections as do the museum's requests. Even my request was granted subject to a reminder of what the centre needed most from my short trips.

The accounts above show the bureaucratic dealings with regard to the museum and the perception of the officials at Maria Mwegere Culture Centre of what seemed to brand best in the context of production, preservation and display of local 'tradition' and 'culture'. The focus of the discussion was more on the state officials as there was seemingly no resident involvement noted in the affairs of the museum except that of the dormant board. It is evident from the observations above that although, the state through its representatives and agencies advocate for museums to be treated as one method to preserve culture, various local offices country wide might prefer other methods that supposedly brand best, unlike the museum. This situation is better explained by Schildkrout (1995) in the publication on museums and nationalism in Namibia. She argued that museums in Africa have only played a minor role in defining national identity and unlike festival attendance, visiting museums is not a "ritual of citizenship" as it has been for a long time in Europe and the United States. Nevertheless, new postcolonial African countries continue to use museums to make politically useful memories within the context of the state and the above accounts are just some of the many struggles museums in Africa encounter in the construction of national identity and culture.

Few local people in Rundu and at the centre speak about the museum and the need to utilize it as a tool to conserve their much-discussed 'culture', but I think it is really not seen as the best manner to protect and promote local culture and tradition. When the official responsible for the museum requested money to buy something, she was told many stories about lack of money even though the centre operates on a sufficient cash flow generated by other means. In fact the ministry²⁵⁴ tried some time ago to recruit a museum curator, but it has not been successful in that endeavor since there are very few curators in Namibia and the salary was low compared to other museums nationally. Only towards the end of last year when the directorate improved the salary structure of that position did they finally appoint a curator, Helvi Mbwalala. Mbwalala is a university graduate whose major subjects were in tourism. Before Mbwalala joined Ekongoro she worked for the City of Windhoek. In our informal conversation she sounded like someone

²⁵⁴ Already in 2006 when I was still busy studying for a Masters degree at the University of the Western Cape, Shapi asked me informally whether I was not interested in that position.

who had a plan and energy for what lay ahead in her new job. Her immediate plan was to have the museum building renovated, before she embarks on the restoration and collection of new artifacts. One would also think that, because government eventually appointed someone it would take the museum seriously. However, when I visited the centre this year during the July holidays she faced the same difficulties that Valesca had encountered.

The above issues are complex, and it will be perhaps uncritical to just refer to them as problems or the 'struggle' involved in museum development in Kavango as Schildkrout (1995) does. While museums in other parts of the country flourish, especially in the northern regions such as the Nakambale run by the Lutheran church, in Kavango it cannot even be jump-started to life. It seems that privately run museums do better than those for which the state is responsible. This can perhaps be attributed to the marketing and public relations strategy used by private museums. I argued earlier that a museum is perceived by officials and maybe local townspeople to be ineffective to promote and preserve local culture and tradition. This is confirmed by what I call the 'cold relations' between the leadership and officials of the Maria Mwengere Culture Centre and the national association of museums. There seems to be an undeclared dispute between the two (as witness the conversation between myself and the Vice-Chair of MAN). When I conversed with members of MAN about Kavango they referred to the lack of interest and action from the officials of the centre. Despite the economic potential in running such an establishment, the local office and people did not seem to be interested in the museum.

However, I can take it further and say that the lack of interest in the Kavango museum expresses also the desire not to reclaim the legacy of local colonial history. The situation should thus be viewed as a subtle revolt against the colonial history by those who ran the centre. It is a different situation from the one explained by Fairweather (2001) that local people of Oshikoto region in northern Namibia use Olukonda museum as an opportunity to reclaim the history of missionary conquest through display and practice for visitors at Nakambale museum. There are two fully-fledged museums in the Oshikoto region, at Olukonda and Tsumeb. Neither museum belongs to the state: they are privately run. These museums have since their introduction become strategic economic resources for those locals with an interest in such initiatives. These initiatives seem to be informed by a fast-emerging cultural tourism industry reinforced by the state discourse of social development.

Now I focus on the colonial ‘culture booklet’ and its relation to the Kavango museum, and will pay attention to its workings and the meaning it has acquired in the postcolonial context.

Maria Mwingere Culture Centre: ‘The culture booklet: an instrument of objectification’

The idea of the booklet comes from the colonial South West Africa period, when it was commonly held that the ‘culture of the native’ should be captured and stored in museums for ethnographic presentations, and the tourist gaze and finally for the production of colonial unity. In the colonial context, the culture booklet was seen as a resource in which the Kavango culture could be stored and preserved. The relation between the museum and the culture booklet needs to be understood in the context of homeland politics engineered through the Odendaal initiative that I discussed in chapters 4 and 5. The initiative was highly influenced by Volkekunde studies which emphasized the distinctness and retribalisation of the native, including those written by authors such as Olivier (1961), Bosch (1964) and Van Tonder (1966). It exhibits the influence and idea of ‘cultures’ that has been discredited by a contemporary anthropological understanding of the notion of culture as dynamic, rather than static. Thus the collection of so-called traditional artifacts in the museum and recording thereof was seen by the state as a way to preserve the pristine ‘cultures’ they found (or were perhaps attempting to re-ignite?). The earlier relation between the museum and the culture booklet was essentialist in nature and as such created the tourist spectacle of a fixed ‘traditional’ way of life of people in Kavango. With the activities of the Odendaal Commission in mind, the administration of the time must have believed that if its subjects had bought into the idea of distinctness, it could morph into some form of homeland cohesion that I prefer to read as ‘colonial unity’. The practice was similar in the neighbouring Ovamboland albeit in a different context as discussed by Hayes and others in their publication termed *The Colonizing Camera* (1998).

The administrative officers at Maria Mwingere Culture Centre went out to collect and record traditional songs, oral histories and do research on tradition and culture of the people in Kavango. The songs were bound in what was known as a *sangbundel*²⁵⁵. The *sangbundel* contained choir songs, choruses and the Kavango anthem. These histories of origins, migrations

²⁵⁵ NAR/1/55 File AP/7/1/1 Jaarverslag (Annual Report) 1978 Departement Van Onderwys- Kavango Regering.

and cultures of various ‘officially’ recognized population groups were bound in a booklet by the state and were also informed by contemporary academic research²⁵⁶ in the region.

The current culture booklet consists of a front page, which has the name of the group or school participating in the culture festival, the year, and any decoration in picture form that symbolizes the group. The second page has the historical background of the group and the list of names of participants. The list of names is followed by aids that decorate the stage and an explanation of the act. Then follow the songs and drama acts, written in local languages and explained in English. The background of the song and how it is sung and danced is also outlined. The songs are organized in three phases namely the entrance song, the main song or drama (often the drama is preceded and closed with a song) and finally the exit song.

The groups organize and prepare their own booklets, independently. During the culture festivals each participating group is required to submit their booklet to the judges just before or as they go on stage. In the case of schools it is the teachers who submit it to the judges and if it is any other groups, the group leader does it. The judges then use the culture booklet and an adjudication form to judge the act.

Groups are judged in terms of how they enter the stage, their décor, costume, song, originality and the presentation of the booklet. Marks are allocated out of 100. The judges are obliged to give comments on the practice, sign the sheet and hand it to the chief judge. Also on the judging sheet is the category of the act, whether it is an adult, secondary school, youth, or a primary school group. The name of the group, the circuit it represents and information about the circuit in which the judge resides are all provided.

In postcolonial Kavango, the booklet has been reinvented, reorganized and given new meaning. The current booklet contains the five previously recognized ethnic groups in Kavango, and in addition the Vanyemba and the San. Although it emphasizes local ethnic differences it contains a nationalistic narrative of inclusion. Most importantly, local people who participate in the festival create the culture booklet themselves. Groups that participate in the state sponsored culture festivals compile booklets containing their compositions and a short history of the ‘culture’ and ‘traditional’ background. Supposedly, the function of the booklet is to give the judges at the

²⁵⁶ See my discussion about sponsored colonial and independent academic research in chapter four.

festival an ‘insight’ into the ‘culture’ and songs of the performing groups in order for them to adjudicate fairly. During the Annual National Culture Festivals, the regional culture offices compile what I call a ‘master cover narrative’ of the history and cultures of ethnic groups identified as Vakavango in Namibia in addition to the various ‘culture booklets’ prepared by the specific groups in the event. The cover narrative is supposed to give the judges a bird’s-eye view of various presentations from the region.

What is evident is a process in which the state imagines and enforces local ethnicities (in this case unopposed) especially in the context of the creation of the master cover narrative that brings together the various culture booklets. This hangs on the state’s ability and power to mediate the context in which the construction happens.

When such a narrative is prepared leaders of various cultural groups are not represented and as I have noted it (the narrative) has remained the same over time, apart from minimal changes. The officials do not edit the songs; they just check whether the groups have catered for a song item for each category of the festival. That is why I argue that, because the narrative has not being changed for some time the state presents Kavango-ness as fixed in all these festival encounters. While the state constructs ethnic identities as fixed in its ‘master cover narrative’ the public through participants acknowledges differences and changes in their idea of Kavango-ness. They contribute to such a process by how they compose and present songs and dances in their ‘culture booklets’. As it appears, the above is a process that fixes boundaries. However, I show below it is quite a fluid process especially if we take into consideration the participation of local groups in making the culture booklet.

As I said earlier, cultural groups create their own culture booklets. At least, that is what I was repeatedly told. During my time in the field, I was not able to encounter a group making a booklet. Every time I went to visit a group whether at school or anywhere in the region, they always had their booklets. I only noticed later that the groups actually have what I call ‘databases’ in the form of computers and books in which their songs and drama plays were stored. Group leaders produced and managed these databases. Many groups used school facilities such as computers printers to produce their culture booklets. They drew songs from their ‘databases’ and only occasionally they changed the song content in order to address a particular context in the festival. I was informed during my interviews at the schools I visited

that it was teachers who compiled the culture booklets, but they also relied on local people for content material²⁵⁷. It has always been a wish for me to encounter one of the groups doing it, but it has not happened. However, what I have been able to observe was how the group Tukulikeni compiled and bound songs for their culture booklet in the regional festival of 2008.

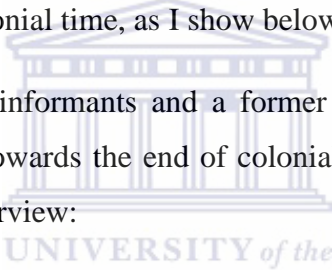
Tukulikeni is a local cultural group that competes in the youth category of the festival. Valesca, the official responsible for the museum at the centre, also takes part in it. She was the group leader at the time. I only learnt about this when she borrowed my camera in order to use it during one of the lunch breaks a week before the regional festival. I gave her the camera and she went to take pictures of her group mates and returned it after lunch. She told me that the cover page of the booklet needed a new look as the older one also had faces of group members who had since left the group. When she returned the camera, she printed the photos. She then also printed songs from the computer file which she told me would help her group win. At the end of the day she was just going to tell them which songs she had selected and the group would then rehearse those songs for the regional festival. She believed that her mates would not be disappointed, because she had included two of their favourite songs. These songs are filed in the official computer by the employee who takes part in cultural dances. The songs were not composed, they were just downloaded from the computer and bound in a booklet. This observation is interesting in the sense that a particular group member was almost autonomously able to select items. In this case even if the colleagues in the group did not like what she had chosen, the material was not going to change, because the document was regarded as final and it was already in print. One can speculate that her colleagues did not necessarily object to Valesca's move, because of her influence as an official at the culture office and the leadership role she played.

As I have observed, local people make and remake their culture through text and images that they capture in the culture booklet. The compilation of songs and dances in a booklet, presented at the festival space, contains extensive social communication between performers/participants who represent the electorate, and the state. For the local people, the "culture booklet" creates a focal space for political advocacy, identity politics, social awareness and the celebration of nationhood in the region.

²⁵⁷ See my discussion in chapter seven.

The discussion above focused mainly on the Maria Mwengere Culture Centre as a space in which the colonial state produced and articulated histories/identities of the local people of Kavango through the compilation and promotion of the culture booklet, the collection of oral stories, songs and research on various musical instruments and traditional implements in the region. In contemporary culture festivals the culture booklet is presented as a tool to assist the judges to do a better job, but there is more to it than meets the eye. This ethnography shows that the state uses the culture booklet to construct the identity of its citizens in what I call 'regional ethnicities' in various political regions; while participants' apply it to present 'culture' as they imagine and see it with their own eyes. Contents in the culture booklet convey an imagery of the population groups in Kavango as bounded and separated, while the song and drama contents²⁵⁸ show otherwise. This aspect of the culture booklet can be understood within the context of the colonial idea of the quest for exploration of Kavango 'tradition' and 'culture' and how it has been re-appropriated in the postcolonial time, as I show below.

Jan Bradley, one of my research informants and a former state ethnologist, who headed the Maria Mwengere Culture Centre towards the end of colonial political administration, made the following statement during our interview:



 "You know an Afrikaner is fanatic about his culture, until today."²⁵⁹

The statement was in reference to fellow Afrikaners to refer to the attitude and manner in which they ran the culture centre. He implied above that because Afrikaners conserve their 'culture' those who worked at the centre before him had ensured that the people of Kavango were rooted in activities of their culture, by participating in the organized activities²⁶⁰. It seems the idea was that everyone should preserve and protect 'their' culture, like Afrikaners did theirs at the time when the apartheid ideology was conceived. (Sharp, 1988). Also Afrikaners who worked at the centre including himself made sure that the supposed 'culture' of the Kavango people was well recorded and documented, because they wanted to maintain originality and respect for local traditional dances and culture. They used notions of authenticity.

²⁵⁸ See my discussion in chapter seven.

²⁵⁹ Interview with Jan Bradley at Tutungeni, Rundu, 20 September 2008

²⁶⁰ I note that Bradley's idea of culture is essentialist and I present them as such in order to make sense of the discussion.

There seems to have been a general fear and anxiety among the officials of the time for the possible loss of culture and tradition of the native, because of various outside influences. The above perspective about the possible loss of culture by the native has already been alluded to by Van Tonder in his study of Kavango during 1966 (and I quote him): ‘Natural segregation between different ethnic groups and races seen as separate homelands with adequate land from which to develop into an independent economic and political unit, is a justified balanced process.’ Van Tonder went on to debunk the idea of the detribalization of the native in favour of retribalisation: ‘To advocate or force detribalization and integration, or even potential integration, on different ethnic groups who have nothing in common, not even the colour of their skins, is to advocate perpetual dependence and conflict, domination, racial discrimination, upper and lower social strata, an unequal distribution of rights and privileges, and also duties and responsibilities.’ (1966:19) Although Van Tonder concluded the above from the functional perspective of the Kavango society after the implementation of the Odendaal Plan, the implication was that of a retribalised²⁶¹ and conservative society that regarded itself as different. Thus it was very important to record the ‘culture’ of the native in the above context as well as the context of Bradley’s essentialist idea of ‘culture’ and ‘tradition’.

The development of the booklet began with the formulation of the judges’ sheet of the adjudicators. As Jan Bradley explains the process below:

“I have drawn up a performance guide for the judges how to judge and what to judge; for all the judges. Then I had a workshop at Ekongoro and we discussed every point. And then it was judged by performance, the clothing, and meaning of the story. That’s why we won! The Kavango group, because I introduced all the traditional dances perfectly in a booklet. And then the evening before the dances I issued a booklet to every judge from the other regions. You need to have an initiative attitude. Tomorrow when you start every judge was following the dances of the Kavango dances and they could understand perfectly well. You must remember that you have a Vambo speaking judge, a Kwangali speaking judge, you’ve got a Nama and they don’t know the Kavango dances and the Kavango also do not know their dances. I felt it was my responsibility to introduce the

²⁶¹ I have shown in chapter two that earlier native commissioners of the region especially after Cocky Hahn were not in favour of retribalised natives in Kavango unlike in the former Ovamboland.

Kavango dances to the judges, otherwise how do you judge? After that the Minister of Youth and Culture John Mutorwa then requested that every region must introduce a kind of script like that for understanding. That played a tremendous role in reconciliation.^{262,}

Bradley's explanation above about the logic and function of the culture booklet is an interesting one albeit in the postcolonial context. The initial colonial motive for the culture book was to store the culture and traditional dances of the Kavango as Jan Bradley and Elrich Pretorius²⁶³ claim. Supposedly the culture booklet is produced to convey a sense and idea of culture and traditional dances of various groups to the judges during the festivals as per Bradley's idea that was discussed in workshops before it was implemented. He also credits the successful performances of the region during the various encounters to the pre-independence culture booklet, which he conceptually redefined and distributed to the judges the evening before the groups performed. What is interesting is his view that judges from other regions did not know anything about the various culture dances and so needed to be oriented about what they did not know so that they could award marks fairly. Clearly in this context there seem to be a representation of 'culture' in a fixed manner. The other interesting point is the request of the former Minister of Youth and Sport John Mutorwa that each region present a script about their cultures so that they could be better understood in the festival contest. That moment marked the reinvention and re-appropriation of the "culture booklet" by the directorate. I mentioned earlier that the idea of the "culture booklet" was a colonial invention. However, the culture booklet or *sangbundel* did not achieve its success and acclaim at the time it was invented, it only became popular during the early phases of independence when the culture festivals were reintroduced.

The other pertinent issue about the culture booklet is its mediation. When I spoke to Bradley, he indicated that he prepared the information of the regional booklet himself and only presented the idea in a series of workshops. He claimed that he was in effect the sole author of the history and 'traditions' of the Kavango, as fixed during the 1980s. By contrast, current culture groups produce the booklets themselves without any involvement from the officials at Ekongoro. It is also worth noting that most booklets I have studied are prepared along intra ethnic contexts such that the groups or schools in Mbunza area supposedly present the Mbunza 'culture', or Shambyu

²⁶² Interview with Jan Bradley at Tutungeni, Rundu, 20 September 2008

²⁶³ My personal communication with Elrich Pretorius at Maria Mwengere Culture Centre in Rundu during 2008.

or Ukwangali etc. However, when the groups participate in the national finals the culture office covers all the scripts submitted by the groups with an overall ‘official’ history of the Kavango and their dances. As a result the region is presented as a unified fixed ethnic entity during the finals.

The booklet can be viewed as having served the same purpose during the two historical moments. However, in both moments the culture booklet created contexts in which the identity of the Kavango was defined and emphasized. As in contemporary times, during the colonial era in Kavango the participants in the culture festival did not have the liberty to prepare booklets on their own. In postcolonial Kavango, on the other hand, the participants in the festival are allowed to picture and define for themselves who they are. They have the liberty to present songs and drama of their choice. While the various groups are able to freely decide what to include in the booklet and how they see themselves, the regional office creates the regional identity and a narrative which presents the people of Kavango as riparian. This regional identity is consumed and perceived and presented as fixed in the national context. When presenters enact the various performances at the festival, they are read by judges within the context of the culture booklet. Judges award the points according to what they read and see in relation to the culture booklet.

Their acts are further influenced by expectations that are listed on the judge’s sheet. While the groups presents and emphasizes the various local inner ethnicities at the regional festival, the culture office asserts the regional ethnic identity at the national event. The above activities at the Maria Mwendere Culture Centre make it a space where local culture is “retrieved” to borrow Soyinka’s (1990) term from historical silos, remade, disseminated by state officials and consumed by the public audience who attend culture festivals. The officials at the centre objectify songs, dances and drama in “culture booklets” and present them as “things” which belong to particular group at the festivals.

Do we see ethnicity at play in this context? I argue that there is ethnicity in action. However, this ethnicity must be contextually defined and divorced from the primordial view of ethnicity as inscribed in shared biology, ancestral history and innate disposition, as argued by Cohen (1974:xii) cited by Comaroff and Comaroff (2009) in their seminal *Ethnicity, INC*. In this case I use ethnicities in a constructionist perspective where those who claim it, do so in order to subjectively assert difference of identity. During the national festival, regional ethnicity is of

particular importance as it forms part of the wider diverse audience which must to be united in order to have a nation. Unlike the stages of the festival that are internal to the region, at the national festival presenters are no longer Mbunza or Gciriku, but ‘Kavango’ and it is this identity that identifies them amongst the many other ethnic groups that comprise the Namibian nation. Thus ethnicity in this context manifests itself as a general category as well as a specific identity. It is an identity that people and the state produce in their quest to address various social matters such as solving problems, to enhance and defend their positions, to justify their actions, to establish meanings, to achieve understanding, or to otherwise negotiate their way through the world they live. (Cornell&Hartmann, 1998: xviii) While I argue that ethnicity is made and asserted through the ‘culture booklet’, the approaches of the actors vary, but the distinctions are blurred. Like the ‘master cover narrative’ I referred to, which the state constructs, it seems to implicitly mean that the ‘culture’ is fixed, essential and not changing, thus it is regarded by officials as the reference point that judges can use in order to award marks ‘correctly’. Local people also seem to have the same perception of ‘culture’ and its representation. However, their drama-play presentations especially signify contemporaneity²⁶⁴.

In the culture booklet there is a clear distinction between and assertion of the various population groups resident in the region. It depends whether the group originated from Mbukushu, Gciriku, Shambyu or Mbunza and Kwangali area. I have shown in earlier chapters that these five groups were officially recognized as the original “tribes” resident in Kavango, while the San and Vanyemba were not recognized as Kavango groups during colonial times. Up to today the Vanyemba and San are presented as those who have no ancestral place in the region due to earlier constructions. The same perception is upheld, although most of the songs in the booklets are written in and performed in *Runyemba*²⁶⁵. A lot of Kavango dances continue to be hotly contested locally, especially when a connection is made to what is believed to be the Vanyemba culture or tradition. (Akuupa, 2010) However, the most interesting observation is the classification of the above five groups into two categories where Mbunza and Kwangali is regarded as the west, because of its geographical location while the rest Shambyu, Gciriku, and

²⁶⁴ See discussion in chapter seven.

²⁶⁵ Runyemba is a generic word used to refer to dialects which are spoken by the population group identified/classified as the Vanyemba. I have discussed the ‘question’ of Nyemba-ness in detail in chapter five and chapter eight.

Mbukushu are the east. This categorization is a complex one especially when it comes to issues of regional development, party politics and appointments to positions of influence at the regional and national government as I will show in the next section.

With regard to the lyrical content in songs and drama I analyzed all the booklets I collected during the regional festival. I observed that songs and drama were influenced and defined by issues in areas where the groups originated. In the next section in which I discuss how the culture booklet is used as an advocacy and communication tool for social dialogue regarding rights and resources between the officials who represent the state, audience and participants at the festival. I argue that the ‘culture booklet’ as represented in the cultural festival is a socio-political space through which social dialogue is enacted.

“Culture booklet”: a resource of advocacy

Earlier I stated that a culture festival is viewed as a vital resource for nation-building by the state. In this context I view the official impression and thinking that postulates especially postcolonial political rituals such as festivals as mere means of nation-building, as too vague and generic. In order to understand the state-sponsored culture festival as an important resource of nation-building for the state is not to read it holistically, but through the various small segments that comprise it. To focus instead on the dominant role of the state during the event, I analyze the festival with a particular focus on the songs and dances in the culture booklet, the audience response and various cultural representations.

In this section I shift my analysis of the culture booklet from being an object of identity construction and assertion, to a medium of dialogue and advocacy. I pay attention to the content of the culture booklet, namely songs and dances, in order to show how participants in the festival use it as a resource and medium through which to address local issues. While the festival organizers utilize the culture booklet to make and assert an ethnicised identity of Kavango on the one hand, participants on the other hand use it as an opportunity for dialogue with the state. In my quest to understand the abstract philosophy behind the festival as a political ritual, I realized that songs and drama present an opportunity to get in touch with social issues that people are grappling with, as indicated below by the teachers at Sauyemwa Junior Primary School:

‘Ose ku za tu ka gave mbudi! Moidana mwa kona ku kara mbudi omo mononsumo noidano. To mudana, eyi yina kara asi vantu va mone asi oudano wongandi ngapi omu ava udana. Nyee kapisi ku dana kwelike, ku gava nombudi. Nampiri moomu yakere na nare si, kapisi ngava dana tupu, ngava dimbi pamwe yihorokwa. Imo vana kuza va tantere vantu vapeke asi yinke yina horoka. Yo yiwa ndi yoyidona. Makura nose imo tuna ku ninka asi moomu da kere nonsumo da nare ngadi simpji mbudi, imo simpe tuna kutara asi yinke yina ku horoka. Makura tat u yi tura yikare mbudi yizo tuna ka gava kovantu vamwe. Ndi walye yinke tuna hara, walye nava turuganena yongandi. Ndi walye ngapi vana kulizuva vanona? Ngapi va kulizuva vantu nonopmitisili? Makura ozo mbudi izo nga tu ka gava nye zize tupu kwo voovo vantu zina tamba.²⁶⁶

‘We go there to give messages! There should be a message in any song or act. People should present or practice dances so that people can see and know how a particular dance is done. However, the purpose is not about dancing only, but to give a message. Even a long time ago people did not just gather to dance for entertainment, they sang about things which had happened. In that manner they are able to go and tell people about what happened. They gave messages about everything good or bad. So we are also emulating what happened long time ago in our songs. We observe what is going on and sing about it. Sometimes we look at what we need to be done for us and direct our message to the people who can do such things for us. We ask; what do children want? How are the leaders working with the leaders? So that is what we formulate into a message and direct it to those it is intended for.’

Looking at the manner in which various songs and drama contained in a culture booklet is contextualized, and the interview excerpt above, it is evident that the small book is issue-driven. As I have observed these issues ranges from identity politics, HIV/Aids, service delivery and regional disputes to praises of leader. It is a means of communication as boldly stated in the interview excerpt above. Cultural groups use the songs to ask their leaders to do things for them. There is a message communicated between the audience, performers, judges and state representatives through song and dance. Although the message in the song is contemporary, the

²⁶⁶ Interview with Magdaleena Pessa Kasera, Theresia Sikongo, Anastasia Mufenda and Helena Nasini, they are teachers responsible for culture at Sauyemwa Junior Primary School, 20 January 2009.

manner through which it is spread is believed by the teachers at the schools and grandparents to be 'traditional'. Therefore people could learn from the dances through which the message is transmitted how they were particularly danced long time ago. In my discussion with the teachers there is a sense of nostalgia-construction which expresses the desire for a sense of rooted-ness in rural tradition as argued by Fairweather (2003) in the context of heritage contestations between villagers and cosmopolitan citizens at Olukonda in Northern Namibia.

When the festival happens at the regional and national level, the stage of performance is centered between various audiences, which I categorize as follows: a public audience composed of local people who come to view the dances at the festival and the political audience that is formally invited by the organizers to attend the gathering and legitimize it as a state ritual. Political audiences are there to represent the state. Last, but not least, there is an adjudicating audience that must judge the acts according to the guide²⁶⁷ provided for by the organizers. The participants are also part of the audience, but here I want to present them as presenters of what is being witnessed and communicated in the performance: the message! The above categorization can also be understood in the context of front stage²⁶⁸ as perceived by Goffman (1959). Goffman (1959) suggests that when an act of performance is prepared and presented to an audience in a mediated context it is done front-stage. What takes place is consistent and contains generalized ways to explain the situation or roles the actors are playing, to the observing audience.

There are dynamics that are context-driven among audiences and determine how they respond to performances. An important one is the language²⁶⁹ of presentation and the message contained in the songs. Political and public audiences are usually the target of these messages in song. When the festival is held regionally those present especially the political and the public audiences are able to easily comprehend what is going on in song and dances, because they are conversant with the language used. The representation of dances is not likely to be viewed on face value, because the language in which it is presented is understandable to most if not all audiences

²⁶⁷ The judges also use a score sheet and a guideline on what to look for in the enactment prepared by the Directorate which directs them how to allocate marks in order to determine the winner.

²⁶⁸ For an extensive analysis of this notion see chapter seven.

²⁶⁹ I refer to the overtly used language.

listening. The message is not likely to be distorted by other factors encountered during translation. However, translation is a must if the festival happens at the national level where the political audience is diverse and not only from the region, but also from the central administration. Certain songs contain messages that are deemed sensitive, especially so when they are presented in particular contexts, but when they are presented in song- in a mediated environment- they become desensitized while maintaining the value of the message.

These messages can be classified as resources to demand, complain, caution, praise and ridicule. The other dynamic is about people who compose the songs. The majority of participants in the festival are pupils and high school students and these groups are coached by teachers. Teachers compose songs that are context-orientated and are mostly about social issues such as health, education etc, though they may also be more overtly political. One issue that was prominent in the culture booklets of Kavango during the festivals of 2008 was the dispute about grazing land in the Ukwangali traditional Authority²⁷⁰.

From 2005 until late 2008 tensions brewed between cattle herders from the former Ovamboland who settled (illegally?) in the western Kavango district of the Ukwangali Traditional Authority in western Kavango. Several herders from Oshikoto and Ohangwena region in the Ondonga and Oukwanyama traditional areas respectively had for some time been allowed by the Ukwangali Traditional authority to graze their cattle in western Kavango. All was in order until those who had grazing rights began to invite others to bring their cattle to graze and settle in western Kavango illegally²⁷¹. Several cattle which were brought to Kavango reportedly belonged to politicians and senior civil service officials such as Ministers and regional councilors from the Ovamboland traditional areas. The situation angered Hompa Sientu Mpati, who ordered the herders to vacate and leave the area, as recorded for the national television current affairs programme Open File during 2005. Despite repeated attempts to make the herders leave, they

²⁷⁰ Since the Independence of Namibia, institutions which were formerly known as tribal authorities were changed to be traditional councils/authorities since the enactment of the council of traditional leaders' act of 1997.

²⁷¹ In order to understand this problem of illegal grazing and settlement of people from Ovamboland in Kavango, one needs to pay attention to what happened historically. I have discussed earlier in chapter 4 how the South African administration moved and resettled people in their quest to create colonial tribal trust funds. As official records show the Kavango territory has been moved twice in order to accommodate people from Uukwanyama in the area known as Mpungu. As a result there has been a higher concentration of people from the former Ovamboland in that area. Those who have settled in Mpungu then also invited their kin to join them in Western Kavango.

stayed put. The Ukwangali Traditional Authority resorted to civil justice and as result the herders were served with court orders to leave. The police enforced the order. Below are the cautionary songs that were performed during the 2008 festivals when grazing in Ukwangali was a thorny issue:

Vakavango pindukeni²⁷²

Vakavango pindukeni evhulyeni vanatwara.

Vakavango pindukeni evhulyeni vanatwara.

Vahompa vetu vatano lizeni mutjima gumwe,

Kumwe nova foromani va kansela.

Kavango people wake up (Translation)

People of Kavango wake up, they took your land

People of Kavango wake up, they took your land

Our five leaders unite with one heart/mind

Together with the headmen and councilors

Evhu Lyaukwangali²⁷³

Evhu lyaukwangali nane vanagusa

Nane ee

Vana gusa ee

Temwinina siranda rugongoro

The Ukwangali land(Translation)

They took the land of Ukwangali, oh my goodness!

oh my goodness!

They took

Chameleon change into collar band

²⁷² The song is composed by Musese Junior Secondary School in Ukwangali. It is translated by me.

²⁷³ The song is composed by Kananana Primary School in Ukwangali. It is translated by me.

During the 2008 circuit and regional culture festivals, participants from the *west*²⁷⁴ as they are locally referred to by their counterparts in Eastern Kavango presented the above songs with lyrics about the grazing saga in Western Kavango. These songs were a warning directed to all residents of Kavango²⁷⁵ to be wary of those who wanted to grab their land. The lyrics ridiculed those who were given rights to graze in the area and likened them to chameleons which change colour and camouflage their presence.

When both songs above were presented at the regional festival the public together with the political audience cheered loudly²⁷⁶. When the songs were presented at the national culture festival the response was not the same. The section on the stand which accommodated the Kavango region during the national finals responded the same way as in the regional culture festival. While they cheered loudly and stamped their feet the rest of people just watched. I observed that there was no significant response from the VIP tent that accommodated the political audience representing both the regional and central governments. The silent response could stem from various communication factors such as the language barriers mentioned above; or perhaps their possible association with the politicians whose cattle grazed in the disputed area. At the national culture festival, political audiences especially those that represent the central government may not be conversant with the language of presentation and had to rely on translations. In such a circumstance, they may just view the presentation as it is performed without understanding the linguistic content and regard it as merely an exciting cultural performance. The message might also have been distorted if any of them had asked for a translation of the item being presented. I have observed that many times translations are done when drama is presented. Usually the local political leader or senior civil servant would lean to

²⁷⁴ I mentioned the distinction of the westerners and easterners in Kavango earlier in the discussion. It is based on the geographic locations of ethnic groups; it is commonly used when people from either side are appointed to prominent positions by the head of state. There appears to be an overt competition over high positions among the traditional authorities on the number of people appointed to central government positions who are drawn from their people. It signifies representation, and the more people you have at central government position from your traditional authority (it is believed) the more influence there is from your area and your needs are more likely to be addressed faster.

²⁷⁵ The issue still remains complex and sensitive at the moment and national leaders have since become involved in order to seek a permanent solution. The head of state also became involved by urging the Council of Traditional Leaders which advises him on issues of traditional authorities to seek a solution to avoid instability. (The Namibian, 23 November 2005; The Namibian, 23 June 2008)

²⁷⁶ In contrast to when a song about HIV/Aids was sung.

the visitor and say something when the drama unfolds and on rare occasions when the participants are dancing. However, the reason could also be that many of the political elite were actually involved in the issue. The songs caution people in Kavango about the imminent danger of losing land to their neighbours who they had offered to assist during their time of need. Another group, Rupara Combined Junior Secondary School from western Kavango composed a song titled:

‘Vakavango mwaha rara evhu lyetu lina piti’

‘People of Kavango wake up, they have taken our land’

Their culture booklet, which is handwritten,²⁷⁷ explains the song in English as follows:

‘This is a song that was composed two years ago by the Vakwangali tribe, due to the problem that they had that their land was intended to be given to other people. So they decided to give their complaints through different songs, this was one of them. It is addressing the Kavango people to be awake and work as a team, work to get their land back.’²⁷⁸

In this time which is perceived to be a period of difficulty, local politics that suggest ethnic differences are put aside, and the unity of Kavango-ness is mobilized by traditional leaders including headman and councillors who serve in the regional government, in order to deal with the problem that threatens the region. In this context the west and east dichotomy too does not matter for the time-being and people become united as a “cultural community” striving for a common goal. (Kymlicka. 1989:135) However, it does not mean that people have forgotten their local differences. They are fully aware and “conscious of their cultural differences”. (Bauman, 1971:35)

While such political issues may take prominent place at times, others may at the same time still emphasize the overarching theme of ‘unity-in-diversity’. The song below was composed and presented by Sauyemwa Junior Primary School which is in the Mbunza Traditional Authority. The song praises the culture festival organizers at the regional level with the specific mention of

²⁷⁷ It seems that to some groups the manner of how the culture booklet was prepared did not matter as long as the message was delivered.

²⁷⁸ The song was composed by Rupara Combined School Junior Secondary in Ukwangali in 2008.

Thomas Shapi the senior culture officer at Maria Mwengere Culture Centre and Diaz Ndango the director of National Heritage and Culture Programmes (NACP) for uniting people of Kavango with all the other ethnic groups in the country. Despite the imminent threat to stability in the region caused by grazing tensions, groups also composed songs of praise calling for national unity. The song urges the unity of ethnic groups represented by various regions at the festivals.

Tunapanda²⁷⁹

Wompo ee tuna panda mwatutura kumwe

Wompo ee tuna panda mwatutura kumwe

MoKavango

Tunapanda ee mwatutura kumwe

Otate Shapi

Tunapanda ee mwatutura kumwe

Pontambo zekeguru

Tunapanda ee mwa tutura kumwe

Otate Ndango

Tunapanda ee mwa tutura kumwe

Wompo ee tuna panda ee mwatu tura kumwe

Wompo ee tuna panda ee mwatu tura kumwe

VaDamara tuna panda ee mwa tutura kumwe

VaWambo tuna panda ee mwa tutura kumwe

VaHerero tuna panda ee mwa tutura kumwe

VaKavango tuna panda ee mwa tutura kumwe

Natuvenye tuna panda ee mwa tutura kumwe

We are happy (Translation)

We are happy that you culture organizers united us

We are happy that you culture organizers untied us

In Kavango

²⁷⁹ Song composed by Sauyemwa Junior Primary School in Mbunza during 2008. It is translated by me.



We are happy that you united us

Tate (Mr.) Shapi

At the higher level (national)

We are happy that you united us

We are happy that you united us

Tate (Mr.) Ndango

We are happy that you culture organizers united us

We are happy that you united us

We are happy that you culture organizers united us

We the Damara are happy that you united us

We the Wambo are happy that you united us

We the Herero are happy that you united us

We the Kavango are happy that you united us

We are all happy that you united us



Another concern in Kavango during the time of my research was the road infrastructure between Rundu and Nkurenkuru²⁸⁰. The road network from Windhoek via Rundu in Kavango to Katima Mulilo in Caprivi is tarred and is seen by the state as vital economic link between Namibia and other Southern African Development Community (SADC) namely Zambia, Botswana, Zambia, Zimbabwe and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Angola has been a strategic business country since the end of civil war. Most of the exports to Angola take place at Helao Nafidi²⁸¹, a town at the border in Ohangwena region. In Kavango, Rundu and Nkurenkuru towns became business hubs which serviced provinces in southern Angola. However, there was no proper road network which link Rundu and Nkurenkuru. Despite the potential economic opportunities which exist between the two countries, the lack of proper road infrastructure between Rundu the administrative capital of the region and Nkurenkuru has always been an issue among local people. Medical referrals made from Nankudu hospital in Nkurenkuru district were of particular

²⁸⁰ Nkurenkuru was recently proclaimed as town. It is around the Katwitwi border post.

²⁸¹ The new 'official name' for the new town around the Oshikango border post.

concern. In many instances the referred patient died on the way, because ambulances could not travel fast enough due to the dangerous condition of the road. Although the dusty road was occasionally swept it did not stop people from complaining due to the high rate of accidents and damage to private vehicles. Already in 2004, the state promised to build a new road which will link Nkurenkuru to Rundu, but the project only realized in December 2007. (The Namibian, 18 July 2007) At the time of the circuit festival in 2008 when the works on the road started the same group composed a song below which they presented to thank not the central government, but the local councilors and traditional chiefs for their success.

Teya twalilira²⁸²

Woteya twalilira nani vana tameke

Efumano kovahompa mpandu kovakansela

Musingi myaka tupu nani toya ndondona

The tarred road we yearned for (Translation)

They have started to built the tarred road we yearn for

Fame be upon the chiefs, thanks to the councilors

Driver, you can dance now, for you will have a smooth ride

This achievement is locally viewed not as a success of the central government, but rather one for which the regional council and traditional authorities should be thanked. The regional councilors are viewed to have won the battle against the central government which is continuously blamed for unfair distribution of national resources. In fact the chiefs from the region had already complained to independent Namibia's first head of state Sam Nujoma that people from their 'traditional areas' are being left out and something needed to be done. (The Namibian, 13 February 2003) Unfair distribution of resources in Namibia has become seriously pronounced especially after establishment of two new political parties namely Rally for Democracy and Progress (RDP) and All People's Party (APP) during late 2007. The two political parties were created by people who were senior members of the ruling party Swapo. The president of the RDP party Hidipo Hamutenya was no longer a favorite within the ruling party since he contested for the position of president before Sam Nujoma retired in 2005. He

²⁸² Song composed by Sauyemwa Junior Primary School in Mbunza 2008. It is translated by me.

also lost his position in the Nujoma cabinet and only returned later as an ordinary member of parliament. The APP president Ignatius Shihwameni who is from Kavango was once a member of the ruling party before he went to join the first postcolonial opposition party the Congress of Democrats (COD) which was formed in 1999 by Ben Ulenga who was also a member of the ruling party. Their election manifestos²⁸³ (including that of the ruling party) all pledge to address the issue of resource distribution. The matter of fair resource distribution nationally was and is still prominent in both print and electronic media where the public air their concern about the matter. (The Namibian, 05 March 2010) The national chat show radio phone in program produced by the national broadcaster has had debates about the distribution of resources. Of late it has been on and off air, as management grapple to deal with the regulation of the program content. Sauyemwa Junior Primary School composed the song for the 2008 culture festival and it presented the same song during its participation in the annual national culture festival which was held later during the same year. The song appreciates ‘development’ locally termed *ekuliko* which is brought to the region. The public audience responded to such a song with excitement and they also sang and dance together with the participants. Organizers had a difficult time to remove individuals from the public audience who kept on running on stage during the presentation of the song.

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Moving further east from western Mbunza, focus in the songs shifts from issues such as conflict and development in the region to education and showcasing what I refer to as the essentialised tradition and culture of the Kavango. As per the lyrics in the songs, they are showing what and how the local Kavango cultures look. The songs create and emphasize Kavango identity time and again, as below:

Hadye wo hana kungena?²⁸⁴

Hadye wo hana kungena,

haDiyana hana kungena

Nahaneghedhe thitjo thawo

²⁸³ www.swapoparty.org.na, www.rdp.org.na, www.hellonam.com/party-manifestos date accessed 10 May 2010.

²⁸⁴ Song composed and translated by Diyana Combined School in Mbukushu.

Twa Kavango

Twa Kavango twe

Twa kuhaka

Haka mumakupakero

Nokuneghedha- Nokunegha yikina yetu yothitjo

Who is it that enters? (Translation)

Who is entering the playground?

Diyana is entering

To show their culture

We are Kavango

We are Kavango

We love each other

We are united

Let us show our cultural dance



Other songs have content about what makes Kavango food and how it is produced. They also speak about the traditional huts and how they are made. Hunting is central in many songs from the east.

Below is a hunting song sung in Runyemba. The issue of the Nyemba songs presented in the festival is that they are contested as not representative of Kavango as I discuss in the next chapter where I deal with postcolonial identity tensions with the focus on the Vanyemba people, their songs and their perceived culture. The Vanyemba identity as a sub-category of Kavango is of particular importance in the postcolonial politics of belonging. The Vanyemba identity is represented as somewhat unwanted in the local discourse on Kavango-ness. Yet awareness of Nyemba-ness as an integral part of Kavango is quite significant. Despite contestations and the exclusion of the Vanyemba in mainstream Kavango identity, songs in Nyemba continue to dominate many culture booklets I have analyzed.

Ndji nyanga lihuli²⁸⁵

Ndji nyanga lihuli,

Ndji iyila kuli

Ndji katala mwana yila ndjelenga

Ndjelenga yaMulyata ee,

Kalenga muna Nduva eee

Chorus:

Kwenda kwaRucara ndende kwamukweni muwawa

Ndende kwamukweni muwawa

The song is succinctly translated in the booklet as follows:

I'm taking the gun and follow my friends who went hunting. My friend Ndjelenga of Mulyata and Kalenga of Nduva. Rucara is moving slowly²⁸⁶.

The other issue which features in the songs from the east is awareness creation among the youth about HIV/Aids. The 'youth' is constantly reminded about the danger of HIV/Aids and they are urged to be obedient and listen to their elders. The song also addresses the common issue of young girls who fall pregnant while still in school. It seems that, as in the colonial time, the youth remain an important focus in the postcolonial discourse of nation-building. The song below is about youth:

Vanantjoka²⁸⁷

Vanantjoka ehee

Tuyuvhenu vyavakondi

Kuna kuwana

Eehe tu yuvhenu vyavakondi

Malira na wanuke

²⁸⁵ The song is composed by Rucara Combined School in Geiriku.

²⁸⁶ Rugara Combined School p.4

²⁸⁷ The song is composed by Rucara Combined School

Kuna kufa kulihamba lya koporoka

The song is succinctly translated in their booklet as follows:

Youth should listen to their parents; they are getting pregnant and dying of HIV/Aids²⁸⁸.

The above song seems to fit in a common moral discourse about youth in contemporary Namibia. Generally, when politicians address gatherings, they always have something to say to the youth or about them. They urge the youth to be obedient and refrain from activities that are deemed destructive.

Conclusion

The above discussion shows how various population groups in the thirteen regions are ethnicized by the regional governments through projects such as heritage hunting, museums and conservation before they are presented as a unified entity during national festival encounters. The most interesting matter here is how ethnicization is appropriated in postcolonial Namibia through the 'culture booklet'. Firstly, the regional governments of Namibia are demarcated according to ethnic orientation, in a way that reasserts the already existing state of affairs. Ethnicity is appropriated in many ways and it is contextually consumed. Discussion in this regard is dealt with extensively by the Comaroffs in their *Ethnicity Inc* (2009). The Namibian state has realized the economic potential in selling culture and since its reintroduction of culture festivals have encouraged people in all the thirteen regions to rise to the opportunity and embrace its economic benefits. People in regions have formed cooperatives to operate guided tours to museums, heritage sites and cultural villages.

As regards the lyrics of songs I collected during my fieldwork, I found that they addressed a range of issues, apart from current affairs. As stated earlier, at the time of my research grazing was an issue in my Kavango research site. The issue of grazing featured significantly in the songs and drama presentations in various culture booklets especially those from western Kavango. Another common issue in the culture booklets was communicating 'morality' to the youth to warn them against risky manner in terms of their sexual health. Most of the songs I have collected urge them to desist from alcohol consumption and unprotected sexual practices.

²⁸⁸ Rucara Combined School p.7

Accordingly I have argued that the culture booklet was not only used to construct the postcolonial Namibian identity, but also as an advocacy tool targeting the state and other citizens. The inherited museum, the idea of the culture booklet, and songs contained in the booklet are of particular importance in order to understand the postcolonial making of nationhood. These aspects cannot be dealt with in isolation especially if one is to understand how the ideas of belonging rooted in the notion of ‘culture’ are formulated and asserted.

The next chapter explores how lay-people and cultural groups in Kavango make ‘their’ culture through participation in the state-sponsored cultural festival.



Chapter 7: “Making the nation”: the role of local people in the festival

Introduction

During my stay at the Maria Mwegere Culture Centre, I not only observed the festival at various levels of preparation, but also visited spaces where some of the local cultural groups met for “rehearsals” a process referred to in Rukwangali as *maliyombiliso*, or *makuyombilito* in Rumanyo. Local cultural groups in Kavango, as in other regions of the country, take part in the composition of songs, choreography, directing dances and writing dramatic plays to be performed during the festivals. Festival themes stem from rehearsal with local contents and are highly influenced by laypeople who are not directly involved in the official festival-making.

During rehearsals groups decide what type of themes and dances to “showcase”²⁸⁹ as one would say in English, or “*ku likida mpo*” (to show culture) in Rukwangali, at the festivals. The cultural groups also decide during the rehearsal sessions what costumes suit their presentation themes for the festival. What makes the festival rehearsals interesting is the belief of participants in the various cultural groups that what they produce during these session is rooted in what anthropologists refer to as essentialist notions of “tradition” and “culture”- locally referred to as “*mpo zetu*”²⁹⁰ (lit. our culture/tradition). The notions are used interchangeably in the festival, as in other social contexts. Although “tradition” and “culture” are represented as fixed in various fields of the festival it is deemed by some to be dynamic. Those who officiate during the gatherings mostly define culture from the anthropological perspective²⁹¹.

During rehearsals what has been decided on is finalised and included in a culture booklet²⁹² presented to the judges just before the groups perform in the festival. The local cultural groups selected the items included in the culture booklet during the festivals. It is the performance of dances and drama that later become a subject of interaction at the festival whether at circuit,

²⁸⁹ The act of public performance in the festival context is locally referred to as showcasing, as are performances perceived to be representations of cultures that are showcased to the public.

²⁹⁰ See my explanation on the workings and usage of the notion of “*mpo zetu*” in chapter one. “*Mpo zetu*” or “Our tradition/culture” in Kavango refers to old things. It is those old things that are believed to be carried from one generation to the next in order to preserve the “being” of people.

²⁹¹ See quotation from transcripts of the speech read by the Inspector of Education in the discussion.

²⁹² I have dealt with the culture booklet in the previous chapter, and argued that the state uses it in order to enforce and reconstruct local ethnicities, because of its power to mediate the context in which “culture” is constructed and legitimized. In the same vein I also argue that, although these cultural constructions occur in the context created and large influenced by the state, festival participants and local audiences also take part in the processes.

regional or national level, especially in the category of *kulinyanyukisa*²⁹³ when it is presented in full view of judges and audience. At all levels of the festival there is a section known as *kulinyanyukisa*. In the context of the festival, this category is all about entertainment. This category is only available during the festival itself and those who present it do not earn points towards the competitions at the festival.

This chapter addresses two issues namely *maliyombiliso* and *kulinyanyukisa*. Using Goffman's dramaturgical theory perspective, I present categories of *maliyombiliso* as the back stage and *kulinyanyukisa* as the front stage of the festival. With ethnographic evidence I attempt to show the limitations strengths and taken-for-granted understanding of performance especially when one attempts to analyze ritual performances while only being exposed to a single aspect of the performance and not its entire transitional aspect.

The chapter explores how local cultural groups and local people make their 'culture' through preparation of the culture booklets that are presented to judges during the State-sponsored culture festival. I describe and discuss the rehearsal as a process of making the festival, after observing two groups namely Mayana Combined School and Ukumwe Culture Dance Group respectively, during their preparatory meetings, as well as referring to interviews I conducted with group members and leaders of various other cultural groups. From this I show that how people participate in and contribute to the national event should be read as nationhood, because the contribution and participation of the local people in the activities of the various culture groups in the festival context makes them active role-players in the processes of nation-building as mediated and envisaged by the State. Besides their role in the State-sponsored project of nation-building, I argue that local people participate and contribute to making the festival not passively, but as active citizens whose involvement has an intended outcome²⁹⁴. My argument speaks to the work of Carola Lentz (2001) in Ghana where she observed the Kakube and Koline Festivals and where she demonstrated how local cultural presentations in the event had significant national dimensions in Ghana's politics of nationhood. What is evidently different between her study and

²⁹³ Lit. make ourselves happy or to entertain. The act of *kulinyanyukisa* is contextual. People can *linyanyukisa* themselves at anytime of the day. In fact rehearsal can also be regarded as *kulinyanyukisa*, because people are entertaining themselves. However, in the context of my study I am engaging it as an official category in the making of the festival.

²⁹⁴ Local people's participation in the making of the festival beside celebration is issue driven. They view the festival as a space where social issues could be interacted.

mine is that the festivals she studied were sanctioned by independent bodies who contended for the right to host these events. In my context, festivals were sanctioned and hosted by the State and this in itself created a different set of dynamics.

On the other hand, performance of cultural groups at various levels invariably generates social interactions between audiences, judges and performers. I present and discuss the various interactions of performers, audience and organizers (the State) that took place in the circuit and regional festivals, with a specific focus on the drum performance of Unongo Cultural Group in the Mpungu circuit and the Shiperu dance of Kapata Cultural Group during the regional competition, in the section referred to as *kulinyanyukisa* in festival context. I show that the interactions in the festival are not mainly about contestations and negotiations of what constitute the ‘proper’ Kavango ‘traditional’ dances and performances, but are also a celebration of regional and national belonging. Unlike the rehearsal sessions where such contestations could only be played out among those in the performance (namely the dancers and group leaders), in the festival interaction involves those who come to watch, perform and organize. I argue that the festival creates a focal environment for communication of “burning social issues” and a celebration of “being”. Thus, I view performance as a process of practice.

My overall intention in this discussion is not only to show how local people participate in the making of the festival, but also to explore the dynamic transition that exists between the two aspects of the festival. With transition, I have in mind the relations between the various actors of the festival and what happens on the back stage, and what on the front stage. In this context I will again rely on Goffman’s dramaturgical perspective to locate the festival “rehearsal” in what he referred to as back stage and the “actual festival” on the front stage in order to show that performances that are showcased in the culture festival are perceived as *social reality* by the actors concerned. Goffman (1959:22-43) distinguishes the two stages in terms of what happens within. He proposes that when the performer and the audience are present performance takes place front stage. The dramaturgical performance is consistent and contains generalized ways to explain the situation or role the actor is playing, to the observing audiences. He says that the front stage also involves a differentiation between setting and personal front.

In the back stage only performers are present, not what I refer to as general audiences. In the back stage the performers can step out of character without fear of disrupting the performance.

When performers are on the back stage, they are nonetheless in another performance: that of a loyal member. However, back stages remain relative, existing in relation to specific audiences.

I feel that Goffman's theory has limitations, e.g. he does not recognize the ability of performers to manipulate the performance, especially when it is appreciated by the audience, and make it more advanced front stage. I also contend that the interface between the two stages is not fixed and this opens both to influences from either side. However, his theory is useful in the context of the performance, in that the performer communicates and explains his or her role to the audience. As my ethnography will show later the performer communicates aspects of real life to the audience and it is these aspects of lived experience that enliven the performance. The experienced life is rehearsed into a story during the *makuyombilito* which I present as back stage and it is told in the front stage of the festival in its various contexts such as *kulinyanyukisa*. In using the two stages by Goffman, I do not imply in any way that what happens in the festival is staged, rather than real. Rather, I have used his back and front stage notion to separate the two categories and understand the transition within.

What happens between back stage and front stage in this context, I argue, is to be understood in terms of Bourdieu's sense of habitus, field and capital. In his essay on the possibility of a disinterested act, Bourdieu (1998:75-76) has shown why it is difficult to measure, and not assume that people do not just do something; that they are not foolish and that they do not act without reason. He has further argued that it should not be taken to say that people (or actors) are rational; or that they are right to act as they do; or even to say that they have reasons to act and that reasons are what direct, guide or orient their actions. In this context human interaction postulates a complexity that can only be understood through multiple social scientific lenses, especially if we do not seem to be convinced by the 'realness' of their social actions as reality.

Theoretically the chapter engages the theory of performance as conceptually conceived in the discipline and as an analytical tool especially by Turner (1979) and Bauman (1986). In anthropology, performance is understood broadly as presentation of symbolic systems through living bodies as well as mediating objects²⁹⁵. As a concept²⁹⁶ of analysis it is understood to be

²⁹⁵ Becker (2011) anthropology conference panel proposal. Similar perspectives are also expressed by Ebron, 2002 and Askew, 2002.

well suited to investigate aesthetic strategies, sensorial and embodied styles that are being employed to authorize authenticity in contestations over gendered- and embodied identity, and citizenship in the contemporary world. Although I concur with such perspectives, I also aim to show, as argued by Hughes Freeland (1998) in the introduction to the collection of essays *Ritual Performance*; that there is the danger of misreading performances and allowing the symbolic to dominate the functional, if we in the social sciences do not appreciate performances as social processes that constitute practices. If we do not see them as social practices, maintains Schieffelin (1998), performances seem to be robbed of life and power, especially when distanced within discussions that are concerned largely with meaning. Edward Schieffelin has argued that in anthropology, performance has largely been used to refer to particular ‘symbolic’ or ‘aesthetic’ activities that are enacted as intentional expressive productions in established genres. His perspective is against the marked bounded-ness of what he calls produced enactments. He suggests that in anthropology we have largely ignored fundamental epistemological issues and we need to see performance beyond the text, embracing the action thereof, which according to him creates presence and presents vivid realities that can amuse or terrify.

Below, before I present the ethnography of both *maliyombiliso* and *kulinyanyukisa* I give a brief background on ‘traditional’²⁹⁷ dances on which the contemporary cultural dances are modeled, in order to present an idea of how the current dance performances and idea of ‘culture’ in the festival context are perceived and against what; and how the contemporary dances are perceived as Kavango dances.

A note on ‘Kavango’ traditional dances

The ‘traditional’ dance is an important component of the State-sponsored culture festival. Although traditional dances are believed to be ethnically-bounded, anybody can actually dance them, as I demonstrate in the next chapter. I also present a scenario in which White students from Noordgrens Secondary School represent what is staged as Kavango dances. In this

²⁹⁶ Becker (2011) anthropology conference panel proposal. Similar perspectives are also expressed by Ebron, 2002 and Askew, 2002.

²⁹⁷ I speak of the dances at the state-sponsored festival as ‘traditional dances’ as they are referred to as such by festival participants and some organizers including spectators. These dances are deemed traditional, because they are believed to have been carried over from past generations and thus believed to have never changed, although the metamorphosis of the dances is clearly evident.

discussion I demonstrate that dances that are presented at the festival are modeled according to what is imagined to be traditional. As I observed, melodies and dances are presented as timeless, while lyrics are adjusted to social contexts. Dance moves are significantly modified. As I have demonstrated elsewhere in the dissertation, originality of dance and songs was highly contested at the festivals especially when they were presented by people who are believed to be Nyemba. What interested me most was the uncritical stance of the audiences, when ‘traditional’ dances and songs were represented by White and Coloured children during a festival. This is important if one is to understand local notions of belonging in Kavango.

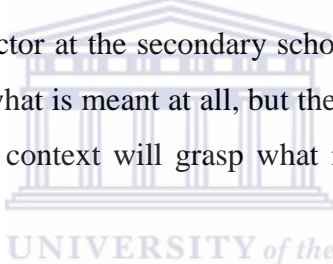
The performances are centered and modeled on traditional ritual dances, stories and old time riddles²⁹⁸. The dances in eastern Kavango (*Kambembe*, *Rengo*, *Shikavedi*, *Thiperu* and *Nyambi* respectively) are common among the Vagciriku, Vashambyu and the Vambukushu while *Mutjokotjo*, *Ukambe*, *Uyambi*, *Epera* and *Kambamba* are popular in the west among the Vakwangali and the Vambunza, and *Mahamba* is popular among the Vanyemba. The Vakavango dances are led by three drums, typically one bass and two tenors, the clapping of hands and singing by men and women. These dances were performed by the people of Kavango for celebration and thanksgiving after good harvests, deaths, rituals of passing and healing and to comment on any social situation of note. Ngondo explained how dances and songs were historically conceived among the people of Kavango:

‘Aaye usili kudimba sininge oso sa horoka nopwanare yimo ya kere ngororo. Morwa nsene asi opurakena nampili dimwe edi da karamo simpe ruveze oru va di dimbire mwina moradio to kazuva asi ngwendi Moukwangali udano ava dana mo unenene ame si Epera. Toka zuva mo mwina mononsumo odo depera tava tangauka mo vantu. Tasi tanta asi koyo vama. Ano yoinzi, nonsumo dononzi unenene nadinge kudi dimba kutundilila kosihorokwa. Nanare yimo yakere. Sosinene soso nye seesi asi nsene muntu o dili ninke, wa dira kudiva nawa nawa asi owo vantu owo zoozo mpo ozo asi mbuyungiso zazo ngapi, kapi ngoyizuva. Nakutantere puaneina ngesi ngano vantu kuna kudimba asi: ‘Kandere lina mu vuru etere lyomosekondere’ tuvangapi natu yizuv? Vamwe tatu tameke kupura asi ogu Kandere etere lyomosekondere kwa kamukuta mosekondere yiyo

²⁹⁸ Bosch (1964) has recorded some of the ‘traditional’ dances, stories, riddles and tales of the VaShambyu in Kavango. Later Fisch (2008) also recorded some of these dances especially the hunting songs from the east of Kavango. The songs, dances, stories and tales are recorded as ‘tradisionele aspekte van die Shambui’ by Bosch.

vanamupe etere asi singe nyee eli etere kapi anakuvura kulihwameka. Vamwe ta valitundile po nokuyizuva si. Nyee posili esi vanatamba. Mpito zowuhuyingiro!²⁹⁹,

‘Yes, it’s true that singing entails events that have happened and even long time ago that is how it was. For example if you listen to some of the traditional songs on radio you will notice that most of the songs they sang in Ukwangali are those of Epera dance. In this Epera dance songs you hear lyrics which praise certain people. What it means is that, these are events they have seen and observed, so all the songs are composed according to the life events people have observed. That is how it has been! The big thing here is that if one does not have a clear knowledge of the people nor the culture and its technique of talk you will not understand anything. I can tell now and today that if people began to sing about the song of how ‘Kandere failed to operate the tractor of the secondary school’ how many of us will know what is meant? Some will think that maybe Kandere was given a job of driving a tractor at the secondary school and could not manage to start it. Many will not understand what is meant at all, but the song has a meaning and only those who know its composition context will grasp what is being sung. Songs are spaces of interaction.’



The above excerpt from my wide-ranging interview with Ngondo, chairman of the Ukwangali Traditional Authority, shows that the composition of songs in what is conceived to be ‘traditional’ dances spoke about social events that were deemed interesting in those contexts. The songs sung during the culture festival were contextual and could also create opportunities of interaction about open or concealed social subjects. The songs are believed to be interactive depictions of social events, representing an image of who the singers are and what their origins are.

In contemporary Kavango, representations of a particular group in the culture festival context are looked at especially in terms of how the songs are sung, the style of dance, the pitch of the drum and ability of the drummer to make listeners excited and even “unseat them” i.e. get them to cheer, dance and sing along or present tokens of appreciation to either the drummer or dancer. It is the style of dance, the song, the drum sound, and the costumes that demonstrate uniqueness

²⁹⁹ Interview with Rudolf Ngondo at Katjindakatji, 15 January 2010.

and excite the spectators. Events that are depicted in song are those that contain satire or village humour, conflicts that beg for intervention, praise for those who have excelled, and/or ridicule for those who are believed to have dragged the community's reputation into disrepute. Songs and dances in Kavango have changed according to prevailing social contexts³⁰⁰. They have mainly been influenced by political and economic conditions that are embedded in song contents.

To date, all cultural groups from eastern Kavango perform the *Kambembe* dance during the cultural festival. It is one of the commonly performed dances, as evidenced from the various culture booklets prepared by groups from the east of Kavango. *Kambembe* was performed when a member of the ruling clan had fallen ill or when a national disaster seemed imminent. It was the only ritual ceremony amongst the people of Kavango that *at times* required human sacrifice. (Fisch 2008:261) (Italics: my emphasis) When *Kambembe* was proclaimed all people in the vicinity were required to participate. All dancers, male and female, wore *marudeve* and they moved forward and backward, slowly stamping their feet and alternatively jolting their shoulders. Three drums were beaten and the rest of the participants sang while clapping their hands.

The dance was centered on the royal dancer who wielded a spear and uttered the words '*lilye mupika ndi ngombe*³⁰¹', while dancing. This is how Shidonankuru remembers the *Kambembe* dance in her legend of the origin of Vakavango and their dances:

'Ogho Kambembe kwayamuwana ngoli pa Mpupa pakuyalimangapo. Opanya pa Mpupa ashi vinke ngoli vyakaliropo? Vantu vakaliropo okunya kuntji ya mema. Kuyuvhanga po ashi 'wuuwu-were-were-were!' Mawe omu ghana kurenka. Opo twa ghurumukire ngoli, mpo vatulirepo ngoli va Mulyata,vaNgara, vaNyumba, vaShimwemwe opo pa Mpupa. Makurane kwavutilirepo tupu kapishi kutunga shimpe. Makura ngoli ogho mugholikadi wa Shimwemwe ne kwalimine weno. Tanko avamughupu vamutware kuntji ya mema. Nani vya ngosho olyo litondo opo valimonanga, kuyuvhanga ngoma 'wuuwu-wuuwu' nani ngoli varwana vakaromo. Muwolikadine nko kumughupa vatware kuntji yolyo litondo! Akakarako nyuku-nyuku-nyuku, nani kunakamushonga. Anakayiva madina, anakayiva namu vaveta, makurane kumupa ngoli liwonga ashi 'Kayensde ngoli'.

³⁰⁰ See my discussion in chapter six on festival songs.

³⁰¹ Lit. "The spear can either eat a commoner or cattle."

Kukamuyaghura ne nko kukangena kumundi. Ghuye ashi ‘Yuvhenu kambembe nakawana ku! Makurane avaghumbiki, avashongo, avashongo ashi ‘mpwali kambembe ku!’ Naliwonga lyendi lyaligehe. Makurane oku ngoli vya tundilire ashi lilye ngombe lilye muntu? Kapi kavadipagherangapo ngombe! Kuyane ove Shidona ghunavindjungumana weno, vanaghumbura kulikupitita tupu weno kumayuru kare kaghufu! Ngoli watundireko ngoli kambembe. Ashi Kambembe ne vakubotore weno?, Um-um! Ovyo anaya ogho muwolikadi kulidamuna ngoli liwonga ne kulipa ngoli vahompa. Vahompa ngoli mbo vanakuvetero ngoli Kambembe. Liwonga lyo nava mama Nyangana vayaliwana ntani linayakombana. Makura ntantani ne ngombe ngoli dinakufango! Oko lyatundirene Vantu!³⁰²,

‘The Kambembe dance was acquired at Mpupa when we settled and cultivated there. What do you think existed there at Mpupa? There were people who lived underneath the waters. One would hear the sound ‘wuuwu-were-were-were’ of the waters sliding on stones. Then when we migrated downward Mulyata, Ngara, Nyumba and Shimwemwe settled at Mpupa. They only rested there; it was not their intention to settle yet. Then the wife of Shimwemwe cultivated a plot. One day she was picked up and taken underneath the waters. So, all that time when they used to hear the sound of drums ‘Wuuwu-wuuwu’ it was from people who lived there. So, the wife was picked up and taken to the depth of the waters and stayed there for three weeks to be trained. She learnt all the songs and how they played the drum. Then she was given a spear and told ‘go back now’. She was brought out of the water and she came into the palace. She said ‘listen to the Kambembe dance I got from that side’. So then they began the dance and she taught and taught them and said ‘there is Kambembe dance underneath there’. She had a reed-like spear. Now, in the beginning, do you think there was such a thing that the spear should kill a cow and then a human? They never used to kill a cow on the occasion! They would be approaching while someone like me Shidonankuru was seated uncomfortably and when they were about to conclude the dance they just passed the spear over your nostrils and there you died. That is how it all began with Kambembe dance. You think during

³⁰² ³⁰² Interview by Kletus Muhena Likuwa and Michael Uusiku Akuupa with Shidona Kamutuva , Gumma village, 27June 2008.

Kambembe dance the spear was pierced into you? No, it just passed over your nostril and you died, it was a magical spear. Later the woman took that spear and handed it over to the royals. It was the royal people thereafter who danced the Kambembe dance. That spear was passed on to generations and even my grandfather King Nyangana finally got it after which it got lost. And nowadays it is a cow that is killed at Kambembe royal dance but in the beginning it was a human being.’

Shidonankuru’s³⁰³ detailed explanation is a perspective on how the Kambembe dance came about. Kambembe was a very important dance in eastern Kavango. It is believed to have been invented by people who lived on the riverbed, beneath water that had supernatural qualities, and were thus deemed magical. The lyrical words in songs for the Kambembe dance “*lilye mupika ndi ngombe*” referred to the likeliness and imminence of death of either a human commoner or a head of cattle from a spear. Shidona’s narrative of the ritual killing is different from the one presented by Fisch (2008:261) who just recorded without going in to detail that the dance in question involved human death. Unlike Fisch who presented the Kambembe ritual as characterized by the killing of human beings or commoners, Shidonankuru’s perspective is that of witchcraft. Her narrative shows that people were not in actual fact stabbed with the spear. Rather, commoners could die when it was merely moved in the direction of their nose. That person could die instantly from the magical powers of the spear. The above dances have been part of the Vakavango ritual ceremonies since the 18th and 19th century. In the 1920s the colonial administration banned certain ceremonies, principally those with aspects of human sacrifices such as the Kambembe dance (Fisch: 2008).

The next common dance from the east, known as *Shikavedi*, was used as a healing dance for treating evil spirits and other bodily ailments. When *Shikavedi* was performed it was confidently believed that the ancestors could and would neutralize the cause of illness. It was also performed for hippo hunters just before they embarked upon a hunting trip. Dancers move their shoulders back and forth with their heels lifted, while moving their feet forward.

³⁰³ Shidonankuru is a daughter of King Kamutuva of the Vagciriku. Due to her advanced age and social status as an elder she is considered by local people in her area as knowledgeable about the history of the Vagciriku and royal affairs.

Rengo and *Nyambi* dances were common among the Vambukushu people, who populate the easternmost part of Kavango; it is similar to the healing dance of the Vanyemba known as *Mahamba*, and is said to have been adopted from the Vanyemba who are locally renowned to have strong healing powers compared with other inhabitants of the region. The *Nyambi* dance is used to heal illnesses related to ‘emotional-neurotic disorder’ as Fisch (2008:267) refers to it in conventional medical terms.

The other festival dance that is specific to the Vambukushu people is *Rengo*, and it is about rainmaking rituals. The rainmaking ritual has three stages known as *Kashandura*, *Dikumbwata* and *Thindongo*. The dance is characterized by long strides and extraordinary gyrations of the waist. (Fisch, 2008)

Dances that are common in western Kavango among the Vakwangali and Vambunza such as *Mutjokotjo*, *Epera*, *Ukambe* and *Kambamba*, are celebratory in nature. These dances like the ones in the east of the region are characterized by the clapping of hands and led by drumbeats. The dance styles of *Mutjokotjo*, *Kambamba* and *Ukambe* are very similar in composition, consisting of a male dancer between two females who are performing in front of other dancers formed in a half-moon shape. However, as observed, they are different in conception.

Specifically, the *Mutjokotjo* dance is centered on one male dancer between two females who dance forwards and backwards. What makes *Mutjokotjo* different from the other dances is that in the process of dancing the male dancer is expected to reciprocate a funny look at the faces of both female dancers. They in turn respond to the gesture. However, *Ukambe* which is the dance of a horse is performed in a horse-like galloping style slightly different from the other dances. The male dancer between the two female dancers move their legs in a galloping horse style with their heads and necks also turning in various directions, so as to imitate the horse. The *Kambamba* dance like the former two is also performed by one male dancer between the two female dancers with their feet moving back and forth while jolting shoulders in both directions. The dance process or style of moving shoulders is locally referred to as *kumhyaka*.

The various forms of dance serve as models for contemporary culture dances in Kavango, which are performed at the State-sponsored culture festivals and any gatherings that warrant

‘traditional’ entertainment. As I indicated above, these so-called ‘traditional’ dances appear to be registers on which belonging and Kavango-ness are emphasized.

Following on Max Gluckman’s (1940) analysis³⁰⁴ of a social situation and Geertz’s (1973) notion of thick description³⁰⁵ in ethnographic research I will show that ‘rehearsal’ creativity of ‘traditional’ dances, song and drama is not only produced and mediated by school teachers and officials in the rehearsal and festival context, but is also created by local people who may not be directly involved. I present rehearsal events at a local school at Mayana and Ukumwe Cultural Dance Group followed by the festival performance of Unongo and Kapata Cultural Groups in the section of *kulinyanyukisa* respectively in order to illuminate the type of social interaction these performances generate.

As such, these rehearsed experiences are part of the social reality in that they are about things that happened or happen in real life. In some instances the material used during the preparation for the festivals at primary schools was taught to children by their parents at home. The teachers had only adopted the songs in their culture booklet, which they then presented during the festival.

When the rehearsed performances were then brought into direct contact with the audience and other stakeholders in the actual festival, they ignited a social interaction that generated discourses of protectionism and reciprocity to issues communicated in the performance. While the materials presented during rehearsals and the festivals were local in nature, they were highly significant in the national context. Eventually when regions battled it out during the nationals, they brought local material to a social space that was mediated at the national level.

³⁰⁴ The descriptions I provide in this chapter are not recorded on a single day; they are social events I observed over a period of time during my field research. However, I am using them to abstract the social relationships which happen in the making of the festival.

³⁰⁵ I use thick descriptions in order to interpret and search meaning. Thick descriptions have general relevance and present a sociological mind with bodied stuff on which to feed on. He has argued in his introductory essay of *Interpretation of Cultures* that the important thing about the anthropologist’s findings is their complex specificity and circumstantiality.

‘Rehearsal Performances’

At Mayana Primary School

During summer last year, I returned to the research field to do some interviews and follow ups and to gather data in order to address various gaps that had emerged in my writing. At the time of my trip, the regional culture office had just begun with an installment of circuit culture festivals for 2010. Within reach and convenient for the short time I had, I was able to observe the rehearsal sessions of Mayana Primary School, where my wife is also a teacher. Mayana Primary School is situated about 28 kilometres east of Rundu in the Shambyu Traditional Authority area. It is a relatively large primary school that caters for about 550 children living in the adjacent villages including those from across the river (border) in Angola. The majority of the inhabitants of Mayana village are Vanyemba³⁰⁶ and they have family on both sides of the river. They move freely in terms of settlement across the river, depending on the climate. Most of the families at the village are subsistence farmers, something specific to the Vambukushu people. They cultivate millet in the area, tend cattle and goats and like many other people who live near the river, they catch fish. Their livelihood besides subsistence farming is also supported by their *ekoro* who work and live in Rundu or elsewhere in the country. There are pockets of Vagcu/Vaduni or San inhabitants in the area, who also have their children attending the school at Mayana.

The school has participated in various circuit culture festivals before, but has never before reached the regional culture festival level. In other words it has never yet won any trophy. My wife Maria with her other colleagues are responsible for culture at the school. They compose songs, write the plays, and design the culture booklet. During my short research stint I joined my wife for two days when the school group rehearsed for the circuit culture festival to be held on the Friday in Mashare constituency at Mupapama Combined School. I also joined them on the day of the circuit festival. The groups usually rehearse for a week just before the festival. In this instance, it was their first rehearsal practice of the year and it was the first level of the festival,

³⁰⁶ Bosch (1964) recorded the settlement patterns and various inhabitants in Shambyu area. Already he had shown that the Vanyemba were in a majority then, rather than the, supposedly, original Vashambyu inhabitants in the area of concern.

namely the circuit. The upper primary groups were rehearsing, since the lower levels had done so the previous day.

The rehearsal of the school cultural group takes place immediately after class, when learners are allowed to go home, except those who had been selected by teachers to be members of the school cultural group. However, the rest of the children remained behind to watch the rehearsal, under a giant camel-thorn tree behind the class buildings.

The process of selecting participant performers is elaborate. All learners³⁰⁷ at the school perform in trials according to class level (namely lower and upper primary) and those who are seen to meet the standards are selected by the school's culture teacher. A preliminary mini-cultural dance competition is organized to select those who demonstrate knowledge of 'cultural' dances. Those who emerge from this selection then become school representatives at all levels of the festival. At Mayana Primary as well as other schools in the region the selected groups are not always the same due to various reasons, as I discuss in the next section.

The two teachers responsible for culture emerged from the class building; Lucia held an A4 sized paper document. Maria asked the performers to collect the drums and costumes from the storeroom and take them to the rehearsal site. While they waited to watch the rehearsals the other children were already singing and clapping hands and dancing, before the teachers arrived at the site. Some were just running around the venue and playing.

The performers brought the drums, costumes and other aids required for the rehearsal and put them on the ground. There was the usual disorganization until Lucia shouted fashionably as teachers will, very loudly calling for some quietness from the relatively large crowd of learners, '*Mweneni one*³⁰⁸!' There was silence and she began to read out the names of those who would rehearse, to go and get dressed in the costumes and take position in the half-moon shaped line. As they took their positions, Maria rearranged them according to their tonal range. There were three boys who would each beat the drum, eight girl dancers and five boy dancers. Judging by

³⁰⁷ Although the school levels are indicated to be lower and upper primary one does not necessarily find children under the age of fourteen as it normally should be. The children's ages vary and it is not surprising to find a sixteen year old child at this school. This age pattern can be attributed to children beginning school late say at the age of ten.

³⁰⁸ Lit. Keep quite you all!

their appearance their ages ranged from 7 to 16. Their clothing was not as elaborate as one would find in the 'real' festival context. The boys wore their costumes (locally known as *marudeve*) over the school uniforms. The girls also wore their *marudeve* over their uniform skirts, and they donned the *vihiho*, the female head gear.

On the side Lucia urged the spectators (the other children) to move further out and watch the proceedings from a short distance. She also gave a short instructional talk to encourage the participants and explained the activities of the rehearsal as follows:

‘Purakeneni nawa si! To mukadimba marusumo gatatu ntani sinyandwa simwe. Apa nomudimba mwa kona kudimba nokuziguruka yipo muzuvike nawa kovantu ntani vagaviyitwa. To mudimbi rusumo Rokambembe, Mahamba ntani Shiperu. Ntanti apa nomudana mwa kona ku mhyaka nawa yipo muka gwange yoitwa yoyiwa. Munaviyuvu sha! Gapi marusumo ogo ka va murongere komambo?’³⁰⁹

‘Listen up very carefully! You will be required to sing three songs and perform one play. Whenever you sing, it must be loud so that the audience and judges can hear you clearly. You will perform one Kambembe dance, Mahamba and Shiperu dances respectively. And again when you dance you must do it very well so that you can get good marks. Is it clear? Which songs did you learn from home?’

After this very clear instruction, one girl who is a lead performer approached the drummer and said something I could not really make sense of, but I suspect she was instructing the drummers to beat out a particular song. It seems she was selected to lead, because of her voice and her knowledge of the songs and dances they performed. As the lead singer and performer she would direct the performance. After some pause, the lead drum sounded followed by the other two other drums. It was a test tune. The two teachers stood and observed how the expected dance would unfold. I stood with the rest of the learners who did not go home and stayed to witness the dances. All of a sudden the girl started to sing the song with drummers reciprocating the melody. The rest of the group in unison clapped and moved their shoulders to and fro, flowing with the rhythm of the drums. The dance involves the turning of shoulders in an anticlockwise

³⁰⁹ My fieldnotes

directions with movements of the waist and buttocks in circles, backwards and forwards. The song Ngombo as sung by the Vanyemba a long time ago was about the war of Mbambo:

Ndhita yoyi ndja,

ndhita yaMbambo yoyi ndja kumalolo

Kambilimbili lelo ngombo ee tutahe, ee.

Translation

The war is coming

The war of Mbambo is coming very soon

The diviner professed that the war is coming

The war is coming soon

As the group members danced giving each other turns to enter the stage, other spectators also joined in the song and clapped their hands. After the song-dance the group reorganized and prepared to perform a play drama. The drama was about a man who is married to a very clever woman. This woman wanted to treat him so that she could have control over her husband's activities. If her plan succeeded it would mean her mother-in-law, whom she saw as meddling in her marital affairs, would be under her control. She went to seek help from the local healer who had knowledge of such matters. The healer was also renowned for making potent medicine, and he gave her some to take home. The next morning as per the prescription she started to apply the medicine while her husband was still in the hut, by taking a sip from the concoction and spitting it out to the east and western side of the homestead while calling his name. While busy, her sister-in-law spotted her and she ran to her mother's homestead to report the matter. Upon hearing such news the mother-in-law quickly went to her son's house to confront her daughter-in-law. She found her son sitting outside his hut in the sun; she first scolded him for being so tame, unlike other men in the village. She told him that his wife had consulted a healer and that she had applied medicine around the house early in the morning. The son was forced to chase his wife away and make her cross the river in a canoe filled with her belongings. As I will show in analysis shortly, this play and its meaning was derived from local social interaction. As

demonstrated in chapter six in the context of song lyrics, the content of the play was topical at the time.

Amidst the play and towards its end the small crowd of learners laughed as they anticipated certain sections of the unfolding drama. As the drumming began they danced moving their shoulders up and down, and their legs forward at a fast pace while holding the small axes; they moved in the direction of the drummers and then ended the dance. At the end of the dance we all clapped to applaud the performance.

On this occasion the teachers did not teach them anything other than give instruction on how to sing the songs and how to dance in order to get good marks from the judges, and to generate audience response.

Below I will also present my observation of the Ukumwe Culture Dance Group during their preparatory sessions before the Annual National Culture Festival, where the group would perform for entertainment purposes in order to show how this well-respected adult dance group relied on the group members and their wealth of experience for producing a performance, unlike the school group that had to rely on parental input.

At Swapo regional office

Ukumwe³¹⁰ Culture Dance Group is composed of several members who defected from Kambundu³¹¹ Culture Dance Group and seven women from the regional Swapo Women's Council branch. It is composed of government employees, unemployed individuals, and self-employed individuals. What they have in common is that they all belong to the Swapo Party³¹² in the region. I observed that it was mostly women in this group who were self-employed and not the men. The majority of men in the group made a living working in their fields and keeping livestock in the underlying villages. For the festival activities they commuted from their villages

³¹⁰ The name Ukumwe which means 'unity' was given to the group after its split from Kambundu.

³¹¹ The group is named after Rebekka Kambundu the headwomen of the Rundu area under the Shambyu Traditional Authority. She belongs to the Vashambyu royal clan and was also a member of the group in the initial stages of the group.

³¹² Swapo Party in the name of the ruling party in Namibia.

to Rundu to take part in the event. They rehearsed often, but this specific occasion was in preparation for their role at the festival.

The group from which they originally split, the Kambundu Culture Dance Group, was one of the early culture groups formed during 1995 when the post-colonial State government began to reintroduce culture festivals nationally. What began as the Roman Catholic Church choir group later became a strong cultural dance group in the early phases of the State's reintroduction of culture festivals in Namibia. After an international trip misunderstandings within the group led to a split and the creation of the Ukumwe Culture Dance Group. The misunderstandings were not openly discussed but it appears that they came about after certain individuals wanted to monopolize the group and run it as if it were a private entity. It also transpired during the interview that certain people were refused entry to the group, because they did not belong to the Shambyu community, who were believed to be the majority. Hence, the newly-created group was named Ukumwe which means 'unity' and everybody who could dance the Vakavango dances could join. It was open to anyone in the region.

Later, I learned that the group was keen to form joint ventures with profitable entities. In my latest conversation with Tamwa Mbambo during the 2011 July holidays he told me that the group also wanted to appoint a promoter to arrange performances for them. The above need arose because the majority of the group members were either self-employed or jobless and their income had to be supplemented with money from these paid performances. At the time, he told me, they were awaiting responses from various institutions they had approached to ask for help in the above regard.

The group had requested an official exemption from the festival competition, because it had exceeded at all levels of competition more than once. Members felt that there was more they could do than just to compete in the festival. Two of the group leaders told me that they wanted to be teachers of culture in the region. As a result the group would no longer compete during the festival; it only performed for entertainment and during very important government occasions such as the welcoming of dignitaries, inaugurations of institutions and sometimes for tourists at various lodges in the region.

Consequently the group had assumed the role of ‘teacher of culture and tradition’³¹³, although this was unofficial in the festival context. It made Sam Nuyoma, then head of State, its patron. The group performed for the queen and king of Spain on their visit to Windhoek in 1999. It has also performed in Libya during the African Union Summit. Ukumwe has also performed in Germany, Botswana and Zambia. Finally, it won the Kavango regional festival and the Annual National Culture Festival twice in a row, in 1998 and 1999. The above accolades have caused it to be recognized as the “proper” representative of Kavango “tradition” and “culture” although it has also been criticized locally in the media and other social spheres. People in the local media³¹⁴ felt that there were other groups in the region that did a better job than Ukumwe, but they were not duly recognized or allowed to represent the region or country on as many arts platforms. During my fieldwork I have not heard of any other group that has gone the route of Ukumwe.

Ukumwe practice its dances and songs at the local Swapo office. The practice takes place every day after five in the afternoon when everyone has finished work. One afternoon, when I had just left the office at the centre with Tamwa Mbambo³¹⁵ to go and have a drink at the local lodge in town before we dispersed for home, he mentioned that he had a practice to attend. We actually drank our drinks very fast so that he could leave for the practice. He invited me to join him so that we could actually continue later after the practice. So we left and as we arrived at the Swapo Office we found that the rest of the group was already there. He was the only one who was not there yet. His absence meant there was no one to begin the songs, as he was the lead singer and announcer in the group.

The other members of the group had the drums and costumes ready. Although it was expected of the members to wear their costumes, it was not compulsory. They all dressed although not in full costume as they would in the festival. In total there were fourteen dancers: half female, half male. This session was opened with a prayer by a female performer. The prayer asked for guidance and wisdom in the rehearsal and future endeavours. After the prayer, the group members deliberated on the specific songs and drama they wanted to practice. They actually

³¹³ My fieldwork notes.

³¹⁴ My fieldwork notes.

³¹⁵ Tamwa Mbambo works for the regional culture office. He organizes various activities of the group, such as performance bookings and travel arrangements.

found it difficult to select from their extensive pool of songs and drama themes. It appears to have been tougher for the group members to agree on the drama theme than on the songs, because themes needed to convey a message of sense and in the process teach the ‘tradition’ and ‘culture’ of the Vakavango to the people attending the event. There was always contestation among group members as to which message to convey during preparations.

Eventually they agreed on the various themes: about how women in Kavango catch fish, the hunting ceremony, and finally the message of love and happiness. Two of the three songs they had in line of preparation were sung in Runyemba, the other was in Rukwangali. One of the songs sang in Runyemba was identical to the one practiced by the school children at Mayana Primary School. I was the only audience at the rehearsals.

The group formed a half moon circle with drummers taking their position on the other end facing the dancers. Tamwa Mbambo began the greeting song titled:

‘Lombe lomba tusikalomba lisesa kulimwangane.’

‘Hello, we are asking for permission from you all gathered here to allow us to dance.’

The whole group responded by clapping hands and beating drum to the lead singer. As the lead singer enters the centre of the semi-circle all other dancers swiftly move their hips and shoulders. At the end of the greeting song the group reorganizes to set the scene depicting women who have caught fish in the river. The performance was well handled with little flaws such as a female dancer who started to dance before the drum beat signal. There was laughter from the group, which continued to perform the final item of the practice, the Runyemba song Ngombo. After the song, the practice came to an end. They packed their aids and costumes away in the office and dispersed.

The practice was very short, it lasted less than an hour compared to what I had observed at Mayana Primary School, which was over two hours. I left with Tamwa Mbambo and we continued with our refreshment after the rehearsal. I will reflect below on the ethnography at the school and that at the Swapo office in order to demonstrate how local/lay people contribute to the making of the festival through their material or intellectual contribution; a process that makes them active agents in the State project of nation-building, even if it is back stage.

Festival making: exploring local people's participation and influences in the discourse of nation-building

In order to make sense of the above rehearsal activities and the production of performances, I have categorized it as events at the back stage of the festival. In this context, events happened out of sight, and away from the intended gaze. Although events are rehearsed unseen, it is the process that makes it a practice of note. As these events happened in the back stage, all actors involved may not be visible. In this context the role of local citizens who are not directly involved in the festival may not be visible, except on occasions when teachers and group leaders of a particular school or group invite local people to come and assist or show them how certain dances or songs are done. In certain instances such assistance comes at a small fee, locally regarded as a token of appreciation.

Although this back of the stage was not the same as the one described by Goffman, it included significant elements of the context, described by Goffman as the 'back stage'. The performance in the rehearsal is raw and it contains a lot of impurities. In this context, the rehearsal in the school setup had an audience other than performers and teachers. Other school learners were present and I as a researcher comprised an audience that may have influenced the rehearsal performance in various ways. The children who knew the dances and songs that were rehearsed also participated and that could have impacted on the process. Significantly illuminated was the knowledge of the children of the content, as presented during the performance. That presents evidence of the social reality that is performed in the rehearsal. The children are firstly supposed to be spectators, but their connection to and knowledge of the social discourse makes them active participants in the event and in the process the act is enlivened. The songs and dances that are performed are about real things experienced in real life, as I demonstrate below, with an example of witchcraft.

In the above contexts, I did not observe an instructor who came to show how certain dances were done. When I spoke to the children at school, especially those who participated in the rehearsal,

they said they had learned³¹⁶ the dances from their parents at home. What was of interest to me is the process of learning, referred to by the children.

The learning does not happen in a class-like environment and neither do parents summon children to a session of learning dances and songs. As I have observed during my research and as a 'local', instances of performance happened in ordinary daily activities such as when people drank alcoholic drinks, when they worked or even during their time of relaxation. One person always began to clap hands to a particular tune, the rest joined in and before you knew it there was a big performance going on. Children are always near when these activities happen and as a result they see, and imitate what they see in their own time.

The process of storytelling and riddles imparted in the festival performance in the form of drama were learnt differently though. In many of my visits to the villages in Kavango and even in my own house I have observed how children keenly listened to *masimo*³¹⁷ especially after dinner is served and folks are relaxed. *Masimo* is a local word that in the literal sense means story-telling. As I have observed *masimo* is a favourite pastime activity for the children as they are always looking forward to the tales (*masimo*). Usually *masimo* are narrated by elders in the family and not by children. It is such interactions in the home set-up that make the invisible ordinary citizens participants in the festival and its generation. This role may not appear to be active, but one needs to look at the impact it has in the wider making of the festival.

One also has to look into the composition of the various groups in relation to the communities in which they originate and social issues that are important in those contexts. Mayana Primary School is a relatively small group that is not very prominent or known in the wider circles of the festival as it has not progressed to any other level than the circuit. Why the school has not moved beyond the level of circuit festivals throughout the years of its participation could be attributed to its creativity or lack thereof and the production of its materials. Also, in the school set-up it is difficult to maintain a team of dancers that can be turned in to a formidable force such as Ukumwe, because students also change schools constantly. That seems to be a general

³¹⁶ My field notes

³¹⁷ Doing *masimo* is an art which requires skills in telling and narrating. It is that art which keep listeners in suspense, captivated and wanting to hear more of the *masimo*. If the *masimo* narrator is not skillful it becomes too boring.

problem at all schools: a new team every year, means that creativity and expertise cannot be retained as in senior groups like Ukumwe.

However, as I observed teachers at Mayana did not appear to be fully involved in various aspects of producing the school's cultural group. During the rehearsal, the only task of the teachers seemed to be to gather and organize the children, but they did not seem to have prepared what learners were going to perform. They relied on what the performers knew or had learned from their parents at home. The ethnography shows that children practiced what they had learned from their parents at home. They appeared to know the songs and the drama lines well, and knew how to perform particular dances. It was not performers only who reacted to the type of songs, but the spectators as well who had to be restrained by the teachers so as not to interrupt those on stage. The ability of the children from the same area to know how to sing and perform certain dances shows how local people influence ideas of what is believed to be or to constitute local 'tradition' and 'culture'.

From the song and theme of their drama presentation we can also deduce the social discourse of the community from which the performers originate. There had been talk of witchcraft among the community of Mayana for quite some time during my fieldwork. This type of witchcraft locally known as *wandjongoka* was rumoured to be prevalent in the area. *Wandjongoka* is a type of witchcraft that can loosely be interpreted as "to tame"; and it is believed to be used by women who want to have control over their husbands' abilities and emotions, resulting in a total dislike of his kin and acquaintances. As a social issue it is regarded as so important that it is sung about in the festival context, in order to get the message to those intended. The line in their dramatic play theme is evidence to that. In this context of the play, it does not mean that those who are believed to practice witchcraft are unknown; their identity is deliberately concealed so that the play and song can serve their purpose to entertain and educate. The practice of singing about life events and concealing identities of those involved concurs with Ngondo's perspective above in my interview with him:

“Toka zuva mo mwina mononsumo odo depera tava tangauka mo vantu. Tasi tanta asi koyo vamonu. Ano yoinzi, nonsumo dononzi unenene nadinnye kudi dimba kutundilila kosihorokwa. Nanare yimo yakere.”

“What it means is that, these are events they have seen and observed, so all the songs are composed according to the life events that people have observed. That is how it has been!”

When I asked Lucia the teacher responsible for culture what they taught the children and what influenced their production she explained:

“We ask the children to learn songs from their parents. You know especially grandparents know how to tell old stories about how people lived. You know we are very young and we do not know these things very well. They also know the tradition and culture very well. We only sometimes change the words, but the song melodies remain the traditional ones.³¹⁸”

Lucia’s response on what they teach the school group places the teaching of ‘tradition’ and ‘culture’ in the sphere of influence of older people, a situation that makes them the ‘right teachers’ of culture and not the young people as teachers. The teacher’s expectation of children parents and grandparents actually helps to illuminate the role and influence of lay/local people in the activities of the state-sponsored festival. The Mayana rehearsal shows that indeed local people have an enormous influence in the festival activities although it may be limited and mediated. In the context of the rehearsal I have just described, there was no obvious new input from the teachers rather than to follow the template of the festival. However, some of their contributions were implicit in the various administrative roles and responsibility they had as teachers responsible for culture at their schools. Teachers do not apply in order to attain the responsibility of culture. They are randomly selected by the school management. There is no clear criterion followed in choosing them. As I have noted teachers can be selected and given the culture task, just because the school is officially required to do so. Expertise in ‘matters’ related to ‘culture’ are not a necessity. So to some teachers being responsible for ‘culture’ at school is just a duty like any other in the curriculum. In the above context the teachers regarded their involvement in the school ‘culture’ affairs as just a duty. They may not necessarily have been enthusiastic about the task but in this case being young made them think that they were not well equipped to transfer ideas of culture to the children than the elders. This is due to a

³¹⁸ My field notes

perception of culture being about old things transferred from one generation to the next. Also, there are inner politics³¹⁹ among teachers especially about the particular roles they play at school and how these may benefit their own growth.

However, the role of teachers and their enthusiasm may differ as I learned through my interview with the teacher responsible for culture at Dr. Alpo Mbamba Junior Secondary school, Jonas Ihemba. He has been responsible for culture at the school since 2003, longer than many other teachers. His group although not discussed anywhere in this study has won many times in the junior secondary category. As I observed, it was the only school that appeared outstanding in terms of costume and choreography, on stage and off stage. For example, his group sports T-shirts with their school name before they compete. When I spoke to him about his involvement in ‘culture’, it became obvious how he has taken on the culture aspect at school and made it his own project:

‘Michael: Do you participate in culture, because it is the policy direction or you do that because you like culture?’

Ihemba: You see myself also I like this culture. Although the policy says the schools must participate, I also like the culture. I see it as important, I also want to take part and I like culture. And I have to win. That is just my own arrangement.

Michael: Do you compose the songs?

Ihemba: Songs are, they are not the easy things to compose. I can remember that since I started this role of culture, I can compose even up to fifty songs myself. And one of my friends who is not here usually helps me to do it. We were just trying to make our own songs. So what makes us to compose songs? Some of the songs have been sung previously and each song must have a meaning. In order to make a song, you must look at the situation, I mean current situation. What is happening there? In my case I look at nowadays life, what is happening and educational things so that we can teach our youngsters or nation. The only tough thing we face is the melody, sometime you have the words, but not the melody.’

³¹⁹ For reasons of confidentiality, I will not dwell into this matter currently.

Unlike his colleagues who thought that it was wise to rely on local elders' input as they were knowledgeable in local culture, Ihemba expressed his love for 'culture' and the importance of winning in the festival. He composed songs for the group unlike the teachers at Mayana who expected children to have learned them from their parents. There is an important underlying difference in the manner how culture is conceived by the teachers at Mayana and the one at Alpo Mbamba. The former understand culture in the essentialised terms; where it is fixed and transferred from one generation to the next. While in the latter culture is conceived to be relative to the current situation. That could be the reason why teachers behave differently. In this context one should not necessarily conclude that the teachers at Mayana were slack or disinterested in what they did or did not do. I also believe that there could be underlying complex matters influencing their take on the government business of culture.

While it is agreeable that local people play a part in the state sponsored culture festivals, teachers also have roles in the culture event that involve their schools. All teachers who deal with culture in all schools had a responsibility to have the costumes made for their groups, to write themes for the plays, finances, and create a reference archive for future groups. Teachers at various schools also consulted local elders to assist them with how certain dances were performed, costumes designed and songs sung. However, in certain instances these consultations come at a cost, because some of them wanted payment. One of the teachers at Sauyemwa Junior Primary School bemoaned the situation in our interview below:

'Vakondi kapi va hara ku kwafa. Nsene o zigida muntu a wize aya rongge walye omu ava ya siki ngoma. Ogo muntu ogo ta ya hara ngano nkenye apa mu mufute. Makura udigu wa karapo asi owo vanona vana rongo mvura zo kukwama ko walye tava diruka. Yeyi ayi ninki asi kwa kupura yimaliva yoyinzi. Nsene ono ka papara muntu asi aya rongge vanona udano wongandi ogo muntu kwa kupura simaliva. Asi ntudi oya mu fute. Makura nkenye apa yininke kwa ku kara ngwendi udigu. Ntani ngwee omu twa ya kara ngesi apa wa wiza ukriste vantu kwa kara mpo ngendi kwa zi vumbika. Mpo yiyo za ku yakara ngwendi apa ya tameka tupu yonosure zi ya tamerereko nye konosure. Makura tayi ya kara asi vamwe kwa kutjira kulikida mpo gayidiva morwa asi mukriste. Ngwendi ta va

mu mono asi mupagani. Ano vamwe kwa tara poyimaliva asi va mu fute, makura ta pura ndiro unene.³²⁰

‘Elders do not want to assist us fully. Say, if you ask someone to come and teach the children how to play the drum, that person would want to be paid every time he comes. The other difficulty is the movement of children from one school to the next yearly (in the process skills are lost). In the process the whole exercise becomes expensive. If you decide to call someone to come and teach the children how to perform a particular dance, he or she would always ask for money. So things become very difficult. The other problem is since people became Christians they seem to have buried tradition. Culture is only starting again after it was introduced at schools. Some people know the tradition, but they would be scared to teach or show it lest they be suspected of being a pagan. For some their focus is on the money only and they ask very high prices.’

While there is evidence of elders who assist various culture groups for free, there are also those who would not assist without being rewarded for their work. The act of payment³²¹ to those who contribute to culture was criticized earlier during the time of the colonial festival (the *sangfees*) as to whether payment would not hamper the ‘original’ and ‘genuine’ transfer of ‘traditional’ knowledge to be displayed in the festival context³²². In the context of the interview however, money and Christianity were believed to hamper the cultural ‘life’, and as agents that buried ‘tradition’. For the purpose of this discussion the teachers’ sentiments at Mayana and Sauyemwa Primary Schools about the role and participation of local people in the festival activities showed their direct involvement, although it did require some form of reward. The issue of culture as social capital was also of importance in the interview excerpt. While teachers expected local elders to come to their schools and give dance lessons without being paid, the ‘culture experts’ expect reward in the form of money. This expectation is very interesting especially in the

³²⁰ Interview with Magdalena Pessa Kasera, Theresia Sikongo, Anastasia Mufenda and Helena Nasini Hafeni; they are teachers responsible for culture at Sauyemwa Junior Primary School, 20 January 2009.

³²¹ I have noted earlier in chapter five that unlike the colonial government which discouraged people to make money out of culture trade, the postcolonial government in its policy directives encourages citizens to better their lives by selling their culture. In this context culture is used as a resource which has a potential to improve living conditions if it is fully explored.

³²² This perspective has been shared by Bradley during our interview on 20 September 2008 in Rundu. See in chapter five.

context of where it is supposed to be appropriated and consumed for free and where and when it should be remunerated. During the colonial festival monetary rewards were seen as an unwanted influence that would dilute the native culture; in contemporary times it is widely regarded as a source of income.

Observations during my fieldwork show that the situation of school groups is different from groups that are well established and nationally recognized, such as Ukumwe Traditional Dance Group. Ukumwe is composed of adults from various social backgrounds. One member of the group is in the employ of the local regional culture office while some are either self-employed or work in the sewing project run by the Swapo Women's Council at the local Swapo office where rehearsals takes place. The membership of the group is steady and has been the same since its creation.

The members' diverse social connections locates the group in an interesting space. Its connections have contributed to the group's popularity, which has in turn helped it to become the group most frequently invited to perform at Swapo and State events. Most importantly, the group had Sam Nujoma³²³ as its patron, and he was credited for many of its accolades.

In addition Tamwa Mbambo, a group member, works for the local culture office. He has considerable influence in the local and national circles which deals with culture. He is believed to be an exceptional dancer locally and is regarded as a very important asset by the other group members.

Since its creation the Ukumwe Culture Dance Group has been seen as an alternative to the Kambundu Culture Dance Group,³²⁴ which was viewed as discriminatory by local people, because it only recruited people from the regional Vanyemba to be part of the group. Discussions of what led to the split were concealed for fear of the consequences. The secrecy³²⁵ and fear did not surprise me, because of the significant political influence at local level of certain Kambundu individuals. Furthermore, those who were excluded were not really seen to be part of

³²³ See the culture booklet of Ukumwe, in the section which deals with the background of the group.

³²⁴ Earlier, I spoke about the secrecy about the split of the Kambundu Culture Dance Group and the sudden creation the of Ukumwe Culture Dance Group. Members of the respective groups have not been willing to share the details. However, I heard how people spoke about the politics within Kambundu and Ukumwe in other social contexts such as at the bars, the festivals and in local media.

³²⁵ I will not detail this matter, because of its sensitivity. Even after a decade people do not freely speak about it.

the majority: which is believed to be the Vashambyu³²⁶. On the other hand Ukumwe was locally believed to be inclusive of all people who viewed themselves as Vakavango and had knowledge of the “traditions” and “cultures”, plus the desire to “preserve the Kavango culture and norms for future generations³²⁷”. However, it is an unwritten requirement to belong to the ruling party if you want to be a member of the group. At the time of my fieldwork, I had not heard anything to the contrary.

The group rehearsal that I observed was different from that at the school I discussed earlier. Its rehearsal performance was systematic and short. During the rehearsal, the group did not seem to struggle in putting together a theme and a number of dance songs for the coming festival. They drew themes and songs needed for the message they wanted to impart to the audience from what I call ‘oral archives’ which is derived from traditional oral sources that include tales, riddles and historical legends and is not limited to songs as told by ‘the elders’ in the context of Ukumwe, parents in the case of schoolchildren and lived experience. However, apart from the themes that the group rehearsed, at least some of the dance songs like *Ngombo* were identical to some of those I had heard performed by the schoolchildren. It illustrates that all groups I spoke about drew their material primarily from ‘oral archives’ that are believed to be transferred from one generation to the next. Like the school group, Ukumwe does not live in isolation from the local community and as a result the contribution of individual group members to the production of their material is influenced by outsiders- an impact that is indirect, but nonetheless significant. The discussion above illuminates an interesting dynamic in the State-sponsored culture festival, which is considered local in terms of involvement, content and participation, but which is significant in the purported national discourse of unity-in-diversity and nation-building.

Having discussed the group’s rehearsal in order to show how local people participate and influence the making of the festivals through its contribution to group’s preparation, my next focus is on the interaction between festival goers, performers and State organizers. This results from presentation of the ‘rehearsed’ performances that happen in the back stage when they are

³²⁶ Refer to chapter four where I discuss the historical legends about the emergence of early Kavango and its inhabitants.

³²⁷ Excerpt from the introductory statement of Ukumwe Culture Dance Group presented during the Annual National Culture Festival in 2008. Sam Nujoma is the first head of state of Namibia, under whose leadership the festivals were reintroduced.

brought to the festival and showcased to the audience. I present events of the Mpungu circuit and Kavango regional festivals as front stage³²⁸ respectively, and discuss this to demonstrate that the festival becomes a social space where local notions of what constitutes Kavango 'culture' and Namibian nationality are contested, especially after those in attendances have viewed the presentations. Most importantly events that occur in the festival front stage are highly mediated, unlike the rehearsals where it takes place back stage. Although the festival front stage is mediated, it does not necessarily mean that there are rigid boundaries that prevent the audience and performers from behaving or acting in a particular manner. I show that the festival is a space where belonging and nationhood is celebrated through audience interaction and participation in the cultural performance and the singing of national anthems.

At Mpungu circuit and Kavango regional festivals

The festival stage is of particular interest in our understanding of how people perceive what happens as social reality and not some 'staged activity', deprived of life. Following on Goffman's (1959) notion of performance in the presentation of the self, in this context I use performance on the front stage to suggest and refer to the activity of individuals, which occurs during a period marked by their continuous presence before a particular set of audiences. It is thus appropriate to refer to such performance as front stage as it regularly functions in a fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance. As Goffman has argued, the front then becomes the expressive equipment of a standard kind that is intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during the performance. Goffman's perspective on performance and social reality is rooted in the belief of actors in the performance. The performance is believed to be real by those who are engaged in it; it does not require to be legitimated, because it is situated in what Bourdieu (1998) has referred to as habitus. In addressing this theoretical challenge I will draw on the local notion of performance which is premised in the 'act of doing culture' or 'playing culture' while what is being done, is referred to as a performance. In the context of this discussion the performances as conceived by the two groups namely Unongo and Kapata Cultural Groups are the particular dances and story dramas

³²⁸ The festival becomes a front stage, because of the nature of its making. Only choreographed presentations are done in the spectacle of the audience.

that they are doing. The interaction thereof is seen as part of the “broader doing” act; and it is what gives and brings life to the performance.

Respectively what happens in the festival during *kulinyanyukisa* and *maliyombiliso*, I argue, are but aspects of the perceived social reality I deal with in the two back and front categories of the festival. Backstage and front stage activities in the festival context will not make sense if dealt with separately. Due to what happens in the festival category of *kulinyanyukisa* in relation to the former *maliyombiliso* it will be of importance to refer to that festival not only as social practice, but a reality all the actors concerned believe in.

In festival encounters, before the competition commences, certain groups (especially those that are not competing) are always invited to ‘open the curtain’ for performance; the section is locally referred to as '*kulinyanyukisa*³²⁹.' People always look forward to this section of the festival as it allows anybody to go on stage and display their dance skills without being asked to leave, which is what happens once the formal competitions begin. One can also present tokens of appreciation to an individual dancer who is thought to have expressed good dancing abilities and other performance prowess. That part shows how fluid the fully mediated front stage can be, especially when what transpires on stage has a significant impact on the audience and its response is an adverse one.

Although the circuit festivals are not viewed by some officials at the Maria Mwendere Culture Centre to be as important as the regional festival, they attract large audiences in the areas where they are held. As I have observed, officials at the centre do not put a lot of emphasis on the circuit festival. Despite such an attitude by officials, local people attended all festivals in large numbers. This was interesting, especially in the context of this discussion where I am trying to show the role of local people in the making of the State-sponsored cultural festival. I will describe and discuss the circuit and regional festival I attended at Mpungu and Rundu respectively to showcase how presentations by various groups initiate an interaction among and between those who come to witness the event as audience, invited guest, festival organizer and/or performers in the *kulinyanyukisa* section. I begin with the circuit festival at Mpungu

³²⁹ Lit. to make ourselves happy or to entertain ourselves.

which was the last event held during the zonal rounds before the regional festival took place in Rundu during 2008.

In the following paragraphs I describe the performance of the Unongo Cultural Group in the Mpungu circuit event and that of the Kapata Cultural Group in the Kavango regional culture festival respectively. My special focus is on gatherings and certain performance presentations that set off interactions between performers and attendees of the event.

The event was to be held on Saturday morning and as Tamwa Mbambo and I arrived at the venue of the festival, Mpungu Primary School, there were a lot of people moving about. Mpungu is in western Kavango and is located in a valley which has quite dense vegetation surrounding it. School learners, teachers, and people from the community had come to witness the event. Performers from various schools and youth groups from the area could be recognized by the 'traditional' attire they wore. There was the sound of a drum in the environment. In the midst of this were the circuit Inspector of Education, Peace Corps volunteer teachers, the headmaster of the school hosting the event, the hospital matron and officials from Maria Mwengere Culture Centre. The officials, including Mbambo, some male workers and some schoolchildren prepared seats where the VIPs of the day were to sit. Thomas Shapi, the senior cultural officer was in conversation with the Inspector of Education, the headmaster and the matron of the local hospital who were very important visitors at this event, while his assistants prepared the documents, including certificates and prize money to be handed over to the groups later in the day. The tables were lined up under the tree between the classroom buildings, where the performance would take place. The judges were all from Maria Mwengere Culture Centre.

When all the technical arrangements were in place the senior cultural officer announced on the public announcement system that people should converge so that the event could begin. He then gave the microphone to a local schoolteacher by the name of Ndepavali who was to act as master of ceremonies for the day. She asked for silence so that the national and the African Union anthems could be sung. Led by Tamwa Mbambo, who held the microphone, we sang all the anthems. After the anthem another local teacher Kalipa, the wife of the headmaster, said a prayer in which she asked for guidance, fairness for judges and a good mood of enjoyment, 'as we enjoy culture'. Her prayer was lengthy and focused on wide-ranging social issues that concerned the village such as wellbeing, health, and the soon-to-come rains.

After the prayer, it was time for welcoming remarks and speeches. The headmaster rose to make a few remarks that dealt with the importance of hosting the event in the circuit, and why those who were present should pay attention to the events. Representing the government, his speech was very short and was made in the local Rukwangali vernacular. It was followed by the circuit inspector. He started his speech in English with a quote from article 19 of the constitution of the republic which states:

‘Every person shall be entitled to enjoy, practice, profess, maintain and promote any culture, language, tradition or religion subject to the terms of this constitution and further subject to the condition that the rights protected by this article do not impinge upon the rights of others or the national interest.’

Although he was a local he made his speech in English³³⁰. His speech was to be translated into the local vernacular by the director of ceremonies, but he could not oblige in the local vernacular and instead asked the headmaster to assist, to the laughter of the audience. The inspector continued his speech with a question of what culture is: he continued to answer, with a fairly anthropological interpretation, as follows:

‘Culture is a shared way of living, not a fossil from the past, but a vibrant dynamic constantly changing complex of ideas and interactions.’

He went on to speak about how ‘culture’ was used to divide people in the colonial past, because people were seen as unequal and thus some of them were perceived to be superior. He also spoke about how the new government started a programme to make use of culture as a force for creating unity. He did not end his speech before listing the various elements such as “customs”, “customs of marriage”, and “inheritance/tradition” and “how history is told” which he believed constituted what he referred to as Namibian culture. His take and understanding of culture was not significantly different from that presented by the Minister of Youth, National Service, Sport and Culture (MYNSC) during the ANCF later in the same year:

“Culture is a shared behavior, ideas and artifacts. A way of life passed from one generation to another. It is a shared pattern for behaviours and interactions, social

³³⁰ The speaker may have chosen to communicate in English, because it is the official language in Namibia.

constructions and understandings that are learned through the process of socialization. These shared concerns identify the members of a culture group, while also distinguishing one group from another. However culture will never remain static. As a society, times changes, and so will culture develop. Changes in domestic and regional environment and the fast pace of living will continue to shape our mind set and way of thinking. Cultural development must therefore keep abreast of the new environments that we face. However, economic development and social cohesion will remain our two pillars for prosperity and stability.³³¹”

The Minister’s definition of culture was elaborate and captured aspects of the changing environments and economic factors and as an important determinant of how people see themselves in relation to others. In his speech there was an emphasis on embracing and being abreast of new global developments. However, a Deputy Director in his ministry presented a different perspective in the same context with regard to the outside influences and its impact on local culture in his short speech below:

‘The flavour of the music should be Namibian, it must be Namibian, it must touch the heart strings. If it attains universality appealing cross-culturally it can reveal magical dimensions. It is not that we are discouraging any other music, we have many occasions that we come together with international culture and even some of the best groups from here will become our culture ambassadors. But for our festival, these ones here it is now where we come up with the best Namibian music. The next criterion is the dance, another ten marks. The dance must be inspiring, you know if you come on stage and you are asleep with your dance those of us watching will also sleep with your dance. So the dance must be inspiring. The dance must speak from body and soul: that is the African idiom. We are not somewhere in New York doing some funny things, let us do with body and soul³³²’.

It appears that the Deputy Director accepted the need to learn from ‘other cultures’ internationally, but the need to brew national music in the festival occasion was of particular importance. The above utterances advocate genuine and original performances and stress that

³³¹ Excerpt from the speech of Willem Konjore of the MYNSC during the ANCF in Kavango during 2008.

³³² Excerpt from the speech of Andre Strauss a deputy director of the NHCP in the MYNSC.

performers must struggle very hard to prevent international influences with which they are in constant contact. It is a clear attempt by the Deputy Director (in this case the representative of the State) to encourage participants to preserve or salvage an essentialized “traditional culture” in Namibia, especially at the festival space. He seemed to construct and imagine the festival as a space, a ‘neutral grid on which cultural difference, historical memory and societal organization are inscribed’. (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992:7) In my mind this construction or imagination becomes a challenge to many participants who incorporate ‘western’ traits in their performances; a situation that came with postcoloniality. Postcoloniality in this case – as further argued by Gupta and Ferguson (1992)- problematizes the relationship between space and culture. I argue that new ways of life³³³ (hybrid culture) that have outside influences, came about at independence. If international influences are to be set aside at the festival moment as per Deputy Director’s request, signs of contestation thereof will merely manifest in another space.

Then it was time for the senior cultural officer to say something about the gathering. This time he was dressed in track pants with a cap with the government’s coat of arms insignia: this was very unusual as he always dressed formally. One can only speculate that maybe, because the event was held in a rural area he did not see the importance to be formally dressed, although his hosts were. He gave the background of the festival and how it had been taken to all the other regions since 1995 when it (the festival) had been reintroduced. Shapi also spoke about the new projects in the office which were about a collection of oral accounts of traditional rituals and histories of the people of Kavango. After he spoke about the history of the festival and the new projects in his office, he turned his attention to the event of the day. At this point there was silence as the audience and performers listened attentively to the rules of the festival as outlined by the senior cultural officer:

“The dance aspect is confusing a lot of people, for them when they see a group that dances excellently they do not consider other criteria then they go to Mudukuli and say

³³³ In 1989 just before independence, the people who came from exile under the SWAPO movement had a musical or cultural group known as Ndilimani. Ndilimani was used as a culture vehicle during the days of liberation. It played music which consisted of a fusion of native songs from all corners of Namibia, however the melody and dance was influenced by West African culture. It has since undergone massive change in terms of style, but most of its dance remains rooted in Congolese musical rhythms.

“*vana fukire*³³⁴”. We look at all the above criteria, but it is true dance is important. We don’t want to see you dancing *kuduru*³³⁵ when it is suppose to be *Epera*³³⁶. If it is *Epera* let it be *Epera*. ... So out of these criteria we will give you marks so that we can determine the winner, but most importantly you are all winners,” he concluded.

The above instances show the unevenness of the State discourse of culture at its various levels of administration. The idea of culture is conceived differently at all levels of the State. The above can be attributed to the widely available anthropological text that people can draw from in order to make and present to the State agenda a situation Richard Handler has spoken about in his work on Quebec in 1988.

When the senior cultural officer finished his remarks, he returned the microphone to the director of ceremonies who then went on to call the first group to entertain the audience and visitors. It is traditional to have a section of *kulinyanyukisa* in every festival competition in which the audience is shown what is believed to be the best teaser or appetizer in that category. The group that was invited to entertain was the Unongo Cultural Group. Unongo is a youth category group that had won the youth category during the circuit festival held at Nkurenkuru some time ago. The group was composed of eight female and six male dancers, including three drummers. Both the female and male dancers were dressed in costumes made out of maroon cotton fabrics. The females wore short skirts and tops which covered their breasts. They complemented their look with white beads around their arms, ankles, neck and just below the knees. The fabric skirt symbolized the “traditional” skin dress which the women wore before the arrival of missionaries and colonial officials. On their heads, they sported a head gear locally known as *vihho*³³⁷. The males wore the *marudeve*³³⁸ around their waists which emitted a rattle sound whenever they

³³⁴ They call in to the radio program and complain that “they have been cheated”.

³³⁵ Kuduru is a sort of dance that was introduced during the late 90s from Angola. It is a back and forth round movement of the waist area, the dance itself is not well received by the older folk of the region as it is seen to be explicit and contaminating the traditional dances.

³³⁶ Epera is a traditional dance commonly done in western Kavango. See preceded section “note on Kavango traditional dances.”

³³⁷ Vihho (sing: sihiho) is a form of headgear. It is a long snarl that hangs down to the female’s shoulders and is made of tree inner bark.

³³⁸ Marudeve (sing: rudeve) is clothing made of reeds which grow along the Kavango River. The reeds are cut into pieces and joined together with a string and tied around the waist like a skirt. When a person clad in a rudeve dances it emits rattle sound.

moved. Most of the male dancers were bare breasted except for the two who also wore white beads around their necks. The décor they created for their play was not elaborate as I have observed with other groups in different festival contexts. Theirs was a clay pot, a calabash, three baskets each filled with maize, mahangu and sorghum seeds and three different types of fish hooks.

What was interesting in the performance of Unongo was that, unlike other groups where the lead singer and song announcer was usually a dancer, in this group it was the drummer who led the singing and announced the songs. The drummer started and led the songs while drumming simultaneously. As they entered, there was no excitement from the audience despite successive urging from the director of ceremonies to cheer for the group. Their presentation started off at a very slow pace. It was only after their second and third *Ukambe* dance that there was significant interaction between the group and the audience. The second song started after the drama play which focused on the types of “traditional” foods that the group displayed on its décor. The song “*daya ngoma*” (lit. hit the drum) is believed to have urged the drummer to beat the drum efficiently and very hard. When the song began, we all watched with wonder the skills of the drummer who did many things at the same time. He led the song, beat the drum and danced, and ended the dance. Two dancers, a female and male danced moving towards the judges in a horse-gallop style, and returned moving in the direction of the lead and backing drummers. When they approached the lead drummer, the female dancer joined the rest in the half moon circle while the male dancer repeated the routine. On his way back as he danced towards the lead drummer he faced him and danced intensely. The drummer moved an inch towards him and beat the drum intensely! The audience was excited and clapped hands wildly as they ululated. Notable was the middle-aged man who ran on the stage in the direction of the drummer with a two hundred dollar bill (N\$200³³⁹) raised in his hand for everyone to see and inserted it in the waist of the drummer who paused for a little while to acknowledge his gift. The other dancers still danced to the tunes of the backing drums. When the man returned amidst the crowd the drummer intensified his drum act. Before we knew it the drummer was on his back and the sound of his drum overpowered any other sound as it pitched on high note. He was on his back and one young male student from a local high school ran onto the stage towards the drummer who was still on

³³⁹ N\$1=R1

his back as he beat the drum. In his hand he had a ten dollar bill note (N\$10.00) which he went to put in the waist of the drummer who had gone into a trance. The crowd chanted “*Ana tumuka!*”³⁴⁰ while they shouted and clapped hands. His eyes were closed, the drum was tightly gripped between his legs and he beat it without stopping for over twenty minutes. The only male dancer had also gone into a trance as he danced the “horse-style” gallop. Spectators also danced to the drum’s tune. The rest of the dancers in the group clapped their hands and responded to the song announcement of the lead drummer. The invited guests, the judges clapped their hands. The drum sound was contagious; I felt goose bumps on my body surface, my intestines moved inside me. I imagined that I also danced although, I know very well that I cannot dance; I am not good at *kumhyaka* despite repeated attempts. The dancers could not signal the end of dance to the lead drummer until he was also on the ground and felt by the drummer, and only then did he close the performance. The crowd continued to chant “*daya ngoma*”. It took a long while before the director of ceremonies managed to calm the audience.

Due to the relationship between the two events in the front stage I will analyse the circuit and regional festivals simultaneously: first I give a snapshot description of the performance by the Kapata Cultural Group at the region’s central festival, which took place in Rundu. Their performance in the section of *kulinyanyukisa* further illustrates the dynamics and interactions that transpire at that level of the festival.

Like the circuit and national festivals, the regional festival at Rundu attracted many spectators, including important people in the regional government. At the regional festivals, the winning groups from the circuit competitions vie in the different categories for the prize of being the region’s best cultural group. Compared to the circuit festival, the regional fair is a large event with a lot of preparations at official level and many groups that would like to participate in the competition. The officials and institutional staff go to great lengths to make a success of the regional festival, held in this case in the recently-renovated amphitheatre. The officials appeared to be very involved and they paid attention to every detail such as catering for performers, invited guests, certificates for the groups, prizes and adjudication. During the circuit festivals officials from the centre judged performances during the competition, but for the regional

³⁴⁰ Lit. He is in trance!

festival the centre invited people from the head office in Windhoek and local teachers who they believe to have knowledge about Kavango “tradition” to judge.

The regional festival took place over two days; it began on a Friday when primary schools competed and ended the following day when the youth and senior groups battled it out at the amphitheatre of the Maria Mwangere Culture Centre. On both days the 2008 regional festival was highly attended. Every seat in the amphitheatre was taken; more spectators, mostly children, sat on the ground a few inches from the stage. There were women selling snacks and cool drinks to visitors. Amidst the spectators were invited guests including the mayor of Rundu, the regional governor, councilors, senior education officials, local business people and religious leaders who sat inside the tent which was also on stage, but not in the performance area. The tent’s interior was decorated with fresh flowers on the tables and the chairs were comfortable. On the tables were bottled water and small baskets filled with snacks and sweets. The senior cultural officer Thomas Shapi was formally clad in brown blazer and grey pants. Other staff at the centre, including labourers, wore their best outfits for the occasion. For someone who has been at the centre for a long time it was a surprise, and I hardly recognized many of them.

The Kapata Cultural Group from the Gciriku area in eastern Kavango was scheduled to perform in the *kulinyanyukisa* session. The group consists mostly of elderly male and female dancers, and usually competes in the festival’s premier category. However, this time the group did not make it through during the circuit festival competition, and was due to entertain the waiting audience.

People talked while they waited for the master of ceremonies to announce what was first on the agenda. Programmes were distributed only to the very important visitors who sat in the canopy. As we waited the sound of drumming was heard in the amphitheatre as various drummers tested and tuned their instruments, and performers quietly sang in the background.

The director of ceremonies Gelasia Shikerete, who is an assistant clerk at the centre, took to the podium next to the VIP table and announced that Kapata would perform next. People cheered when they heard the name of the group. The group came on stage to set their décor theme. They laid out various baskets filled with seeds, a number of hoes, and freshly harvested watermelons, some yellowish to indicate that they had been badly burned by the sun. The group performed an entrance song followed by a drama about two women who worked in their fields. The two

women always went together to the fields to cultivate and tend to their crops. However, one of them did not really work hard and would usually go home early, in fact soon after she had arrived. The other one worked very hard and always left last. They later returned to the fields to harvest. On their way to the fields they conversed on how they were looking forward to reaping the fruits of their labour. The spectators listened carefully to the unfolding story and occasionally laughed at the comments of the two women. The crux of the story was when the two got to the fields: one was happy and thanked the gods for the good harvest. The other woman was in shock when she found only weeds in her field, and one yellow watermelon. Her reaction attracted laughter and comments from the spectators as she exclaimed:

‘Nane! Owu mushoni, mo nalimine mu? Evi vya kunkuwa vi! Vyakundohita vhino.’

‘Oh my goodness! And this grass? Is this the place that I cultivated? This cannot be! I must have been bewitched!’

The spectators inside the VIP tent sarcastically retorted to the questions the women asked, to further laughter from the audience and performers:

‘Kwato vyaurodi!’

‘There is nothing like witchcraft!’

The women ended the play with a statement about the importance of hardwork:

‘Ukoli wanaumwande! Ira mu va tanta vakhughona shi, ukoli kulya ukoli woye, nange udwa kulya udwa woye!’

‘This is my hard work! Elders have said if you work hard you eat from your hard work; if you were lazy, you will eat laziness!’

She then started the Shiperu dance, led by the drum. When the dance intensified, Tamwa Mbambo from the centre could not contain himself and joined the group and moved his shoulders faster to the urging of the master of ceremonies, who invited anyone in the audience who wanted to dance, to join in on stage:

‘Eewa! Ame kwa ku dana nare, rutu rwange kuna ku ligumakura. Nsene ka pi ono kuhwilila odane ono hupu ko ko ku lironga mpo kovakondi ntani nokulinyanyukisa’.

‘Yes! I am already shaking my body; if you do not enter and dance you will be left out. No one will comfort you when you regret not joining the group of elders to learn and enjoy with them.’

In a short time the stage was filled with people from the audience who joined the Shiperu dance at its high point, at that particular moment. The master of ceremonies then attempted to stop the dance so that she could move on to the next item on the agenda, but the dancers just kept going.

“*Daya Ngoma*³⁴¹”, a drumming performance that had us electrified: an analysis of front stage interactions at the festival

In order to tease out the social interaction in the festival space, I deliberately selected from the *kulinyanyukisa* category, because it was more neutral and not subjected to intense scrutiny like the adjudicated presentations. I thought this category might have a different impact on audience and participants alike, since it was not linked to a festival result, where the end could be said to justify the means. People from all sections of the festival: whether they were spectators, invited VIPs or organizers could join the stage activities. In the competition itself, no one other than the performers are allowed on stage during any event.

Performances in this category are meant for entertainment, although they follow the same presentation format as those in the competition. The *kulinyanyukisa* is much anticipated in the festival, because it is the space in which festival-goers freely enjoy, entertain and celebrate the actual event. This does not in any way imply that they do not enjoy other categories of the festival, but this is an open space, the only one where the master of ceremonies invites one and all to join in and dance. This category creates an open interactive space between the various sections of people represented at the festival.

Most importantly this is a front stage, a space highly mediated by each master of ceremonies. We expect the front stage to be systematic and fixed in the way Goffman (1959) suggested in his outline of stages. This front stage is mediated by the master of ceremonies even though his

³⁴¹ Lit. Beat the drum.

powers are at times overruled by persistent performers. However, he or she also has the ability to initiate interaction between the audience and performers through urging the spectators to cheer for the participants. The audience is less likely to respond to those urgings if they do not foresee excitement, although in many cases they do comply. The interaction in this front stage removes the rigid system of the performance. Once this interaction has come in to place the performance cannot be systematically fixed as suggested by Goffman, because it can be modified according to the acknowledgement and appreciation it receives from the spectators and performers.

Let me first focus on the circuit festival at Mpungu where the Unongo Cultural Group performed in the category of entertainment. Mpungu is in a rural area and all the modern buildings in it belong to the State: they are either schools or hospitals which provide employment to local people. There is relatively little to do in the village, and the circuit cultural festival is a welcome social activity that attracts the majority of the village people. To the locals it was an important occasion, as one of the two young people I met the evening before at the local cuca-shop said:

‘At least there is something going on this weekend, it is not going to be boring here’³⁴²

The Inspector of Education and the matron of the hospital were regarded by the festival organizers as VIPs representing the State. Most importantly, the national anthem and the African Union anthem were sung in order to convey stately significance on the event. Some years into independence, Namibia ruled that the AU anthem be sung along with the national anthem. This was said to be in line with the spirit of pan-Africanism and creating a sense of belonging. The matron did not do anything on the particular day, but his presence was highly acknowledged. The headmaster of the host school and his office staff, including the master of ceremonies, were all public servants.

The Inspector of Education officiated during the event in order to give the festival its national dimension. He reiterated the message of unity and the rights of citizens to enjoy and practice their cultures as long as this did not infringe on the rights of other citizens. As with many State officials who officiated at festivals that I attended during my field work, he used the term culture in an anthropological sense. However, when he explained and listed the aspects of culture that need to be preserved and celebrated for unity and diversity, the explanation presented culture as

³⁴² My field notes

an object. In an anthropological sense, we understand it as dynamic and use it synonymously with tradition.

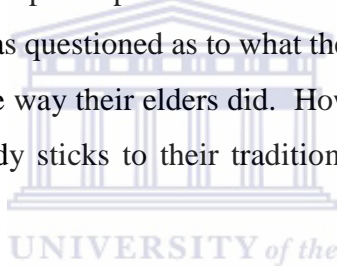
The senior cultural officer, Thomas Shapi, who on this occasion was dressed casually in tracksuit pants, presented a completely different persona compared to his demeanour at the regional and national festivals. It had been his duty to speak about the background of the festival and the new projects in his office during the circuit competitions. In the process he called on people to participate in projects and cultural activities in order to enhance unity and the independence of the people of Kavango as well as the Namibian nation at large. He also set out an official expectation of the type of local dances to be presented later during the day. His sentiments about local dances were to discourage improvisation and modification of dances and foreign influences, including what he referred to as the *kuduru* dances. However, he also acknowledged the right and freedom of the citizens to complain and protest the festival outcomes in the various media available, especially the local radio phone-in show *Mudukuli*, which means to expose.

These presentations contain stories that are told in drama and song as part of the social discourse. The dances are all modeled on the various “traditional” Kavango dances as explained earlier in the chapter. The dances and ideas in the plays presented in this category are also compared with the models in order to show whether they are symbolic and presented in the utmost original form, or not. Similar sentiments about the importance of observing the originality of dances were expressed by one of my informants. But he blamed the State as follows when I asked him about the state of contemporary dances in Kavango:

‘Njene ashi vya kurenka mpo kuna ku yi negheda moomu ya yenda ndi nawa tupu. Ngoli napa nopanya kuna ku yuvha vantu omu vanakushivana yira moomunya nakutandilire ashi, nanke aghufanekita mpo ya vakuron ashi weni omu vana kughu dana ghunya ghudano, ghufanekite navanuke, vanuke yira kuna ku yenda mwapeke. Mpo ashi avitovalite kuva kamukenga kunya ku national ashi ayiva movements ndi weni, mo nka va ka wana vitwa. Opanya mpo ngoli kava shivan vantu. Nayona apa ka tu kara na mbongarero pano kavi yapo nka na vyo nka. Kava renke shi vinya kapishi mpo vyenevyene. Mukutwara ngoli mukurona Shapi ghuye ka renke ashi, evi kapi vina tanta ashi dogoro mpo ya mwene tupu kehe vino ana dana. Shitambo munke ngoli? Weni omu

munakupopera maudano ngoli? Ameshi ndi kehe ghuno a fere po pamaudano gha mwene ashi weni omu ana ku dana mukemwinina vakurona vendi.³⁴³

‘If it is to say people should showcase their culture (tradition) and how it developed, it is good. Now, here and there, you hear people who complain, because of the manner in which culture is performed nowadays. It is not the way our elders did it. If you compare how the youth of today present their culture, there is a big difference. The youth performers especially children try very hard to modify in an apparent (attempt) to draw attention and gain more marks at the national festival, but it is not right. And that is why people are complaining. Recently in the meeting we had about the festival, that issue came up again and it was concluded that what people perform at the festival is not original culture. In that meeting, the senior cultural officer Shapi said that the festival was not necessarily meant for people to perform their indigenous culture, but anybody could perform any culture. He was questioned as to what the purpose of having festivals was, if people were not doing it the way their elders did. How does one protect the tradition? Is it not just proper if anybody sticks to their traditional dances and imitate the way our elders did it?’



Mberema thus presents a discourse that essentializes local culture. It speaks of the modification of dances in the front stage of the festival and how they have lost their original sense as expressed in the section on the note of Kavango traditional dances. This discussion points out the type of interactions between the State and the festival- goers in the various capacities that take place in the festival space. In this interaction the State outlines its expectation to the audience and festival participants of how culture should be. There are local people who contribute to the festival content during rehearsal: those who perform the dances also present the dances in a way that according to them is culture. Both actors in the festival contribute to the festival dances and dramas according to their own conception. While the State views and presents culture as dynamic and yet static at the same time, local people see it as an object that needs protection in the process of transference to the public or the new generation.

³⁴³ Interview with Karel Shiyaka Mberema at Maria Mwengere Culture Centre, Rundu, 23 September 2008. Mberema is a local historian and linguist and has published on traditions of the vaGciriku. He also recently published a Rumanyo and English dictionary with Mohlig. He also serves as a judge during the culture festivals in Kavango.

However, this does not mean that local people do not acknowledge that the culture they represent in the festival is dynamic. As I have demonstrated in the previous chapter, they also present 'their' culture as they imagine it. The conception of culture between the two sides overlaps and as a result becomes complex to analyse: especially when one attempts to locate it within the anthropological conception. However, to echo what Losambe and Sarinjeive (2001) wrote in the introduction of their publication on pre-colonial and post-colonial drama and theatre; in this context it seems as if culture is semioticised in order to demarcate as signifier (vehicle) and signified (communicated meaning of social life).

There is an implicit aim in the festival making, which is to communicate the State's message of 'unity in diversity' and its meanings as discussed in chapter two. Clearly this message emphasizes tolerance of difference and belonging. The culture discourse has become prevalent during this specific historical juncture. However, it is interpreted differently by the various levels of the State and local people. The State through its representatives as active actors in the making of the festival conveys its message of unity in diversity, and through other programmes that are important to its project of nation-building. They influence the festival in significant ways. In other words the festival brings people together for the State to deliver its messages to them, before they are allowed to express themselves and their needs through performances that are presented in the various categories such as in the *kulinyanyukisa* moment of the festival.

Now I turn to the actual performance of Unongo and Kapata in the two festival contexts of the *kulinyanyukisa* category. Both performances have a story to tell. In this context the perceived subject used in order to teach the audience was a variety of traditional foods, how they are cultivated and why people should work hard so that they can gain more from whatever they do. 'Learning' as an aspect of culture is implicit in all the performances I have observed, as are the speeches and statements of the various speeches made during the festivals. The importance of being able to 'learn culture' is emphasized in various aspects of the festival contexts so that citizens can know where they originate and this will (presumably) help them face the future.

The performance of Unongo and specifically its drummer was of particular interest for me. What started as a low-energy performance culminated in a frenetic, energy-charged activity, because of the acknowledgement and appreciation shown by the actors at all levels of the festival. The group knew that the song excited the drummer, especially if his contribution was

acknowledged and reciprocated. The song 'Daya Ngoma' and the urging of his partners encouraged the drummer to immerse himself in what he was doing. The spectators also acknowledged his ability to drum by inserting bills of money in his waist as he beat the drum. He in turn appreciated their acknowledgement by increasing the tempo of his drumming, to the astonishment of the spectators. Such extraordinary drumming is known to happen only during certain social activities such as healing. Healing (*Mahamba*) or death rituals require elaborate drum beating and it is when the drummer and some of his dancers could enter a trance³⁴⁴. The interaction was triggered by an extraordinary performance of the drummer and his dancer; it was not urged by the master of ceremonies as with the dance by Kapata during the regional festival. When Kapata performed, of course Tamwa Mbambo from the culture office went to join the dance, but the master of ceremonies also urged other people to come and join in.

Having discussed the above events I argue that the reaction of spectators in the festival was not only excited by the dances, but by the story lines of the dramatic action. The story lines dealt with issues that were in the public discourse. The lazy woman presented in the play by Kapata claimed that she had been bewitched, because she did not have a good harvest. A spectator retorted to the claims of the woman in the play. That interaction demonstrated the communication and negotiation of prominent public issues between spectators and performers. Interaction is not only limited to the communication of issues between performers on behalf of the audience to the State representatives in the tent canopy, it goes right across all the festival attendance.

Conclusion

I have discussed the transition of the process from the rehearsal to the actual festival, with special focus on the interactions that take place between the various actors in the event. In the discussion I have highlighted the role of local people in the making of the festival through a discussion of the pre-festival rehearsals of two groups namely Mayana Primary School and Ukumwe Culture Dance Group in Kavango. I described and analyzed rehearsals that happened at two different levels of festival making, the junior category and the highly rated premier category. The ethnography shows how local people participate in and contribute to the making

³⁴⁴ Interview with Jonas Mbambo at Mupapama on 26 May 2008.

of the festival, through teaching and showing traditional dances to participants, who in turn perform them during the festival. Although they are not directly involved in the making of the festival, their contribution makes them active players in the processes of nation-building as mediated and prescribed by the State. The cultural material used in the festival in Kavango is local, but it has a national dimension (to borrow a term from Lentz, 2001) as presented in a space that is mediated and controlled by the State. It is when local cultural material is presented in that controlled space that it generates interaction at various levels of the festival among the performers, audience, organizers and invited guests. The interaction is between those who are present and compose what is deemed 'proper' dances and the expected conduct and performances of the Kavango 'tradition'. The performances by Kapata and Unongo were viewed as proper by some locals, including officials from the culture office, because of the kind of social interaction they ignited. The interaction was measured (I use the term loosely) by the audience's response to the drummer, the sound he created and the rush of people onto the stage after the master of ceremonies opened the stage to all, to join in and dance along. The interaction contains a communication of social issues that are particularly important to those in attendance. It is a reciprocal interaction in which the people in all levels of the festival celebrate, acknowledge and appreciate the space (festival) and the performances.

Finally I argue that every stakeholder at the festival has a functional role and contribution in order to turn it into a festival. The State needs the festival in order to communicate its message of unity and tolerance. At the same time local people or festival-goers also need the festival to communicate with the State about their grievances, praise, and acknowledgements.

The following chapter is an ethnographic presentation drawing on events at the Annual National Culture Festival of 2008 which took place in December of that year in Rundu, the capital of the Kavango region in Namibia. The ethnographic description and analysis focus on the culture performances of two groups namely the *Ntunguru Cultural Group* and the groups from the *Noordgrens Secondary School*.

Chapter 8: Annual National Culture Festival: Discourses of *difference* and *belonging* in postcolonial Namibia

Introduction

Social scientists who have written about the dynamics of festival rituals have analysed such practices variously as celebrations of commonality, as the enhancement of social cohesion, or as expressions of nostalgia. Festivals have also been studied as spaces, where information is disseminated to the public. In previous chapters I discussed that the waves of independence that swept across Africa from the 1950s left a desire to recapture African culture and history in their wake. In the same breath, as has been shown in a substantial body of literature following the publication of Hobsbawm and Ranger's (1984) influential *Invention of tradition* volume, culture and history were mutilated and reinvented by colonial interests. Postcolonial states especially during the 1990s found themselves faced with enormous diversity and very few unifying elements. African leaders developed different approaches to the problem of internal unification and almost all placed much emphasis on the production of national culture. I have also argued elsewhere that state-sponsored cultural festivals in Africa and on other continents seem to have become avenues in which cultural representations are produced by Africans in a postcolonial context of nation building and national reconciliation, by bringing visions of cosmopolitanism and modernity into critical dialogue with its colonial past. There is a growing body of literature which studies contemporary festivals and their politics in order to enhance the understanding of the making of postcolonial nations and their identities (see for example, Van Binsbergen 1994; Lentz 2001; Askew 2002; Apter 2005; Flint 2006).

In this chapter I demonstrate that in postcolonial Namibia, cultural festivals have become avenues where discourses of difference and belonging are emphasised and contested by local people, festival participants and state officials through a range of ethnic-cultural presentations. The work of anthropologists, such as Van Binsbergen (1994), and Flint (2006), speaks closely to the subject of this chapter. Van Binsbergen's (1994) investigation of the Kazanga festival in Central Western Zambia shows how festivals have become contexts in which cultural reconstructions are demonstrated; his argument centers on the connections between culture festival performances and the reproduction of ethnicity. In another study from Western Zambia,

Flint (2006) presents an interesting intra-ethnic contradiction of the Lozi people in Western Zambia as regards their representations of their history and heritage. Both Van Binsbergen and Flint show how the festivals they studied created perspectives of difference and, most importantly, how they address the problem of cultural and ethnic demarcation. They demonstrate that cultural and ethnic demarcation is indeed the key question that festival organisers face when they decide which local cultural heritage they will stage and celebrate.

In this chapter I am primarily concerned with the ‘making’ of Kavango identity as distinctively different from that of other ethnic groups in postcolonial Namibia. This process takes place in a particular political space, that of the culture festivals, which the state has organised and mediated since the mid-1990s. As I discussed in the preceding chapters of the dissertation every year during the Annual National Culture Festivals representatives of Namibia’s various ethnic groups gather to ‘showcase’ and express their diversity. At this political space representatives³⁴⁵ of the state time and again emphasise, couched in a discourse of ‘unity in diversity’, the importance of bringing together the country’s previously segregated population groups.

In particular, this chapter draws on the events of the Annual National Culture Festival of 2008, which took place in December of that year in Rundu. The festival lasted eight days. I present a detailed ethnography of the processes of the ‘making’ of Kavango identity which unfolded during the festival as distinctively ‘different’ from that of other ethnic groups in postcolonial Namibia. My central argument is that while performers act out diversity through dance and other forms of cultural exhibition during these festivals, the importance of belonging to the nation and a larger constituency is significantly highlighted.

My ethnographic description and analysis focus on the culture representation of two groups, namely the *Ntunguru Cultural Group* and the group from the *Noordgrens Secondary School*. Both these groups hail from the Kavango region. I pay special attention to these specific groups, because of their significance in the local festival space. Both these groups have on various occasions been selected by the Rundu regional office to represent the Kavango region in festivals, including those that have been organised by the state and by other institutions. In the

³⁴⁵ See New Era news paper dated 09 August 2006 ‘Mutorwa Argue for Culture’.

analysis I will show how the organisers from the regional culture office in Kavango perceive the groups' roles in the region, drawing on their presentation, their demographic composition and character. It will be demonstrated, further how these two groups are presented by the festival organisers to show 'difference' and emphasise the 'significance' of 'the Kavango' as a unique ethnic existence in the national festival context. Respectively, I will conclude that the event I observed was part of the political rituals enacted by the postcolonial state in Namibia for its projects of decolonising the mind and nation- building.

The growing body of literature on festivals in Africa has pointed out the different dimensions that these public representations of 'culture' assume in different contexts. The chapter demonstrates that in the early 21st century, in Namibia too cultural festivals have become significant avenues where discourses of 'difference' and 'belonging' are emphasised and contested by local people, festival participants and state officials through a range of ethnic-cultural presentations. In the next section I will briefly contextualize the Annual National Culture Festival followed by a presentation of events which transpired in the Annual National Culture Festival which was held in Kavango during 2008.

The Annual National Culture Festival

As I have discussed throughout this dissertation, every year, the Namibian government organises culture festivals nationwide. The Directorate of Heritage and Culture Programmes in the Ministry of Youth, National Service, Sport and Culture, which is in charge of these events, has offices known as culture centers in all thirteen regions, such as the one at the Maria Mwendere Centre, where I spent several months as an intern during my fieldwork. Their staff is responsible for organising circuit and regional festivals. As I have shown in the preceding chapters the culture festivals begin at the 'circuit' level, using the demarcation of school districts, where performing groups that have exhibited 'their culture' to meet the expectation of judges,³⁴⁶ are selected to participate in the culture festival in their respective regions. Eventually, the regions' top performing groups compete in the Annual National Culture Festival.

³⁴⁶ The judges are drawn from among the circles of local government officials and other local luminaries.

As I have shown, even circuit festivals attract large audiences, although they are held during the week and many people cannot attend. The regional festivals are held over weekends. The national festival draws many spectators, including the local elite and numerous officials from the national government who attend the occasion on behalf of their respective ministries. The national event is held with pomp and ceremony to demonstrate its importance to the spectators and those who participate in it.

Those that participate in the festivals certainly take them seriously. During my fieldwork, I found that in preparation for a regional festival, members of the participating groups rehearse intensively. As I discuss in the previous chapter, rehearsals involves the choreography of dances, drama and learning lyrics of song. The majority of participants in the festival are students and pupils from schools in the region. The event is held in a competition format, which as the organisers never fail to point out, is used not as an end in itself, but as a means to an end. On one occasion for instance, in response to a question on how ‘cultures’ could ‘compete’, the Kavango region’s senior culture officer explained during the local radio show *Mudukuli* (‘saying it’):

‘Eyi twa ku ya rugana apa kاپisi yo kurumbasana nye tuya likide mpo. Ngendeseso izo za kara po zo ku gava yitwa yipo tu ka gwane ogo ana fundu moku likida mpo. Kapi tatu vuru kurumbasana pampo, morwa za kara momarudi gokulisigasiga.’

‘What we do is not gathering to compete, but to ‘showcase’ our culture. However, we need a guideline that guides how we awards marks so that we have one group that wins in its effort of showcasing culture. We cannot compete at culture level, because of the diverse cultures we have.’

But let us now turn to the events of the Annual National Culture Festival, which I witnessed in Rundu in December 2008.

The march through town

The first item on the event’s itinerary was the ‘march’, which began in the heart of town and ended at the Rundu stadium. As instructed by the director of ceremonies, the members of cultural groups from all over Namibia had donned their ‘traditional’ costumes for the march and the official opening ceremony, during which a senior state official would officiate. When I arrived at

the shopping mall from where the march would leave, the cultural groups had already gathered in front of the new complex. Several culture groups displayed banners advertising the names of their regions of origin. They lined up in the following order: Kavango, Oshikoto, Otjozondjupa, Oshana, Ohangwena, Omusati, Caprivi, Karas, Hardap, Erongo, Omaheke, Khomas and Kunene. However, it was clear that the public exhibition of ‘cultures’ during the march was about specific ethnic groups resident in the various regions since the participants were all clad in attires that are believed to be ‘traditional’ costumes. It was a colorful picture and accompanied by vigorous singing. Each group sang a different song; they sang loudly, groups seemed to compete about who could sing the loudest. Since the singing was not coordinated, the result was a high pitched sound and one really had to listen hard to make sense of what was being sung. The police were present to coordinate the march, together with culture officers from various regions. The traffic police directed other road users away from the main road as the crowd began to march in the direction of the soccer stadium.

I believe that the march had two consequences: on the one hand, it signified the symbolic representation of Namibia’s different ethnic groups. On the other hand, it was a display of power mediated by the state through the presence of its staff and security personnel which led the march. The spectacle can best be understood as an attempt to institutionalise the festival and its world of meanings among the citizens. Residents stood on the roadsides to witness a large number of people move in the town centre; a very rare sight in town, unless there is a funeral or wedding procession, particularly one involving the local elite. As the march entered the stadium, the participants kept singing and dancing, all the while exhibiting the banners and costumes.

Inside the stadium

Inside the stadium seating arrangements were demarcated according to the participants’ region of origin. Each cultural group had been allocated a different marquee, which specified the name of its region. The tribune also accommodated participants from various regions; only a small section was not demarcated, presumably to accommodate local festival goers. There was also a sunshade under which the officially invited guests and other dignitaries were seated. The first to arrive and be seated under this canopy was the Deputy Minister of Youth, National Service, Sport and Culture, Pohamba Shifeta. He was followed by the Ministry’s Permanent Secretary,

Peingondjabi Shipoh. Then the Acting Governor of the Kavango region arrived, shortly before Rundu's town Mayor. Next was the Vambunza chief, Alfons Kaundu. The Roman Catholic Bishop arrived a few minutes after him.

However, for a long time the Festival could not go ahead since the Minister of Youth, National Service, Sport and Culture, Willem Konjore, who was to officiate at the opening, arrived more than two hours later. People became agitated because of this prolonged wait; some lost patience and started demanding that proceedings go ahead as planned.³⁴⁷

Finally the vehicle carrying the Minister appeared at the gate, from where it was driven straight onto the lawn and came to a stop a few meters from the VIP marquee. The Director of National Heritage and Culture Programmes (NACP), his Deputy, followed by the Mayor and other government representative approached the Minister's vehicle to receive him in line with the elaborate protocol customary at such occasions. After brief greetings, the Minister was ushered to his seat in the front row, where he took his place between the Deputy Minister and the Acting Governor. All this time, other VIP guests chatted among themselves; the Permanent Secretary who was to be director of ceremonies was still compiling a list of names to be acknowledged during the official event. The audience was now calmer since they expected the proceedings to begin after the long delay.

The Permanent Secretary started by greeting the crowd in various languages that are commonly spoken in Namibia. Judging by their enthusiastic response, the audience appreciated his manner of greeting, which symbolised the presence of Namibia's diverse ethnic groups. I understood it to be an enactment of the state principle of 'unity and diversity', where all ethnic groups present at the gathering were acknowledged. He then requested the audience to sing the national and the African Union (AU) anthems. Following the singing of the anthems, the director of ceremonies sternly reprimanded some men for not removing their hats while the anthems were sung. He said: 'In other countries, you will be shot dead if men have their hats on, when people are singing the national anthem, please remember that.' Following the singing of the anthems, the Roman Catholic Bishop said a prayer. The Acting Governor was next to express words of welcome. As

³⁴⁷ It appears that Konjore is notorious for keeping people waiting. In another incident, about which I read in the media, he also kept people waiting for a very long time in another Namibian region where he was expected to officiate at an event.

he made his way to the podium, the audience applauded. Clad in a black suit and carrying a folder which contained his written speech, he started with a prolonged greeting that acknowledged all dignitaries present. His prepared speech touched on wide ranging aspects of ‘culture and tradition’ which, he said, would be celebrated on the day of the Festival. He emphasised the importance of showing the ‘true color of our origin and embrace culture as a diverse and unique exercise of different ethnic groups on this universe.’ He went on to share his expectation that he was looking forward ‘to see how happy Herero, Damara, Tswana, Caprivians and other tribes are dancing around at the podium’.

I could not fail to notice how the (ethnic) difference between the various population groups that make up the Namibian nation state was emphasised by the senior regional government officer. This obviously went down well with the audience. The crowd cheered loudly when he read such sections of his presentation. He closed his speech by welcoming people to the ‘mighty Kavango’. His presentation of Kavango as a ‘mighty’ region can be read in various ways, depending on one’s reading of the region’s current political context. Although Namibia is generally seen as politically and economically stable, some residents of Kavango that I interviewed during my fieldwork felt that an unfair distribution of the national wealth prevailed, as well as a jagged ethnic recognition; both apparently due to the uneven recognition of the contributions to the liberation struggle made by residents of different regions. As I discussed earlier in chapter six sentiments of neglect, ethnic recognitions and unfair distribution of wealth are not only expressed in public discourse, but also in songs which presented are at the festivals. For some time now, there has been a sense of neglect and discontent with the state of national affairs among local people in Kavango, especially those belonging to the tiny local elite.³⁴⁸

After the Acting Governor finished reading his short speech, the director of ceremonies introduced the main speaker of the day, Minister Willem Konjore. Like the Permanent Secretary before him, the Minister greeted the audience in the various languages spoken in Namibia,

³⁴⁸One prominent member of the regional government remarked during the closure of a conference in the region two years ago: ‘*Ose kumoneka asi vakwatesiko tupu*’ (Lit: ‘We are regarded as hand lenders.’). He was referring to the role played by people of Kavango during the liberation struggle, which is considered secondary. At the time of the 2008 ANCF a new political party had just been launched in the region. It has been labeled as an ethnic political party in speeches by the ruling party, SWAPO, on many occasions during recent election campaigns and the increasing number of presidential visits to the region.

followed by the official protocol of addressing state gatherings. Clad in a navy suit and black hat, the minister approached the podium carrying his speech in one hand, and holding onto a carved cane with the other, thereby embodying symbolised seniority.³⁴⁹ Before he read his prepared speech, he conveyed greetings from the Head of State who had been invited to officiate at the event, but who failed to attend.

The Minister's prepared speech started with what sounded like a (dated) anthropological definition of the culture concept. He presented culture as a 'thing' in Handler's (1988) sense, a 'thing' that can be shared and used as a tool to identify differences in identities. Furthermore, Konjore presented culture as 'something' that should embrace global developments in order to enhance economic development and social cohesion. From the Namibian government's perspective therefore, culture is presented as a commodity that can change the economic aspects of people's way of life.³⁵⁰

Halfway through his speech the Minister warned that people should not regard their 'own' culture as superior to others. Encouraging the audience to acknowledge diversity, he emphasised that the event should be celebrated with the 'sure knowledge that we are different'. Konjore presented the festival as an arena where a greater understanding of cultural diversity could be achieved, because here different people had come together not only to celebrate, but to 'showcase' their cultures and origins.

When he finished his short speech, Konjore declared the festival officially open. The crowd clapped hands and ululated in appreciation. The Minister then left the podium and shook hands with the director of ceremonies. The other VIP guests gave him a standing ovation; each of them moved to shake the Minister's hand. Konjore's speech demonstrated a skillful political articulation. He had concentrated on nationalistic sentiments about 'culture', and he had presented himself as a representative of the nation as a whole rather than of a particular interest

³⁴⁹In several communities in Namibia people move around with a cane in their hands once they have reached an elevated status in the community, or seniority in age.

³⁵⁰The commodification of culture is not the topic of this article, but it was evidently a significant part of the event. I observed that throughout the week of the festival, some people recorded dances and took pictures that were developed and sold on site. Many times when I attended festivals during my fieldwork, people asked me whether I was in the business of selling 'culture products'.

group within the society. Once the excitement had settled, the director of ceremonies again rose to call on the culture groups to get ready for their performances.

‘Performances’ of culture

For my discussion of performance at the festival, I deliberately chose to focus on the stage presentations of two groups, namely the culture group of the *Noordgrens Secondary School* and the *Ntunguru Cultural Group*. During my stay at the Maria Mwegere Culture Centre, where I served as an intern for most of the duration of my fieldwork in 2008, I observed that the officials based at the Centre attached special sentiment and significance to these two groups. When the national festival programme was being prepared, the senior culture officer, Thomas Shapi, motivated that *Noordgrens Secondary* should be included among the groups chosen to provide entertainment during the event, although during the competitions it had not made it beyond the circuit stage. For Shapi and his colleagues, *Noordgrens* presented and signified something special because of its demographic composition. *Noordgrens Secondary* and its culture group comprised both white and black youth. Like any other school in the region that participated in the festivals, however, it presented what is believed and imagined to be ‘Kavango culture’. Although its performance was not considered particularly successful, the officials considered its inclusion in the National Festival as crucial because of the symbolism of the group’s demographics and of how it locates the region within the national principle of ‘unity and diversity’.

The *Ntunguru Culture Group*, on the other hand, was perceived to represent Kavango-ness in an exemplary way. It is an adult group from the eastern Kavango and has participated in the finals on many occasions. *Ntunguru* is regarded as a group of performers in the premier category that has represented the region in many local, Africa-wide and international contexts. The group has been officially endorsed by the regional culture office as the representative of Kavango and its people. It has also been accorded national status, which has not delighted everyone. As I discussed in chapter five, during early 2010, officials from culture offices in several of the country’s regions complained publicly that groups from Kavango were given opportunities to travel abroad far more frequently than other groups (*Informante*, February 11, 2010). In the

Kavango region, however, no eyebrows were raised by other culture groups about the frequent travels of *Ntunguru*.

The *Noordgrens* group was the first to enter the stage, but not before the Director of National Heritage and Culture Programmes had read the guidelines and rules of the festival to everyone present. The Director stipulated the criteria that judges would use during the adjudication process. He emphasised that the audience and performers should not view the adjudication process as being aimed at ranking or demeaning any act being presented on stage, nor should the process be seen as favoring any cultural presentation over others. He stressed that the process should simply be viewed as a guideline, which would help to identify the group which presented itself in the most original manner possible; this would then make it eligible for a national prize or to serve as ‘culture ambassadors’. He maintained that in the fourteen year history of the national festivals, judges had always demonstrated and upheld high levels of integrity in order to promote and enhance fair play.

Noordgrens’s act was in the category of *kulinyanyukisa*, which I discussed at length in the previous chapter. The category of *kulinyanyukisa* is for entertainment purposes only. Groups which present in this category perform for fun and entertainment only; they do not get credits for their act unlike those who are in the competition categories. When the group from the *Noordgrens* Secondary School appeared at the entrance to set the stage for their performance, many spectators seemed shocked by the composition of the group and its costumes. Several people exclaimed in disbelief amidst applause: ‘*tatu tarere neina*’ (lit: We shall see today what they will show us). The crowd as well as the invited VIP guests applauded and greeted the group with loud cheers, yet the audience seemed uncertain about what the youngsters would perform. The girls wore brown skirts and tops with strings of blue and white beads over their skirts and around their ankles and arms. The white girls in the group sported blonde *vihho*.³⁵¹ The boys wore *marudeve*³⁵² around their waists. These items of clothing supposedly signified Kavango

³⁵¹ *Vihho* (sing: *sihiho*) is a form of female headgear. It is a long snarl that hangs down to the female’s shoulders and is made of tree inner bark.

³⁵² *Marudeve* (sing.: *rudeve*) is clothing made of reeds which grow along the Kavango River. The reeds are cut into pieces and joined together with a string and tied around the waist like a skirt. When a person clad in a *rudeve* dances it emits sound.

culture. One of the black boys wore a blazer and a white hat for his part in the group's drama presentation. First, the youngsters came on stage and arranged the props of their performance: a reed mat, a tape recorder, three cloths, a small chair, a big basket made of palm leaves and two plastic plates. Items such as plastic plates, blazers and fabric hats are regarded as foreign to the traditionalist notion of 'Kavango culture'. Their use in the context of the Festival represented the ability of local people to appreciate and incorporate things from 'other cultures' in their own lives, a matter that had been loudly emphasised during the Minister's opening speech.

After laying out the props, most of the group members left the stage. Three male drummers remained behind to welcome the other members of the group as they began the performance from the entrance. On stage, they danced to the tunes of the drums amidst loud cheers and ululation. Some sections of the audience egged them on, shouting 'forward, forward', while others exclaimed, 'wee, culture, wee!' The director of ceremonies drummed up even more applause and ululation from the audience. As the group prepared to present their last item, the senior culture officer for the Kavango region unceremoniously took to the podium for a little impromptu speech:

'Noordgrens has been a good example in the whole Namibia. We chose *Noordgrens* because it is a group that displays all kind of population groups in Namibia. And that is what we mean when we say unity in diversity. *Noordgrens*! Give them a big applause. Last year when we went to Ohangwena region people were left speechless to see our composition and they could not stop but praise Kavango region for promoting unity and diversity. Thank you, thank you!'

To end their performance the group sang a song about 'Kavango the good land' in Rukwangali, praising the region's abundance of food, animals, people and culture. The song urged people to take care of what they have. Then the two last dancers moved towards the drummers to stop the song. The audience clapped wildly as the group left the stage.

After this - symbolically-charged - performance as a result of competition, it was time for the presentations by the groups that competed for a prize in the Festival. The director of ceremonies announced that the first competitive performance in the adult category would be by the local stars from the *Ntunguru* group. The male dancers had their *marudeve* wrapped tightly around

their waists and wore *mutjeketje*³⁵³ around their ankles. Some of the male performers also wore headgear made from animal skin. They wore necklaces made out of green beads with an engraved symbol of a star. The men's upper bodies were not covered with anything else; they were also barefoot. The women were also barefoot. However, they had put on tops to cover their breasts. They wore headgear known as *vihiho*; their brown petticoats were decorated with white and orange beads. Around their ankles, arms and wrists they sported bands made of white beads. In addition, the women also showed off green star necklaces. The group members carried a big canoe and fresh river reeds onto the stage to present a river scene; other props included small axes and small baskets containing millet, sorghum and *nongongo*.³⁵⁴ They also arranged two black pots and storage baskets. Through their costumes and material items such as the *nongongo* fruit, the group presented the locally essentialised imaginary of the 'typical traditional Kavango'³⁵⁵ way of life. As became evident from the presentations of other groups from the region, so-called traditional Kavango dress and life have evolved and appreciated new influences.

When the *Ntunguru* group entered the stage to lay out the props for their performance, the director of ceremonies called on the - already cheering - crowd to clap their hands. After they prepared the stage, thirteen of the performers walked toward the entrance of the arena, where they waited for the three drummers left behind on stage to invite them with the beat of the drum. As the drumming began and the group reentered the stage already dancing, the audience cheered and ululated loudly. The dancers entered in two parallel lines which later fused to become one as they formed a half circle. Each dancer carried a small basket containing maize or millet seeds; she or he announced the contents of the basket and explained what it was used for, for instance, '*Mumahangu ghakulima twe Vakavango kuwana mo vitima*' (lit: This is *mahangu*. It is used to make porridge by the Kavango people).

³⁵³*Mutjeketje* are seeds of the camel thorn tree. They are attached to a string and tied around the ankles, producing a sound when the performers stamp their feet on the ground.

³⁵⁴*Nongongo* are dried nutty plums which are stored for the extraction of their nutritious oil.

³⁵⁵ My usage of terms such as culture and tradition follows local usage and is not meant to suggest that I see earlier forms of Kavango social history as timeless and preserved in their entire integrity which has been disrupted. All evidence shows that life has changed significantly and continues to so.

The group moved to the front of the stage holding baskets high before they placed them on the ground and returned to their original half circle position. As the song progressed, three female dancers separated from the rest and danced towards the drummers who also danced as they beat the drum to end the first song. As the three women got close to the drummers, the drum stopped to signal the end of the song.

When the group began to sing their exit song at the end of their performance, the director of ceremonies encouraged the audience to give a round of applause as the group was leaving the stage: ‘Thank you, thank you *Ntunguru!* We have learned Kavango culture from you, and I hope everybody will take it forward’, he concluded as their drum beat faded. Over the next few days, all the other groups that had entered the national competition carried out their performances.

At the end of the festival, every participating group received a certificate of attendance and prize money which had been raised by the Ministry. The director of ceremonies stepped forward, carrying three large envelopes containing cash and certificates. He announced the winners and runners-up of the different categories and briefly reported on how the results had been arrived at. He called the Deputy Minister to assist him with the prize-giving (the Minister had already left). While the Deputy Minister was making his way to the stage, the director of ceremonies announced business-like:

‘Everybody who participated today is a winner. Each group will receive a certificate of participation and prize money of N\$300³⁵⁶. The runner up gets N\$650, second winner receives N\$900 and first winner will take away a whopping N\$1200 and a certificate. I request the group leaders to collect their certificate and prize money when I call the group names and kindly sign for receiving the money.’

The handing out of certificates and prize money began. All the groups received their certificates amidst cheer from the spectators. Then the moment of truth arrived and the director of ceremonies read the names of the groups and the points they had been awarded in the runner-up category. In the adult category, *Ntunguru* came second behind the *Ondjondjo* Culture Group from the Oshana region (in Owambo).

³⁵⁶

1 N\$ = 1 Rand

Analysis of the festival representations in Kavango

To make sense of the events I depicted in the previous section, I shall take a closer look at the roles of the various actors. The National Culture Festival is an annual event on Namibia's social calendar and is organised by the state. The gathering should be considered as one that constitutes social capital in associational life; the performances during the festival can best be read as embodying postcolonial Namibia's official narrative of 'unity in diversity'. The Festival is performative in that it encompasses bodily practices that produce meaning and highlight interactions between social actors and their environment. It is a social process which is sanctioned by the state, but which constitute practices which are highly influenced by citizens. During the national festival people from all of Namibia's thirteen political regions are represented. The state, through its Ministry of Youth, National Service, Sport and Culture, organises the event that rotates among venues in the regions. The culture office of the region which hosts the event does most of the preparations; it is only assisted by the head office in Windhoek with matters that are beyond the capacity of the regional executive. In 2008, such a matter was the invitation to the Head of State, who the regional office hoped would officiate during the Festival.

It appears that, although it is ostensibly an event of *national* significance, the Festival becomes centered around themes that are important to the host region. The theme for the festival was '*Keeping our diverse cultures amidst globalization*'. Since it was held in Kavango in 2008, Thomas Shapi, the region's senior culture officer and a teacher by profession, made sure that all the local dignitaries were personally invited, including the regional governor of Kavango region, the Rundu town mayor, education directors and managers from local businesses. As he told me earlier, he would very much have wished that the Head of State would officiate, but disappointingly, unlike in some previous years, in 2008 the President was not available and instead a minister from Windhoek represented the national government. Clad in a black blazer with the insignia of the national flag on the front pocket, Shapi had evidently been busy before the event commenced since he was making calls to his colleagues who were responsible for different tasks during the gathering. Together with Shapi, the then Director of National Heritage and Culture Programmes coordinated the event. He, some believed, had a personal interest in this particular festival since he too hails from the Kavango region, although since his appointment to

the central government he has settled in the national capital.³⁵⁷ Herbert Ndango Diaz holds a PhD from the department of religious studies at the University of Capetown and he has written novels and poems in the Kavango dialects.

The Permanent Secretary, Peingondjabi Shipoh, who served as the director of ceremonies during the festival, left after the official opening. The Deputy Minister Pohamba Shifeta also arrived on the day when the festival began but, unlike his superior, he stayed in Rundu until the last day. The festival lasted for eight days. Shifeta, a one-time leader of organisations such as the Namibia National Students' Organization (NANSO) and the National Youth Organization, assisted the director of ceremonies with handing out certificates and prizes. The Acting Governor of the Kavango region, David Hamutenya, a constituency councilor from western Kavango, stood in for the Regional Governor, John Thighuru, who could not attend the festival opening because it had been rescheduled to accommodate the potential presence of the Head of State.³⁵⁸ Then there was Willem Konjore, the Minister of Youth, National Service, Sport and Culture. A pastor by profession, and a former Deputy Speaker of Parliament, he represented the central government at the Festival when it was confirmed that the Head of State would not be able to come to Kavango.

The immense importance that was placed on the possible presence of President Hifkepunye Pohamba at the event is worth greater consideration. The fact that it was never quite known whether or not the Head of State would arrive makes for some very interesting reflection. Of course, there can often be legitimate logistical reasons for the absence of the president, but one would think that any logistical problems could be overcome. The enduring uncertainty and the anxiety that this produced in the regional culture office in Rundu, seems to suggest that the arrival (or not) of the Head of State had perhaps become a power tool. The Head of State had to be kept in mind during all the preparations because of this uncertainty.

Except for the senior culture officer who played a major logistical role in the preparation of the festival, most of those seated in the VIP marquee were dignitaries representing foreign

³⁵⁷ Before he retired from the civil service in 2009, he was accused by several ministry staff members of favoring the Kavango region in many aspects of culture.

³⁵⁸ Namibian President Hifikepunye Pohamba could not attend because he had to travel to the funeral of Helvi Kondombolo, the mother of Sam Nujoma, the first president of Namibia. Kondombolo was accorded a state burial.

embassies, national leaders, and the local state administrative elite. The presence of national leaders, together with the local leadership and the wider local audience, as well as the participating performers, gave the Festival gathering a particular significance. All the parties, and especially the local officials involved in the planning and organisation of the Festival, were fully aware that this event could not ‘make any sense’ without the presence of national dignitaries. As Pye (1963: 27) pointed out half a century ago, there is always a human dimension in the celebration of nationhood and the presence of the national leadership since it has to ‘appeal for an undifferentiated public’ which presents itself as different through performance.

The ‘ordinary’ audiences of the festival, mostly Rundu residents, were seated on the tribune at one side of the stadium. They moved in groups of children and adults in the direction of the residential settlements at the end of each day’s festival session. Some members of the public obviously saw the potential to make money from selling snacks and pictures and DVDs of culture groups, which reminded me of the Comaroffs’ suppositions of the commoditisation of culture in the sense of Ethnicity Inc. (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009). In the context of the festival, the selling of culture products was in line with what the state emphasized in its culture policy which stipulates the event as an economic possibility for its citizens.

And then, of course, we need to consider the performers. One of the groups, whose performance was discussed in the previous section, was the *Ntunguru Cultural Group*. *Ntunguru* (‘the star’) comes from the eastern part of the central Kavango area of Shambyu and is composed of sixteen younger and older adults; some of the older members have retired from civil service positions in Rundu and moved back to the village. Six members of the group are male, ten are female. *Ntunguru* boasts several trophies and certificates which it has won since it began to participate in festival performances. The *Noordgrens Secondary School’s* group includes sixteen young white, coloured and black performers.³⁵⁹ During South African colonial rule this school accommodated children of white civil servants only. Since independence, it has become a mixed race school; it is also the school of choice for the children of (black) civil servants from other Namibian regions, who settled in Rundu after independence. Previously, before and shortly after independence in 1990, the school did not participate in culture activities. One of the previous

³⁵⁹ Strictly-speaking, secondary school students are in their teens but, as is common Namibian parlance, as school going youth they are locally referred to as ‘children’.

local culture officers told me that he attempted to have the school participate in festivals shortly after independence, but his efforts were unsuccessful. The school only started participating in the regional culture festivals in the late 1990s after the festivals had been officially proclaimed by the new Namibian state.

The interactions of these social actors in the environment of the Annual National Culture Festival demonstrated how the official principle of ‘unity and diversity’ serves as the basis on which difference among the people of Namibia is constructed. One wonders how the festival organisers, participants and spectators interpret the meaning of ‘unity in diversity’, especially in Kavango, where the matter manifests itself in many complex ways.

Debates on local radio shows around the start of the annual ‘festival season’ give a good illustration of these complex issues. Radio debates on the festivals included topics such as how the region could participate in the ‘national unity’ projects implemented by the central government. Presenters and callers also debate, however, how ethnic groups in Kavango contribute to *regional* unity. For instance, the senior culture officer, Thomas Shapi, called in to the early morning radio programme, *Pinduka* (‘wake up’) to announce an upcoming festival. He urged people to attend the festival, for it would be ‘a perfect opportunity to come together as Kavango people and nation’. Shapi’s statement triggered a debate on the radio chat show, *Mudukuli*, later in the morning, which carried on for several days. A few days after the regional culture festival, for instance, an anonymous caller asked the presenter, ‘*Nani wolye Vakavango?*’ (lit: Who are the Kavango people?)

The discussion on the radio points to the origin of the five groups namely the Kwangali, Mbunza, Shambyu, Gciriku and Mbukushu, who according to royal oral histories, can rightfully claim to be Kavango people as I discussed in chapter four in this dissertation. This postcolonial construction of Kavango-ness does not include the people collectively known as Vanyemba, who have also been resident in Kavango since time immemorial, as some local history narratives have it. There was a palpable sense of exclusion in the radio discussion. Although the senior culture officer did not mention who ‘makes up’ the Kavango, on this as, on other occasions, the discussion routinely lead to the point of who is a (legitimate) part of Kavango. His statement apparently created a situation that Handler (1986) would refer to as an ‘anxiety of being’ which befalls people when their ‘being’ and ‘belonging’ are questioned.

During the ongoing radio show discussions of the purpose and merits of the festival, notions of the allegiance and true commitment to Kavango ethnicity emerged as issues of regional unity and diversity. The radio programme allows for an open discussion, which at times reaches a crisis point, especially when touching on local ideas of inclusion and exclusion. In this context, the debates about the belonging of the residents referred to as ‘Vanyemba’ are particularly significant.

As I discussed already, the Vanyemba are believed to have migrated from areas in Southern Angola to Kavango at different times, and for different reasons. A smaller group is said to have lived along the Kavango River at the time when it became the colonial border between Namibia and Angola. Their claims are that they migrated to the Namibian side, because of who lived there. These smaller groups of Vanyemba are locally accepted as *vandambo*, which means ‘familiar’. Then, at least tentative, inclusion of these earlier migrants from present day Angola is in contrast with the exclusion of those who came with the more recent and much larger influx of Vanyemba and Vimbundu³⁶⁰ during the war of liberation in Angola.³⁶¹ This group is often seen locally as *vatywayuki*³⁶², or refugees, who supposedly have influenced the local culture with their ‘alien’ ideas, practices and processes of meaning making.

The colonial state’s construction of the five Kavango legitimate ‘peoples’ (or ‘tribes’), which I discussed earlier (Chapter 4), still seems to be commonly accepted. When, for instance, I asked the leader of the *Ntunguru* group what the star in their name and ornament symbolises he said that it represents the people of Kavango, namely the five groups of Hambukushu, Vashambyu, Vagciriku, Vambunza and Vakwangali. This is despite the fact that the Vanyemba are the largest of the groups. However, as I discussed earlier dissenting views insist that the Vanyemba have been around in Kavango for a long time, and that many, if not most, of the region’s ‘traditional’ songs and dances are actually of Nyemba origin, in contrast with those who claim to be the ‘real’ locals. This viewpoint also maintains that since the Vanyemba have been living among the so-called local people for a long time, trading and intermarrying with them, their

³⁶⁰ Vimbundu is an ethnic group mostly found in southern Angola. It is generally believed that they supported Unita rebels during the civil war against the MPLA government in Angola.

³⁶¹ Brinkmann (1991) deals in detail with issues of Vanyemba identity in postcolonial Kavango.

³⁶² I have critiqued Brinkman usage of this phrase in reference to the Vanyemba. See the chapter four and five.

songs and ways of life have been assimilated into Kavango cultural practices. As one very knowledgeable informant pointed out:

‘Nonsumo domaudano ndi dina domarungano domoKavango, kapi ava di dimbi moRukavango. Ku dimba moruNyemba, imo ya kere nanare ku tunda kokakuru ka nare. MoruNyemba nga va yi dimbi. Pogeli marusumo gamwe goudano goruMbukuhu ndi ruSambyu ndi ruGciriku ndi ruKwangali nyee maudano gomanzi aawe Vanyemba. Oyo yo ku ninka asi Vanyemba taantani aawe kapi naku yikwatesa ko ngororo nga va ruvongavonga moidimbagera na nare³⁶³’.

‘Many traditional songs, dances and tales in Kavango are not of Kavango origin; they were told and sung in Nyemba languages. That is how it has been even long time ago. Well, there are also songs and dances that were sung in, say, Mbukushu, Shambyu, Gciriku and Kwangali, but the majority of the songs and dances belonged to the Nyemba, and they dance them. When some people are saying that it is Vanyemba who are spoiling everything, that I do not believe.’

Surprisingly, the belonging of Vanyemba to Kavango-ness remains fiercely contested despite the fact that since independence the state has recognised the Vanyemba as part of the region’s people and culture by including them in an official publication about the identity of the Kavango people (MYNSC 2006:13). This concise publication on the history and dances of the Kavango people which was designed by the Kavango culture office has become known as the ‘culture booklet’. The booklet as I discussed in chapter six in details is based on interviews that the culture office conducted in the region in order to reconstruct the history and traditional activities of the Kavango. The booklet is also used to present the judges with insights into the local culture when the regional cultural groups participate during the Annual National Culture Festival. While all participating groups at the festivals, starting from the lowest circuit levels, independently produce their own ‘culture booklets’ to explain their background and performances, purportedly to convey a sense of their culture and dances to the judges,³⁶⁴ for the national festival, the

³⁶³ Interview with Immanuel Shikukumwa; Safari, January 2009

³⁶⁴ The judges then use the culture booklet and an adjudication form to judge the act. Groups are judged according to criteria such as how they enter the stage, their décor, costume, song, originality, and the booklet.

regional culture office prepares what I will call a ‘master cover narrative’ about the history of Kavango and its people. The individual booklets of the participating groups are then bound under the official account and presented to the judges.

In the culture booklets produced by the individual groups as I discussed earlier, invariably there is a clear distinction and assertion of the group’s origin. In all the booklets that I looked at, it was boldly stated whether the group originated from Mbukushu, Gciriku, Shambyu or Mbunza and Kwangali, that is, one of the officially recognised, legal Kavango ‘tribes’ of the colonial time. Yet, even today the Vanyemba are presented as those without an ancestral land in the region, although my analysis of a large number of ‘culture booklets’ showed that most of the songs in the booklets were written in and performed in Runyemba. This may explain why many Kavango dances continue to be hotly contested if they are seen as being connected to what is believed to be Nyemba culture or tradition.

Conclusion and reflections on Kavango identity

When I analysed the culture booklet in relation to the Festival in general, it emerged as a tool to signify and confirm Kavango-ness, encompassing the different ethnic groups represented in the festival space. I discussed that the booklet’s ostensible role is to guide the judges during the festival presentation, yet, I conclude that it should also be seen as a tool of differentiation. In what started as a colonial project to present the ‘objectified’ Kavango, the culture booklet has become a vital tool of the postcolonial administration’s nation building project. In particular, it has become a mode through which the state imagines and emphasises regional identities, which are presented in a homogenised form, although they encompass a complex diversity. Furthermore, we need to locate this complex matter within the wider discourse of ethnicity and differentiation as an aspect of identity. I use identity in this context as a category of practice as suggested by Brubaker and Cooper (2000). Here, we need to return to the two groups whose representations I discussed earlier in the chapter.

For the organisers of the Festival, the *Ntunguru Cultural Group*, on the one hand, apparently signified Kavango-ness. Because they are adults, they were ascribed a position of experience in a ‘cultural’ hierarchy, where the young are supposed to ‘learn’ the Kavango culture from their ‘elders’. The need for the young to learn culture from their elders is a common moral narrative in

postcolonial Namibia. Arguably, the confirmation of material culture and cultural performance is aligned with hierarchies of authority among the actors who participate in the event, and with the officials of the state.

The group from *Noordgrens Secondary* on the other hand, is seen as a product of the local nationhood factory. Because of its multiracial composition, the group's participation in the 'performance of sovereignty' (Hansen and Stepputat 2005: 26) is particularly important to the Kavango region. Moreover, the fact that *Noordgrens Secondary* used to be an all-white school which has transformed over the years makes it appear as a good example of the 'imagined' unity in diversity, which the state propagates in its 'body politic' (Anderson, 1983; Brinkel, 2006). In this way, past impositions of difference become reconciled with post-colonial notions of national belonging. The notion of unity in diversity is based on what Brown (2001) refers to as the 'shared problematic' regarding South Africa, which acknowledges a mutual history of difference as well as local and global affiliations. Another important aspect of the participation of *Noordgrens* is the demonstrated ability of the group's white members to learn to speak native Kavango languages and to perform local traditional dances. Therefore, the group is regarded, by culture officials and spectators alike as the embodied willingness and ability of those born-free³⁶⁵ to 'learn' local culture; it is thus seen as an example for others to emulate.

Finally, it is tempting to ask why it is apparently deemed 'proper' for whites to perform the perceived Kavango 'culture', while the performance of Nyemba dances by 'real' Kavango remains disputed. This is quite a complex question. Another one follows: should we view these intra-Kavango tensions and contestations as an attempt to establish ties of community or tools for empowerment? One can conclude, perhaps, that these tensions are about 'modern senses of belonging', which are expressed through ethnic allegiance and emphasis as suggested by Guss (2000: 63) in the Venezuelan context in South America.

When groups join the march with banners which display their regions of origin, they signify and assert their differences. However, it is also important to not only see difference in the coming-together of diverse groups in the same arena. The motive of the gathering is of utmost

³⁶⁵ 'Born-free' is a local term used to refer to those who were born around the time of Namibian independence and thereafter. It is used to indicate that they have only experienced peace and not the wrath of colonial oppression.

importance as I stated in the earlier chapters of this dissertation. As per state discourse the Annual National Culture Festival is held to bring people together for the common good, which is 'unity'. I have shown that the culture festival is a space which is mediated by the state, but it is also highly influenced by the participation of the local community. In conclusion, the National Culture Festival is a space of cultural representation that allows and enables Namibia's different regions to present themselves as a 'cultural community' within a wider 'political community' (Kymlicka, 1989:135), thus constituting the nation despite all local contestations of belonging.



Chapter 9

Conclusion

‘All of us as Namibians have the right to take pride in our diverse culture and heritage. While exercising and practicing our cultural heritage and beliefs we urge every one of us to recognize the colorful diversity of our nation and celebrate, accept the culture of others instead of pointing the differences and encouraging tribal division. The onus is on each and every one of us to build a unified and dignified culture because failure to do that will result in to disintegration and hopelessness. It is my hope that an event like the annual national culture festival will serve as an event that will foster understanding amongst the different cultural communities in the region and the country as a whole and ensure that respect and genuine understanding of culture, which other traditional communities have to offer.’³⁶⁶

The above statement by Minister Konjore identifies diversity as a very important feature in the process of making the Namibian nation. While diversity is embraced fully as a distinguishing aspect, it is to be tolerated and treated cautiously for it could lead to hopelessness and disintegration. Disintegration seems to be a key word in this context as it implies that there is a possibility that this diversity can lead to either unity or destruction in terms of social cohesion. However, harmonious co-existence can only be emphasized in a festive state in which the diversity can be presented through cultural performance in a celebratory mood in order to ‘showcase’ unity. The assertions of the minister and many other national leaders in Namibia in the festival space provoked my aspiration to undertake a study towards understanding the purported ‘diversity in unity’ which I have come to understand later as an emphasis of ‘difference’ and ‘belonging’ simultaneously of Namibian citizens in the context of my study. At the same time it is also very important to understand this awareness of diversity within the global context in which people have become more open to other ideas and influences. And accordingly Habermas (1996:849) has asked a very important question albeit in a different context about multiculturalism, which may be an adequate term to describe the expressed contemporary Namibian political aspirations towards nationhood:

³⁶⁶ Excerpt from the speech of Willem Konyore, the Minister of Youth, National Service, Sport & Culture at the official opening of the Annual National Culture Festival in Kavango in 2008.

‘Should citizens’ identities as members of ethnic, cultural or religious groups publicly matter, and if so, how can collective identities make a difference within the frame of a constitutional democracy?’

Habermas’s question on the issue of multiculturalism, is of particular importance in the context of my study especially in Kavango where relations between the Nyemba and other cultural groups are contested in order to illuminate the philosophical aspects of inter minority group conflict and the relationship of minority cultures and political identities to the majority culture within a constitutional democracy. His argument is that various aspects of communitarian and libertarian theories can be combined to produce a universally shared civic culture, one which recognizes and accommodate cultural difference while providing a ‘neutral’ public sphere in which groups can communicate, compete and carry out a democratic project. With the same question in mind I approached the making of the postcolonial culture festival as a ‘neutral’ space in which the project of democracy is carried out through representation of difference in a cultural sense and emphasis of a united imagery belonging to the Namibian nation. The festival space is where the nation-state and citizens meet in order to interact on key social issues as I have discussed in chapter six. This interaction is not between the state and citizens only, but also among citizens.

In the dissertation I documented activities which happen at Maria Mwengere Culture Center in Kavango. Respectively I argue that such a center and its activities serve as a ‘strategic factory’ of the perceived national culture which the postcolonial nation-state imagines. This seems to indicate similarities to what Askew found for the context of Tanzania, that it has been an increasingly dominant concern for state strategists how to even or navigate over the inconsistencies of cultural expressions and present a unified national front that blankets dissent and masks diversity. (Askew, 2002) At Maria Mwengere I focused on the museum, the making of culture booklets and culture festivals as activities through which local ‘cultures’ and heritage can be preserved according to the state’s perception. I showed how local culture officials deal and attribute importance to the activities such as festival dances and the museum at Maria Mwengere Culture Center. I have found that these activities of the center are indeed ways through which the state constructs its citizens according to its imagination. However, I also realised that citizens also participate actively in these endeavours. Through their culture festival

performances and the preparation of their culture booklets they become active agents in making and imagining postcolonial Namibian citizenship. In the process local people create an image of how they see themselves and represent it as such in the state platform which in turn has the authority to amend and modify what it desires to showcase.

This study has addressed the issue of nationalism and nationhood as expressed in the state sponsored culture festivals in Namibia. Of course it has only addressed a tiny fraction of what makes Namibian-ness, a situation which leaves a large terrain of uncharted research field in the festival context. Although this study focused only on state sponsored culture festivals, there are also various festivals which happen in the Namibian social space an arena in which different insights could be explored. Such festivals, which are organized by agents outside the realm of the state are the Witbooi, Omaongo, Lusata, Damara festivals which take place in different regions of Namibia. (Kossler, 2003)

There are main two perspectives addressed in this study. The first one is that of the state as an administrator and custodian of the state sponsored culture festivals. My interest was why the state subsequently went against its initial political principle and reclaimed the colonial festival. Secondly, I was interested in the perspectives of people who attend or participate in the event, which is highly mediated by the state. In other words: I was interested in how they made meaning of their cultural representation in the festival context.

The dissertation set out to address the main question of how the practice of state-sponsored cultural festivals, which was considered to be a 'colonial representation' of the 'other' has been reinvented and appropriated with new meanings in postcolonial Namibia. The colonial culture festivals, which used to take place in some parts of the country, were cancelled at independence for they were seen by authorities to be contravening the interest of nation building and reconciliation. However, five years later the new Namibian State re-introduced state-sponsored cultural festivals. My ethnographic study of the state sponsored culture festival in Namibia, with a specific focus on the Kavango region as a case study in order to gain insight into the professed notion of 'unity in diversity' shows that the 'new' festival is significantly different in principle from its predecessor even though the model appears to be similar.

Two points are important in this respect. Firstly, as I have observed, the new festival is held according to the old model of the sangfées which is: its competitive nature, regional participation which is aligned according to geographic ethnic presence and most importantly the festival is produced by the state. This similar method uses ‘competition’ as a means to reach an end. Postcolonial regional boundaries of many regions seem to coincide with the old Bantustans concept especially in northeastern Namibia which signified distinctness and separateness. Secondly, however, I found that despite these apparent similarities with the colonial festival, the current festival is different in conception. It has acquired a new meaning which defines postcoloniality and is differently conceived at all levels of its making. This is crucial if we are to clearly understand the making of the postcolonial Namibian nation state. The new festival making emphasizes ‘difference’ which is informed by the constitutional clause in Article 19 that guarantees people’s right of association, practice and enjoy any culture, tradition or religion. This type of guaranteed right was non-existent during colonial times. The new festival encourages tolerance of difference and co-existence as advocated in the constitution. Interestingly, I learned that these guaranteed and tolerated differences does not suggest disregard for the state ideology of belonging to the nation. On the one hand people who attend these festival gatherings, politicians included, emphasized the importance of national belonging. On the other, politicians and state representatives urge citizens to use these differences to enhance their social being towards social cohesion through representations of their imagined culture. This suggests that such difference should be used for economic betterment of citizens. As a result the state through its directorates of arts and culture has created support programs which would assist people in all regions to create cultural villages and identify heritage sites which could generate income through cultural tourism.

At the center of meaning and how it is made are issues of difference, exclusion and belonging. This ‘difference and exclusion’ I am writing about does not refer to racial distinction, which would have been central in pre-Independence Namibia, but cultural or ethnic diversity. The issue of difference, exclusion and belonging has become topical in the discipline and in other social and cultural scholarship of late, especially now that matters of such nature are being dealt with not only in the African, but the global context as well. It seems nowadays it has become more important to express oneself ethnically or culturally than in terms of race, a practice supported by many leaders in Namibia and local people.

For instance the first head of state in Namibia expressed and emphasise the constitutional right of each individual to practice their own culture during our interview. Nujoma's view about people and their culture suggests that people would feel 'Namibian' if they were legally allowed to practice their own culture. As I discussed in the preceding chapters, this ideology of difference was not welcome during the early stages of independence and the national discourse was that of 'one Namibia, one nation. Geingob, (2004) in this regards demonstrates though metaphorically, in his thesis how the state formation at the time promoted the national discourse which discouraged difference. As we witness and as I have shown in the dissertation, five years into independence the state through its representatives began to promote and enhance diversity.

Beyond the politics of difference and nationalism, my research also shows that ideas which are transformed through cultural representations produce meanings about 'being' and belonging to a particular 'culture', which are also relevant at the regional level. My research shows that in both national and regional contexts ethnicity is emphasized as a signifier of difference. In the circumstance of Kavango it is demonstrated that people could display difference and yet belong or be excluded from the mainstream regional identity. As Ngondo has suggested in our wide-ranging interview, difference seems to have been inherent in the history of Kavango. It is interesting; however, that many people I have spoken to in Kavango do not recognize the notion of Kavango-ness as a product of colonial times at all. Although, it is evident that Kavango identity as a category is colonially made, it seems appropriated locally to signify and emphasize belonging and association in the postcolonial moment. As Ngondo inferred, appropriation of Kavango-ness is situational, especially in the postcolonial context; where for instance the Vanyemba with other people such as Vaherero from outside the region can claim Kavango-ness. However, that does not really mean that they are Vakavango. This suggests one can belong to Kavango-ness for being in the area as a geo-political space. In this festive space the state also reminds and assures the citizens of their belonging to the nation although they are diverse. It is a type of difference which defines some sense of implicit commonality at the national level. As I have observed in the festival representations postcolonial Kavango-ness is rooted in histories legends and myths which have been emphasized and affirmed by the earlier colonial administrations. It is the same narrative which is being used in the postcolonial contestation of

belonging which excludes, for instance, the Vanyemba from mainstream Kavango-ness which as I said is rooted in historical narratives which were emphasized during colonial Namibia. Today as I have shown there is a high level of Nyemba-ness awareness in Kavango and it is being contested at all levels of social life.

Finally, the study also shows that interaction in the festival space is not only about ideas of difference and belonging, but there is also advocacy through song by the citizens. The citizens interact with the state about its needs and vision by outlining social issues in the 'culture booklet' and in the lyrics of songs. I thus argue that the cultural festival event conceived during the colonial administration and reinvented in the postcolonial period is a social space of interaction. The postcolonial festival is a space in which society and the state produce and practice ideas of association. While the idea of the festival is conceived variably by its participants, audiences and producers findings in this study show that the event is deemed important by the state and people for the conservation of heritage and I emphasize that it should not be viewed in isolation of the state's ambition of economic prosperity as Minister Konjore clearly stated during his festival address.

It shows that in that space of interaction the state calls for citizens to be proactive in a manner in which they 'showcase' their performances as the festival provides an opportunity for individual and national growth subsequently. What the state is striving for is for the creation of national culture and a space of association which can be placed in the global gaze as the tourism and heritage industry is one of the notable contributors to the national wealth. Culture is the most important aspect in the festival context, where it is now seen and regarded as a commodity which can be purchased and consumed in many ways. Although the scope of the study does not cover the issue of 'culture on sale'³⁶⁷, it remains the goal of the state to make it a resource which can create wealth as the ministers' speech shows.

³⁶⁷ There is evidence in my fieldwork data that there were people who recorded the dances, took pictures of the various culture groups at the festivals and processed them into DVDs and photos and sold them to the public who attended the event. I have also been asked on various occasions whether I was making DVDs for sale as I was always seen with the video camera at the festival. For more discussion on commoditization of culture see the recent publication *Ethnicity Inc.* by Jean and John Comaroff (2009).

Theoretically, the study contributes to literature on 'performance' as an act and analytical concept of social life and nationalism. (Goffman, 1959; Turner, 1979; Askew, 2002 and Ebron 2002)

Two perspectives on performance emerge. Firstly, the postcolonial Namibian state views performances as a system of representation which is made of intensively rehearsed acts of creativity. This perspective is contested by participants in the festival as they believe that it implies what they are doing is not 'real' as I discussed in chapter seven. The second one is that of participants and spectators who believe that they are involved in a performance through 'doing culture' which is not rehearsed, but 'real'. For instance the cultural representations at the festival that I discussed in the dissertation are about daily occurrences. Representation of birth ritual, witchcraft discourses, and types of food displayed and materials are not just brought in the open during performance as process; they are integrated in the daily social life of those who represent them in the festival context, as well as those who view them. The two perspectives lend the state sponsored culture festival to be analyzed as cultural performances which showcase visions which are viewed and embodied as true facts of life in a processual sense of bringing an act to completion by festival participants. (Turner, 1979) In order to analyse the festival in question as a performance we must contextualize it as a process which is sanctioned for a particular purpose. A festival is an elaborate process which constitutes practice in a Bourdieian sense. Overall the above discussions give us an insight about the state sponsored culture festival as a social capital of associational life; they are a practice with meaning. They are a space, which is treated as an object of value by participants and organizers,

In addition cultural festivals are presented as important dramatizations that enable participants to understand, criticize and even change the worlds in which they live, a conclusion similar to that made by studies done in Canada (Handler 1988), Venezuela (Guss 2000) and Nigeria (Apter 2005). Without doubt such reflexive quality is what is appreciated as the most important aspect of cultural representations as my study has shown. Specifically it speaks to the work of Guss (2000), Corr (2003), Van Binsbergen (1993) and Flint (2006) who has dealt with festivals in the context of ethnicity as an imagined construct and resource. With particular reference to the current contestations around Nyemba-ness, my study like the abovementioned also shows how sentiments of ethnicity have been used for the articulation and mobilization of recognition.

Below I briefly outline the significant concluding insights and themes of my study in order to show the importance of studying nation building through festivals.

Festivals and ‘Nation Building’

Throughout the African continent, the 1990s brought a turn to new rituals of belonging, which differed substantially from the older ones that had been developed during the earlier postcolonial periods. (Geschiere, 2009:213) Yet the specific practices of nation building continued to influence the crystallization of alternative forms of belonging in every part of the continent, albeit along quite different trajectories. (Geschiere, 2009:213) Geschiere (2009)’s historical approach to belonging and nation building demonstrates that there are always competing forms of authority, each one imbued with different myths of legitimacy and principle of allegiance. (cf. Lonsdale 1981) I have used history and festival analysis in order to understand the politics of difference and belonging which manifests Kavango specifically and Namibia in general. In Kavango specifically, there is an ongoing discourse of difference and belonging in the local perspective which is also transmitted to the national level in a festival context. These differences are based on the historical legends of origin to the area of Kavango which has become a common verifier among many people. These legends imply that Kavango as a space belonged to supposedly five ethnic groups namely the Vambukushu, Vagciriku, Vashambyu, Vambunza and Vakwangali; whereas other groups such as the Vanyemba and the San are mostly regarded as outsiders. This is especially the case for the Nyemba. The Vanyemba are regarded as outsiders who have just come to the territory and do not make the collective of what became the Vakavango especially after colonial time, while the San are regarded as those who have lived in the bush very far from Kavango.

The study shows that this politics of difference and exclusion and belonging in the context of Kavango has a root in historical legends which present people as distinct. The Vanyemba are, in the process, excluded from many ‘traditional’ activities, because they do not have communal rights to claim ancestral space in Kavango like other people in the area. Just before the beginning of my PhD research in Shambyu traditional authority where the regional education office is situated, there was a debate the about recognition of Runyemba as a language to be used in on schools and local radio. It coincided with the call for recognition and demand for space which

can be referred to as an ancestral land for the Vanyemba. Even though there was certain support for these calls (the former was supported by certain officials³⁶⁸ and the latter by Nyemba headmen in Shambyu) they led to serious consequences; all Nyemba headmen who had previously been under the Shambyu traditional authority were removed by Hompa Matumbo Ribebe. Since then there have been no Nyemba headmen in the Shambyu area. There was also a campaign call by 'local' teachers and certain prominent officials for the removal of Nyemba teachers and education officials who supported the call for the official recognition of the Nyemba language. These observations suggest that previously unrecognized ethnic groups are now able to claim recognition in the new dispensation. I view it as such because the current political situation through the constitution guarantees people the right to express themselves according to their imaginations. There is no legal instrument which suppresses such manifestations³⁶⁹ as was the case during colonial time.

The most interesting aspect in this discussion is the usage and celebration of history which differentiates and determines belonging in the festival context. Although there is not much written about the San and Vanyemba in the postcolonial culture booklet, the Vanyemba dances and art displays especially are said to be leading and making an impression in the representations at the festival perspective of Kavango and its showcase in the national context.

While there are serious contestations of post colonial Kavango identity³⁷⁰, the region presents a different image at the national festival context, emphasizing ethnic and racial harmony. The regional office used the Noordgrens Secondary School ensemble of black and white students showcasing the 'Kavango culture' to present a good image and example of the 'imagined' unity and diversity which the state propagates in its 'body politic'. (Anderson, 1983; Brinkel, 2006) As I have shown, these past impositions of difference become reconciled with postcolonial notions of national belonging. All the above activities happening in the state sponsored culture festival make it not only a space in which nation building happens, but a necessary resource (itself) critical in nation building. With the above said, it will be safe to conclude that the postcolonial festival is not a state affair singularly, but a social process which involves both the state and its citizens.

³⁶⁸ I may not mention their names for reasons of confidentiality.

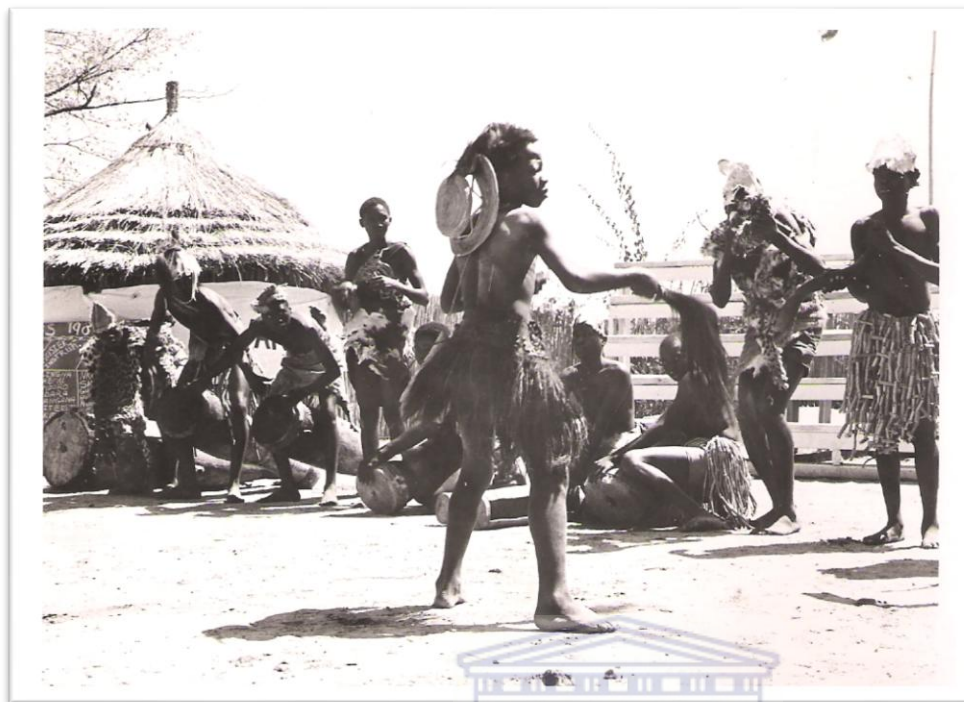
³⁶⁹ I am aware of the similar cultural politics of new claims for recognition in Southern African. See Robins (2001)

³⁷⁰ I use identity as a category of practice as suggested by Brubaker and Cooper (2000)

Finally, a very important aspect for me in this research was the focus on Kavango region as a case study, a region which remains on the fringes of academic discourse. The current contestations around belonging and exclusion and especially the claims for the recognition of Nyemba-ness in itself might make a relevant subject, both academically and politically. Another important research potential in Kavango especially in History and Anthropology is the study of the San. A proper historical research about their origin and contemporary discourses of marginality will assist future researches in dealing with the rather complex foundation myth of Kavango and its people.

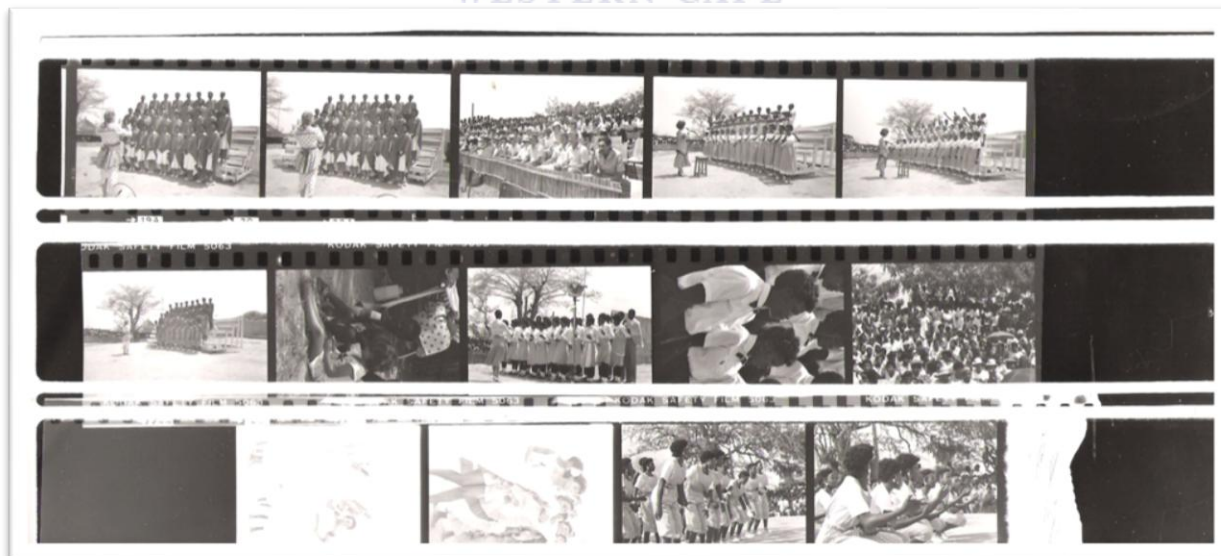


Festival in Pictures:



Picture 1: Dances at Ekongoro during the 1970s

Source: Ministry of Information-Rundu Office



Picture 2: Variety of activities at Ekongoro during the 1970s

Source: Ministry of Information-Rundu Office



Picture 3: First senior youth officer Elrich Pretorius during the local festival at Ekongoro

Source: Print of photocopy given to me by Mr. Karel Shiyaka Mberema



Picture 4: People in this image are believed to be Ezuva recruits during one of the field gatherings.

Source: Ministry of Information-Rundu Office





Picture 5: Gathering during the Annual National Culture Festival in Kavango during 2008
Akuupa

Source: Michael



Picture 6: The group from Kavango Region readies for the street march during the Annual National Culture Festival

Source: Michael Akuupa



Picture 7: Minister of Youth, National Service Sport and Culture Willem Konjore delivers keynote address during the Annual National Culture Festival in Kavango. Source: Michael Akuupa



Picture 8: Kapata Cultural Group at the Kavango Regional Festival
Akuupa

Source: Michael



Picture 9: Noordgrens Secondary School Cultural Group readies to enter the stage during the Kavango Regional Festival
Source: Michael Akuupa



Picture 10: Sam Shafiqhuna Nujoma and author

Source: Office of the Founding President

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Interview with Irma Jericho, Tutungeni, Rundu, 18 December 2008

Personal communication with Elrich Pretorius at Maria Mwengere Culture Centre during 2008

Personal communication with Kandali Nangolo at the Annual National Culture Festival held in Kavango during 2008 December

Interview with Magdaleena Pessa Kasera, Theresia Sikongo, Anastasia Mufenda and Helena Nasini, they are teachers responsible for culture at Sauyemwa Junior Primary School, 20 January 2009

Interview with Queen Maria Kandambo at her homestead in Gciriku, January 20, 2007

Interview was held with *Hompa* Alfons Kaundu Mattias on 14 April 2007 at Sigone

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