

# Transforming Owambo Transhumant Pastoralism in Northern Namibia: A social- Environmental History, ca. 1900s – 2006

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## **Dedication**

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In memory of my parents *Tate* Festus Shilunga and *Meme* Linea Nghiwanapo-Shilunga, who passed away respectively on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February and the 8<sup>th</sup> of June 2009. May their souls rest in everlasting peace!

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## Summary

Transhumant pastoralism in north-central Namibia, the former Owambo, was explored from a historical perspective, using the theory of socio-environmental history as a framework. The study used secondary data, informal interviews and discussions, and for recent times, interviews with herders. The change or transformation of transhumant pastoralism in Ohangwena was analysed from three phases, namely, the period before colonialism, during colonialism and after Independence. The goal was to understand how transhumance has been transformed over the years and factors responsible for such transformations.

The study shows that livestock mobility in north-central Namibia involved nearly 70-90 per cent of cattle in transhumant migrations. However, the transhumance has changed in scope and extent of movements at geographical scales over the periods under consideration from 1900 to 2006. Some of the traditional routes of migrations have been retained. Since colonial times, particularly during the German rule in Namibia, the changes in transhumant pastoralism were more to man-made than natural causes. During the colonial administration Owambo pastoralism was never understood. In combination with other factors such as political factors, this led to the neglect of agriculture and pastoralism in the north-central regions.

The change in livestock mobility is mainly connected to the decrease in rangeland size and communal grazing, the change in communal land rights, introduction of new cattle breeds, adoption of new cattle ranching methods and shortage of professional herdsman. The rangeland has decreased mainly due to establishment of clearly-defined artificial borders, animal control-fences such as veterinary cordon fence (VCF), introduction of sedentary agriculture in previously grazing reserves, the change in patterns of human settlements and so forth. The change in communal grazing, which has decreased by 20 per cent, and grazing rights is mainly caused by the development and extension of modern infrastructures such as water pipelines, the privatization (enclosures) of large areas of communal land, and weakened power and capacity of traditional rulers on management of grazing and land. The migration of men mainly for formal paid jobs and participation in war has contributed to the shortage of Owambo professional

herdsmen to implement transhumant migrations. Since communal grazing and the rangeland have decreased, transhumant pastoralists have been experiencing difficulties with regards to sufficient grazing and livestock mobility. Conflicts associated with grazing resources have become common in the northern Namibia because of more demands for private land and competition for scarce resources among different land users. Land-related conflicts have affected relationships between different ethnic groups and territories or regions. In the long term this can easily result in the politicization of land-related conflicts which in turn can affect the relationship between poor herders and the elites particularly political elites (whose aim is the privatization of land), and the relationship between pastoralists and the state. Environmental conditions will also be affected if future decisions are unfavourable for transhumant pastoralism.

**Keywords:** Transhumance, pastoralism, grazing, transformation, north-central, Owambo, cattle, livestock mobility.

## Introduction

*“Evicted farmers protest, demand grazing: A group of Oshiwambo-speaking farmers evicted from western Kavango held a protest at Eenhana in the Ohangwena Region yesterday to demand that Government provide them with grazing for their cattle”<sup>1</sup>*

Environmental history (EH) has provided important methodological and time related frameworks for analyzing human environmental relationships. This is particularly relevant for such regions such as southern Africa where we have good sources for reconstructing past environmental and human events that influenced changes in land use by the traditional African societies. The processes of environmental changes are deeply rooted in the past<sup>2</sup> and, African environmental history should investigate the influence of colonial state administration on relations between people and the natural environment.<sup>3</sup> This is applicable to Namibia where the colonial history extends for over 100 years. It is in the view of Jacobs<sup>4</sup> that challenges for survival in the natural environment are caused more by human injustices than natural environmental factors.

Pastoralism which is defined as “a complex livelihood system seeking to maintain an optimal balance between pastures, livestock and people in uncertain and variable environments,”<sup>5</sup> has socio-cultural, economic and environmental significance. Transhumant pastoralism or transhumance is an important part of holistic resource management strategies<sup>6</sup> and the most important factor in preventing degradation of grazing resources and land degradation in general.<sup>7</sup> However, the history of pastoralism in Northern Namibia has been neglected in literature. A historical perspective will give us

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<sup>1</sup> O. Shivute, *Evicted farmers protest, demand grazing (2005) in: The Namibian*, Windhoek (01.11.2005)

<sup>2</sup> W. Beinart & P. Coates, *Environment and History: The taming of nature in the USA and South Africa*. Routledge (1995) 1

<sup>3</sup> N. Jacobs, *Environment, Power, and Injustice: A South African History*, Cambridge University Press (2003)

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> M. Nori, M. Taylor & A. Sensi, *Browsing on fences: pastoral land rights, livelihoods and adaptation to climate change*. International Land Coalition (2008)

<sup>6</sup> E. P. M. Kreike, *The Owambo Agro-Silvipastoral System: Traditional Land Use and Indigenous Natural resources Management in Northcentral Namibia*. Directorate of Forestry, Ministry of Environment & Tourism, Namibia (1995).

<sup>7</sup> A. Marsh & M. Seely, *Oshana: Sustainable people, Environment and Development in Central Owambo, Namibia*. DRFN and SIDA (1992)

a broader perspective on different processes and perspectives of change or transformation of transhumant pastoralism in a long term, by investigating interrelations between changes in nature or ecosystem, economy, culture and politics. This requires a comparative approach,<sup>8</sup> and a representation at different levels.<sup>9</sup> As EH is important for analysing contemporary challenges affecting humans and nature,<sup>10</sup> it can help us to understand the contemporary status or challenges concerning pastoral development and, shape views of development initiatives based on providing possible solutions to challenges of pastoralism and agriculture in Namibia. A historical perspective will help us to understand that the patterns of migrations of Owambo Sanga-type of cattle, which are well adapted to arid climate, are similar to those of wild grazers such as wildebeest and antelopes.<sup>11</sup> It can also help us to acknowledge arid climate which is characterized by rainfall variability and unpredictability and the occurrence of droughts that cause famines. Drought which is defined in terms of rainfall below normal,<sup>12</sup> is considered to be “normal” and can also transform the transhumance.<sup>13</sup>

Even though the historical analyses are rich, there are shortages of critically important human-environmental analysis from the perspectives of social history, environmental history and ecological history. The gaps in such analyses are pronounced in relation to land use strategies of African pastoralists. In the southern African region, cattle Pastoralism which had played a dominant role in subsistence production provides a clear linkage between spatial and time-dependent strategies of land use involving transhumance movements across ecological systems before and after the colonial Frontiers were fixed.

The aim of the study is to understand the transformation of transhumant

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<sup>8</sup> Beinart & Coates, *Environment and History: The taming of nature in the USA and South Africa* (note 2)

<sup>9</sup> Jacobs, *Environment, Power, and Injustice: A South African History* (note 3)

<sup>10</sup> Beinart & Coates, *Environment and History: The taming of nature in the USA and South Africa* (note 2).

<sup>11</sup> A. Marsh & M. Seely, *Oshana: Sustainable people, Environment and Development in Central Owambo, Namibia* (note 7)

<sup>12</sup> P. Huttchinson, *Climatology of Namibia and its relevance to the drought situation*. In: R. Moorsom, *Coping with Aridity: Drought Impacts and Preparedness in Namibia-Experiences from 1992/93. Prepared for the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Rural development and UNEP*. Brandes & Apsel Verlag GmbH, Frankfurt, Windhoek (1995)

<sup>13</sup> J. D. S. Olszewski & R. Moorsom, *Rainfall records and the Analysis of Drought*. In: R. Moorsom, *Coping with Aridity: Drought Impacts and Preparedness in Namibia-Experiences from 1992/93. Prepared for the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Rural development and UNEP*. Brandes & Apsel Verlag GmbH, Frankfurt, Windhoek (1995)

Pastoralism in Northern Namibia. Transhumant pastoralism, which is the traditional feature of the north-central Namibian systems of land use, has not received as much attention as it deserves.<sup>14</sup> This is partly due to limited research on the history of pastoralism during the colonial era which ended in 1990.<sup>15</sup> The previous studies had mainly focused on the history of cattle ranching by the European settlers namely Afrikaners (Boers) and Germans but, little on the dynamics of cattle populations and cattle management by the larger African populations. In Namibia the minority farmers of European descent who constitute only 6 percent own large commercial farms and ranches in the Commercial Farming Areas, which cover about 44 percent of the country's land. In contrast, the majority African pastoralists are concentrated in the Communal Farming Areas which cover about 41 percent of land.<sup>16</sup> Farming in communal areas which was conceived as primarily for subsistence economy has been neglected while much emphasis was placed on commercial farming.<sup>17</sup>

The transhumant pastoralism in north-central Namibia, which is cattle based, is facing challenges with regards to sufficient communal grazing and increased livestock mobility. The strong perception that prevails is that transhumant pastoralism in northern Namibia is ending due to changes in land use intensifications that obstructs the traditional forms of land use.<sup>18</sup> This perception is mainly based on the fact that communal grazing has decreased to 20 per cent of its former size since the 1990s<sup>19</sup> with the consequence that

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<sup>14</sup> J. Rawlinson, *The Meat Industry of Namibia: 1935-1994* (1994). See also B. Lau & P. Reiner, *100 Years of Agricultural Development in colonial Namibia: a historical overview of visions and experiments*. National Archives of Namibia (1993) 3

<sup>15</sup> M. Salakoski, *How Kings are made – How kingship changes: A study of rituals and ritual change in pre-colonial and colonial Owamboland, Namibia*, University of Helsinki, Faculty of Social Sciences (2006). See also K. Miettinen, *On the Way to Whiteness: Christianisation, Conflict and Change in Colonial Owamboland, 1910-1965*, *Bibliotheca Historica* 92 (2005); C. Saunders, *Towards the decolonisation of Namibian history: notes on some recent work in English*. in: *Namibia 1884-1984: Readings on Namibia's History and Society*. Namibia Support Committee in co-operation with the United Nations Institute for Namibia (1994) 81-89.

<sup>16</sup> A. S. Bishi & J. A. Kamwi, *Veterinary science, transboundary animal diseases and markets: pathways for policy in Namibia*, Working Paper 4, Institute of Development Studies, Brighton (2008); See also, Rawlinson, *The Meat Industry of Namibia: 1935-1994* (note 14)

<sup>17</sup> Rawlinson, *The Meat Industry of Namibia: 1935-1994* (note 14)

<sup>18</sup> Interview with A. Sheuyange, Namibia Meat Board, Windhoek (2007). See also, A. S. Kruger & A. Verlinden, *Changing grazing systems in the north-central Namibia*. *Land degradation & Development* 19 (2006) 179-197

<sup>19</sup> J. Mendelsohn, S. el Obeid & C. Roberts. *The profile of the North-Central Namibia*. Gamsberg Macmillan, Windhoek (2000)

cattle transhumance had declined by an estimated 70 to 90 percent.<sup>20</sup> The decrease in communal grazing is a result of greater expansion of privatisation of communal grazing, implementation of development initiatives such as resettlement farms, quarantine camps against cattle diseases, and infrastructure development and expansion in both rural and urban areas as well as changes in patterns of human settlement.<sup>21</sup> Other factors that reduced the range of annual transhumance include non-adaptive land management from increased human and livestock populations as well as the borders between regions and across the country.<sup>22</sup>

A decrease in communal grazing has consequences for transhumant pastoralism. Major transhumance destinations to the unsettled grazing landscapes (*ofuka*) where former cattle posts (see sections below) were located have been transformed into permanent settlements (*oshilongo*) characterised by “large” scale farms and fields. Despite the effects of rainfall variability and unpredictability in pre-determining transhumance, livestock mobility is directly affected by fencing of communal grazing and regional borders within and across the country. In Ohangwena and Oshikoto (the north-eastern regions of the north-central Namibia), the decrease in communal grazing has caused transhumant pastoralists to move their animals further into western Kavango, and into south-eastern Angola.<sup>23</sup> Despite the existence of the borderline (*onhaululi*) between Namibia and Angola that restricts livestock movements, the Namibian government has plans to “re”-establish a Veterinary Cordon Fence (VCF) between Namibia and Angola. This will reduce the available cattle range that would restrict livestock mobility between the two countries, ultimately breaking the traditional transhumance range very

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<sup>20</sup> Interview with A. S. Bishi, Directorate of Veterinary Services, Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry (MAWF) Windhoek (2007); Also, interview with K. K. Shoombe, Eenhana Veterinary Office (2007), See also Mendelsohn, et. al, *The profile of the North-Central Namibia* (note 19)

<sup>21</sup> Mendelsohn, et. al, *The profile of the North-Central Namibia* (note 19), See also, C. Tapscott, *The Socila Economy of Livestock Production in the Owambo Region*. NISER Discussion Paper No: 4 (1990)

<sup>22</sup> P. Klintonberg, M. Seely and C. Christiansson, *Local and national perceptions of environmental change in the north-central Namibia. Do they correspond?* Journal of Arid Environments 69 (2006) 506- 525; See also P. Ndongo & R. Vigne, *The borderline: ‘Onhaululi’*, part of *The Movable Frontier: The Namibia – Angolan Boundary demarcation 1926-1928*. In: P. Hayes, et.al, *Namibia under South Africa Rule: Mobility & Containment 1915 – 46*, James Currey & Ohio University Press (1998) 289-304; See also R. Vigne, *Imperialism at one remove: Britain and Namibia, 1785-1915*. In: *Namibia 1884-1984: Readings on Namibia’s History and Society*. Namibia Support Committee in co-operation with the United Nations Institute for Namibia (1988) 145-151

<sup>23</sup> National Agriculture Support Services Programme (NASSP), *Report on the Study to identify the optimal geographical sites for the selected state veterinary offices*, Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry (2006)

significantly. As communal grazing decreases, competition for available communal grazing for purposes of cultivation, settlements and other alternative land use uses within and across regional boundaries has increased.<sup>24</sup> There is therefore a growing land conflicts phenomenal in northern Namibia. As Shivute<sup>25</sup> reports, the demands for grazing from the government is a response to the eviction of the north-central transhumant pastoralists from western Kavango, where they have been grazing their livestock since 1980s. The eviction that was carried out by the Kwangali Traditional Authority (TA) and the Namibian Police was based on the view that pastoralists had no grazing rights to keep their livestock in western Kavango. This conflict that is quite politicized is caused by an increasing privatisation (through fencing) of communal grazing by the elites and politicians who also have cattle posts in north-central Namibia.<sup>26</sup>

We however lack scholarly work on traditional pastoralism in Northern Namibia informed by a historical perspective on how the traditional pastoralism was transformed. Furthermore, there is a need for cattle population data to understand if cattle population dynamics can be related to rainfall variability as well as changing land use policies. This type of analysis within the Namibian context has not received attention from Historical Geographers. My focus in this analysis is Northern Namibia [more specifically the Ohangwena region], which is one the 7 regions that belong to the Northern Communal Farming Areas (NCAs) where approximately 60 per cent of the Namibian populations are found.<sup>27</sup> The Ohangwena is the third densely populated region with about 203,700 inhabitants or a population density of 21 people per km<sup>2</sup>. The north-central, which represent about 10 per cent of the Namibian land, is a home to approximately 46 per cent of the 1.8 million people living in Namibia. Approximately 70 per cent of land the north-central is used for agriculture and the most common mode of existence is agro-silvi-pastoralism.<sup>28</sup> Yet, evidence from recent years would show that the shrinking grazing

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<sup>24</sup> Mendelsohn, et. al, *The profile of the North-Central Namibia* (note 19)

<sup>25</sup> Shivute (note 1)

<sup>26</sup> Verlinden & Kruger, *Changing grazing systems in the north-central Namibia* (note 18)

<sup>27</sup> Namibia, *2001 population and housing census: preliminary report*. Namibia Census Office, National Planning Commission (2002); See also, FAO, *Namibia Northern Livestock Improvement Project: Socio-Economic and Production Systems Diagnostic Study*, Report No. 121/92 IFAD-NAM 2 SEPSS (1992); Republic of South Africa, *Official Yearbook of the Republic of South Africa*. Third Edition (1976)

<sup>28</sup> Kreike, *The Owambo Agro-Silvipastoral System: Traditional Land Use and Indigenous Natural resources Management in Northcentral Namibia* (note 6).

home range of the traditional pastoralism is causing intensive conflicts between different forms of land use in Northeastern Namibia.

Despite the evidences of decreasing home ranges of the former transhumant pastoralists, we have limited descriptions on the traditional systems of transhumance that African herders such as Ovawambo used between cattle posts and the main settlements as well as mobility that took them across to the neighboring regions. Furthermore, traditional Pastoralism in the north-central Namibia was little understood despite their important roles in the earlier colonial trade and later in commercial meat production. Most importantly, we have little understanding of the dynamics of cattle populations in different sites since records became available from 1930s to the present. This kind of information is critical for supporting sustainable pastoral production as well understanding the factors that had influenced the changing patterns of land use between the colonial and post-colonial periods in the transformation of the transhumant Pastoralism. Such an understanding will inform development initiatives aimed at providing solutions to the challenges of traditional pastoralism in Namibia. The knowledge on pastoral transhumance will influence the decision-making processes and the implementation of development initiatives as well as examining the implications of the new land use laws and policies for guiding Pastoralism development and alternative land use in the formerly communal grazing lands of Northern Namibia. This will aid the decision-making process and the implementation of development initiatives as well as examining the implications of the new land use laws and policies for guiding pastoralism development and alternative land use in the formerly communal grazing lands of Northern Namibia.

This study has three main objectives. Firstly, the study seeks to describe the history of transhumant pastoralism in northern Namibia between 1900 and 2006. The second objective is to understand the relationship between long-term rainfall and cattle population dynamics. Finally, the study seeks to understand changes in cattle house holdings in relation to the herd structure. The study advances arguments regarding why transhumance remains ecologically a viable system of land use in northern Namibia



## DATA SOURCES

In this study, I focused on the effects of land use changes on the traditional pastoral transhumance patterns that were practised in response to rainfall variability, colonial Frontiers and internal changes in land use patterns as well as population changes. In order to understand the nature of grazing land-related conflicts in the north-central Namibia, we should grapple with the past usage and management of pastoral landscapes, the management of transhumant Pastoralism as well as the relationships between different land users in northern Namibia. The historical changes, which I prefer to refer to as transformation in this study is linked to other northern communal areas (NCAs), particularly Kavango, Oshikoto, Omusati and Oshana (Fig. 1).

The linkage is important in this study because it would provide us with comparative perspectives of time within which transformation had occurred in relation to different environmental processes such as climate variability and changes in political and policy climate that transformed landscapes.<sup>29</sup> My assumptions were that if the communal grazing lands continue to decrease, livestock mobility will be congruently reduced but total populations might not change due to cultural drivers. This

would create two environmentally related problems. Firstly, there will be severe environmental degradation. Secondly, conflicts between the large livestock herds and crop cultivation will increase. Given that mobility is a necessary strategy for coping with drought, more stock is likely to be lost during droughts. In order to verify this, I used livestock populations census taken between 1930 and 2006 to understand, if there was a corresponding decline in livestock populations, that might reflect the effects of the



Figure 1: Map of Namibia  
(Source: <http://images.google.no>)

<sup>29</sup> Beinart & Coates, *Environment and History. The taming of Nature in USA and South Africa* (note 2)

constraints associated with the diminished grazing lands. Much of data on cattle population was obtained from the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry in Windhoek (Head Office) and Eenhana (regional office for Ohangwena region).

The main challenge I faced regarding secondary data was the limited literature on transhumant pastoralism in the north-central regions of Namibia. Much of the available historical literature on biophysical environment and people of northern Namibia are written from historical perspectives that had limited analysis of transhumant Pastoralism. Mietinen<sup>30</sup> states that historical studies on Namibia are characterized by European stereotypes (e.g. on violence and tyrannical ruler) and prejudices, or focused on issues such as political development,<sup>31</sup> pre-colonial long-distance trade,<sup>32</sup> migration of labour, the Owambo reaction to German colonization,<sup>33</sup> and the emergence of south African rule in Owambo.<sup>34</sup> However, there are a few studies related to agriculture and natural resources management which used historical data about population, demography, migration and land use as a framework but little to say about transhumance pastoralism. For example, Kreike (footnotes 6) who thoroughly analyzed the environmental history of northern Namibia focused on farming systems and adaptations to political economy. Other studies that provided a broader overview of pastoral movements but less so from environmental historical perspectives were those of Verlinden and Kruger,<sup>35</sup> Mendelsohn and others,<sup>36</sup> Marsh and Seely,<sup>37</sup> and Tapscott.<sup>38</sup>

Although good archival sources exist I lacked the resources to make use of them and therefore relied mostly on census data and secondary data. Historicizing the region of Northern Namibia from secondary sources is problematic because of the assumption that

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<sup>30</sup> Mietinen, *On the Way to Whiteness: Christianisation, Conflict and Change in Colonial Owamboland, 1910-1965*, (note 15).

<sup>31</sup> Cooper, in: Mietinen, *On the Way to Whiteness: Christianisation, Conflict and Change in Colonial Owamboland, 1910-196* (note 15).

<sup>32</sup> Siiskonen, in: Mietinen, *On the Way to Whiteness: Christianisation, Conflict and Change in Colonial Owamboland, 1910-196* (note 15).

<sup>33</sup> Eirola, in: Mietinen, *On the Way to Whiteness: Christianisation, Conflict and Change in Colonial Owamboland, 1910-196* (note 15).

<sup>34</sup> Kotze & P. Hayes, in: Mietinen, *On the Way to Whiteness: Christianisation, Conflict and Change in Colonial Owamboland, 1910-196* (note 15).

<sup>35</sup> Verlinden & Kruger, *Changing grazing systems in central north Namibia* (note 18)

<sup>36</sup> Mendelsohn, et. al, *The profile of the North-Central Namibia* (note 19)

<sup>37</sup> Marsh & Seely, *Oshana: Sustainable people, Environment and Development in Central Owambo, Namibia* (note 7)

<sup>38</sup> Tapscott, *The Socila Economy of Livestock Production in the Owambo Region* (note 21)

the history of the region begun with German colonization. Lau Brigitte<sup>39</sup> states that there is a very strong and decisively prevalent traditional view that ‘history’ only starts in 1884. The limitation of this study must also be seen within this context. I have not been able to unearth enough material that covered pre-colonial periods to give an in-depth historical analysis of pastoral transhumance in northern Namibia. However, because of the historical focus of the study, I relied on archival data mainly focused on long-term rainfall records, records of livestock censuses and recent census data on livestock house holdings in terms of cattle per capita. My selection and use of the archival livestock and rainfall data from wider areas was to provide the regional picture of land use problems.

The thesis consists of four sections. The first section gives a general overview of systems of transhumance in Northern Namibia. Here the main elements of cattle Pastoralism that will historically be analysed are given. The second section gives a historical description and perspective of pastoral land use and management as well as the factors responsible for change or transformation at different phases. A critical analysis and reflections on the factors responsible for change or transformation are presented in the third section and, conclusions remarks in the fourth section.

## **THE SYSTEMS OF PASTORAL TRANSHUMANCE**

Cattle herding and all livestock-related activities in Northern Namibia are traditionally men’s responsibility. Depending on the type of land rights, cattle herding involves both short-distance herding and long-distance transhumance. Short-distance herding, which is used on both privately-owned grazing (on private land) and communal grazing, normally takes place near homesteads, villages or settlements during the cropping period (December-April/ May). The aim is to prevent animals from feeding on crops. The method is also used at cattle posts (see below) during transhumant migrations. As private lands are managed by individual owners, individual livestock holders normally cooperate with each other on resource utilization and grazing rights. It is also required that herders or cattle holders obtain permission from the local traditional authority when crossing

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<sup>39</sup> B. Lau, ‘Pre-colonial’ Namibian historiography: what is to be done?’ In: *Namibia 1884-1984*: B. Wood, *Readings on Namibia's history and society*. Namibia Support Committee - Action on Namibia Publications (1988) 90-91

territorial boundaries in order to access grazing and avoid potential conflicts.<sup>40</sup> These short distance grazing systems are not the subject of this study. The focus of the study is long-distance migrations, especially where these movements have been obstructed by political and Frontier problems, forcing the pastoralists to assume short distance migrations.

Long-distance transhumance, which is locally called *epanga*, involves driving cattle into the remote wilderness (*ofuka*). This is an important ecological method used by pastoralists to cope with the variable climatic conditions by opportunistically searching for better grazing. The method allows grazing and fodder resources to regenerate naturally without any or less animal disturbances.<sup>41</sup> Transhumant pastoralism involves approximately 70–90 per cent of cattle in the north-central Namibia.<sup>42</sup> Mendelsohn and colleagues<sup>43</sup> argue that this figure is an exaggeration and that the exact number of cattle moved to seasonal grazing could be only 30 per cent. It is my view that more than 30 per cent of cattle are involved in transhumance. Disagreements regarding the real figure may relate to the lack of distinction between the local movement and the transhumant mobility in the literature. However, further research is required to verify this.

The best grazing areas are open grasslands (*omanyana, nomalondo*), which contain much grazing and water, where bush encroachment has not thickened.<sup>44</sup> Oshimholo, the earliest settlement for Ovawambo which is located in the north-eastern areas of Ohangwena region and south-eastern Angola used to be one of the best transhumant destinations. The transhumant movements used to be cyclic<sup>45</sup> and guided by herders based on local traditional knowledge.<sup>46</sup> Cattle would be driven as far as Kavango in the Far East of the north-central, Kaokoland in the west, and Cuvelai in southern Angola.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> J. Nghishiilenhapo, *Oshitunda nonghedi*, Out of Africa Publishers, Windhoek (1996), Interview with Shitaleni (2007)

<sup>41</sup> Kreike, *The Owambo Agro-Silvipastoral System: Traditional Land Use and Indigenous Natural resources Management in Northcentral Namibia* (note 6).

<sup>42</sup> Bishi (note 20), Shoombe (note 20); See also Mendelsohn et.al, *The profile of the North-Central Namibia* (note 19)

<sup>43</sup> Mendelson, et. al, *The profile of the North-Central Namibia* (note 19)

<sup>44</sup> Nghishiilenhapo, *Oshitunda nonghedi* (note 40)

<sup>45</sup> Interview with K. Mukwayu (2007) & F. Hapulile (2007)

<sup>46</sup> Interview with S. Shitaleni (2007)

<sup>47</sup> Loeb, *In Feudal Africa* (note 47); See also, A. Tönjes, *Owamboland*. Namibia Scientific Society (1996); Kreike, *The Owambo Agro-Silvipastoral System: Traditional Land Use and Indigenous Natural resources Management in Northcentral Namibia* (note 6).

The people could drive their cattle about 50 to 150 km away from homesteads and villages, spending a year or even longer in the remoter grazing areas.<sup>48</sup> Transhumant migrations begin at the beginning of the dry season in May, shortly after the crop harvest. Not all the cattle are driven away. A small number is kept in the villages near the homesteads, where they are left to graze freely in the *veld* (rangeland) during the day before they are kraaled at night. Keeping cattle near homesteads is meant for meeting normal household needs.<sup>49</sup>

After the crop harvest in April, cattle are allowed to feed on crop residues, mainly millet stalks, before they are driven away into the wilderness. During the reign of powerful kings in Oukwanyama (up to 1917) cattle movements were not allowed to start before *epena* took place. *Epena* was a ritual event that was performed only by the king. Prior to the commencement of cattle movements, best grazing areas were identified in advance. Several cattle owners in the village would then meet to discuss issues relating to cattle mobility and thereafter combine their cattle herds. They would appoint a professional herdsman who would lead the journey throughout and his specialised assistant herders. Normally, the leader was a maternal uncle (*xekulu yepata*), entrusted for the task by clan members because, cattle are properties of the clan.<sup>50</sup> The common practice was to combine herds for sharing tasks during mobility such as digging wells.<sup>51</sup> Due to risks associated with livestock mobility and predator attacks, the appointed leader should be “*omulumenhu, ena onyati, yee oha dulu okulela nokuninga omatokolo oshilumenhu,*” meaning, a brave man, capable of leading others and making sound decisions. He is responsible for the well-being and safety of his assistants and animals.<sup>52</sup> In order to carry out this responsibility, he receives a club (*odibo yonghwalute yomutwe wa nyolwa*) symbolizing authority, from the cattle owners, which he always carry during mobility.<sup>53</sup> Apart from this, herders carry weapons such as knobkerries, bows and arrows,

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<sup>48</sup> Miettinen, *On the Way to Whiteness: Christianisation, Conflict and Change in Colonial Owamboland, 1910-1965* (note 15); Interview with F. Hapulile (2007), Personal observations

<sup>49</sup> Miettinen, *On the Way to Whiteness: Christianisation, Conflict and Change in Colonial Owamboland, 1910-1965* (note 15); Also, Hapulile (note 45) and, personal observations

<sup>50</sup> F. Williams, *Precolonial communities of South West Africa: A History of Owambo Kingdoms, 1600-1920*. National Archives of Namibia (1991)

<sup>51</sup> Mukwayu (note 45); See also, J. Nghishiilenhapo, *Oshitunda nonghedi* (note 40)

<sup>52</sup> Miettinen, *On the Way to Whiteness: Christianisation, Conflict and Change in Colonial Owamboland, 1910-1965* (note 15)

<sup>53</sup> Nghishiilenhapo, *Oshitunda nonghedi* (note 40)

throwing sticks (*eedibo*), daggers, machete (*panga*), and knives.<sup>54</sup> As it is a taboo to cultivate and pound millets at cattle posts, it is important that herders carried enough food (*onghuta*) for the entire period they are away from home.<sup>55</sup> Herders relied on dairy products; therefore they carried milk containers (*eholo noxupa*) which they used to store milk and butter. They also supplemented their diets with plentiful game meat especially small animals and birds as well as wild fruits and vegetables.<sup>56</sup> This means that transhumant pastoralism is a form of production and institution.

## Cattle posts

As transhumance is never meant to be permanent, herders established several temporal cattle posts or *eehambo* (*ohambo*, singular.) during mobility as they moved from one place to another.<sup>57</sup> The time spent at different cattle posts may vary, as a new post is established depending upon the need for better access to grazing and water.<sup>58</sup> A new post is also established depending upon the need for water and new grazing rights.<sup>59</sup> In order to protect cattle from predation, herders would construct temporal kraals at cattle posts which are made of wooden poles and tree branches, preferably *Acacia* species. The kraals are mainly used for the protection of animals at night and milking during the day. As wild animals cannot stand fire, lighting fires inside the kraal at night is the most important strategy to scare away dangerous animals.<sup>60</sup>

Cattle are herded according to categories relating their age, status and sex. Herders categorize them into: 1) the herd of oxen (*oufita weehove*), 2) the herd of cows (*eedidi hadi nyamifa ile da dala*), 3) the herd of heifers (*omutanda neengholoni*), 4) the herd of calves (*eenhana*) and, 5) the herd of bulls and young cows (*eemhedi, eedidi neendema*).<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Loeb, *In Feudal Africa* (note 47); Also, my own personal observations

<sup>55</sup> Hapulile (note 45)

<sup>56</sup> Nghishiilenhapo, *Oshitunda nonghedi* (note 40)

<sup>57</sup> Shitaleni (note 40); See also, Nghishiilenhapo, *Oshitunda nonghedi* (note 40)

<sup>58</sup> Nghishiilenhapo, *Oshitunda nonghedi* (note 40)

<sup>59</sup> Kreike, *The Owambo Agro-Silvipastoral System: Traditional Land Use and Indigenous Natural resources Management in Northcentral Namibia* (note 6)

<sup>60</sup> Interview with Mukwayu (note 45) and Shitaleni (note 40); See also Nghishiilenhapo, *Oshitunda nonghedi* (note 40)

<sup>61</sup> Discussion with Shitaleni, K. Hangula, and T. Haihambo

Each herd is taken care of by a specialised herder.<sup>62</sup> Different cattle herds are taken out of their kraals to graze at different times of the day. Oxen are the first ones to leave early in the morning before sunrise (*eluwa inali tenda*). It is for this reason that this time of the day in Oshiwambo is called “the morning of oxen” or “*ongula yeehove ile peluwa leehove*.”<sup>63</sup> The rest of cattle herds, except calves, go out after sunrise to graze for what is locally called *oshikwiifa*. Afterwards, all cattle herds are brought back to the kraal for milking (cows only!) and for herders to take their breakfast (*oshuumbululwa*) before cattle are again driven to graze distant pastures from the cattle post. Calves, especially the young ones, are never allowed to go away with their mothers; they are left behind to graze near kraals at the cattle post. The main reason here is to protect both cows in milk and their calves and to allow cows to produce enough milk.<sup>64</sup> This method is also used in short-distance herding during cropping time where cattle are kraaled near homesteads at night and taken out during the day. Cattle are brought back to the villages or settlements during the following rainy season and in case of drought years; it is not advisable to remove cattle from the rangelands because there would be poor grazing in villages or settlements. Therefore, in order to maintain cattle’s health as animals travel long distances, a rotational method is applied whereby different groups of cattle are driven out of the rangelands every other year.<sup>65</sup> On returning to villages and settlements some cattle owners prefer to organise “cattle shows” or *omaludi* at the beginning of May before cattle are driven back into the rangelands. Cattle shows are organised so that cattle owners get to know their cattle and mark them, thank their herders and learn about herders’ experiences in the wilderness.<sup>66</sup> As herders had not fixed salaries, they were given cattle as appreciation.<sup>67</sup> The above description must be used as a benchmark for analyzing historical transformation of transhumant pastoralism, the extent of change and continuity.

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid

<sup>63</sup> Ibid

<sup>64</sup> Ibid

<sup>65</sup> Interview with M. Haitula (2007), F. Hapulile (note 45) & F. Shilunga (2007); See also Mittinen, *On the Way to Whiteness: Christianisation, Conflict and Change in Colonial Owamboland, 1910-1965* (note 15)

<sup>66</sup> Nghishiilenhapo, *Oshitunda nonghedi* (note 40)

<sup>67</sup> Interview with S. Shitaleni and F. Shilunga (2007).

## **PASTORAL LAND USE AND MANAGEMENT**

The current pastoral land use and management can only be clearly understood if we first try to understand the people of Northern Namibia and their relationship with the natural environment and with other resource users. This understanding can be only reached if we know the past history of people, how they used and managed the land and other resources. The history of Northern Namibia is inseparable from the history of the entire environment and people in the region. The history of pastoral land use and management is analysed from the environmental history perspective focusing on three phases of change or transformation in history, namely, the pre-colonial phase, colonial phase, and the post-Independence phase. Though I have focused on the period between 1900 and 2006 in this study, it is important to understand the pre-colonial history in order to understand the colonial and post-colonial phases. The approach used by Jacobs<sup>68</sup> in relation to Kruman in South Africa has been adopted for this study.

### **PRE-COLONIAL PHASE: Up to the 1800s**

The pre-colonial phase focuses on the interaction between African people and their natural environment before the arrival of Europeans. The emphasis is mainly on resource use and management amongst the Ovawambo and between the Ovawambo, the San and other Bantu speaking groups. Archaeological evidence shows that the San, the earliest occupants of the land in the northern Namibia, have lived in the area for approximately 1, 8 million – 75,000 years. Owambo agro-pastoralists seemed to have entered the area some 2000 years ago.<sup>69</sup> Generally, the patterns of human settlement were guided by agro-ecological conditions such as natural water supply, fertile soils, pasture and good hunting

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<sup>68</sup> N. Jacobs, *Environment, Power, and Injustice: A South African History* (note 3)

<sup>69</sup> M. Bollig, Michael, O.V. O. Bubenzer, R. Vogelsang & H.P. Wotzka, *GIS-based Atlas of Holocene Land Use Potential for Selected Research Areas*, Atlas of Namibia - Acacia.Project-E1 , German University of Heidelberg, [http://www.uni-koeln.de/sfb389/e/e1/download/atlas\\_namibia/e1\\_download\\_physical\\_geography\\_e.htm](http://www.uni-koeln.de/sfb389/e/e1/download/atlas_namibia/e1_download_physical_geography_e.htm) (2002). Accessed on 16.01.2008



grounds.<sup>70</sup> Settlements and land occupation were also influenced by the size of the social and political unit of a group.<sup>71</sup> The modes of existence between the San and the Ovawambo differed with regards to residential patterns, social and political organisation, land tenure and usage, ritual customs and ceremonies, and so forth.<sup>72</sup>

The Ovawambo were semi-pastoralists who practised sedentary agriculture and transhumant pastoralism while the San were hunter-gatherers following game and gathering. The Ovawambo lived on stockaded and palisaded homesteads, where each homestead owns about 3 hectares of land or more.<sup>73</sup> The land is divided into two areas; the forest land or *ekove* and crop land or field (*epya*) where a homestead is build. The privately-owned forest land which normally used to be fenced with tree branches is managed by an individual owner. It is used for grazing, thatching, and logging for house construction and firewood.

The San communities, which by tradition had neither chiefs nor rulers, do not cultivate land. They were nomads, who moved in small groups or bands. Their simple houses which Ovawambo named *omapundo* (*epundo*, singular.) were constructed on temporal basis. Upon entering a specific area, the entire band occupies and owns the land and its resources.<sup>74</sup>

The cyclic migrations of transhumant pastoralism in Ohangwena can be easily linked to the migration routes of people in northern Namibia. Oral history confirms that the Owambo agro-pastoralists entered the former Owambo or Owamboland from the north, and have originated from the land of the Great Lakes in Central Africa.<sup>75</sup> Their first settlement was Oshimholo, which later became a sacred place<sup>76</sup> and a major transhumant destination for people in the former Owambo.<sup>77</sup> According to Loeb<sup>78</sup> one

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<sup>70</sup> Republic of South Africa, *Official Yearbook of the Republic of South Africa* (note 27), See also Mendelsohn, et.al, *The profile of the North-Central Namibia* (note 19)

<sup>71</sup> J. P. van S. Bruwer, *South West Africa: The Disputed land*. Nasionale Boekhandel, Cape Town, South Africa (1966)

<sup>72</sup> Bruwer, *South West Africa: The Disputed land* (note 71)

<sup>73</sup> Loeb, *In Feudal Africa* (note 47); See also Bruwer, *South West Africa: The Disputed land* (note 71)

<sup>74</sup> Bruwer, *South West Africa: The Disputed land* (note 71)

<sup>75</sup> Loeb, *In Feudal Africa* (note 47); See also Tönjes , *Owamboland, Owamboland* (note 47)

<sup>76</sup> Sckär, in: F. Williams, *Precolonial communities of South West Africa: A History of Owambo Kingdoms, 1600-1920* (note 50)

<sup>77</sup> E. Kreike, *Architects of Nature: Environmental Infrastructure and the Nature-culture Dichotomy*, Phd Thesis, Wageningen University (2006), See also Mendelsohn, et.al, *The profile of the North-Central Namibia* (note 19)



Traditionally, each group which spoke a different Oshiwambo<sup>81</sup> dialect lived separately in its own territory over which they claimed ownership. For example, Oukwanyama country (*oshilongo shOukwanyama*) belonged to Ovakwanyama, the speakers of Oshikwanyama dialect. Except for settlement patterns, borders for each Owambo country were not clearly defined and recognised.<sup>82</sup> The Owambo societies are organised in clans and lineages which normally follow a matrilineal pattern.<sup>83</sup> The Owambo people were divided into different communities, each ruled by a divine King (*Ohamba*), who received advice from his counsellors and the elderly members of the society.<sup>84</sup> This means that Owambo Kingdoms were ruled under different judicial systems which used different approaches to land occupation and utilisation.<sup>85</sup> A king was considered the owner of the entire country (*omwene woshilongo*), ruler of the universe (*omupangeli wounyuni*) and a brave warrior (*omwene woita*). As kings owned the entire land, they controlled the people and all the cattle.<sup>86</sup> Kings controlled the rhythm of activities such as hunting, fishing, eating of first harvest (*oshipe*), herding and transhumant movements, salt mining, iron casting at Oshimanya, and lighting of bush fires before rain fall.<sup>87</sup> Such activities could not take place before a king had performed the necessary rituals and after he had first participated in such an activity as the first consumer.<sup>88</sup> Rituals such as *epena* were performed on major events and at the New Year anniversary (which was marked by the drinking of *Omaongo*, the Marula alcoholic drink, during February/March). Kings were responsible for, among other things, rainmaking, making of rules and regulations and laws, granting districts or villages (*omikunda*) to their councillors and headmen and sometimes approving land requisitions.<sup>89</sup> The councillors and headmen were also responsible for granting villages the fields (*omapya*) and communal grazing rights.

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<sup>81</sup> The spoken language made up seven dialects and two of them, namely, Oshindonga and Oshikwanyama are the official dialects used in formal education.

<sup>82</sup> Bruwer, *South West Africa: The Disputed land* (note 71); See also, F. Galton, *Narrative of an Explorer in Tropical South Africa: Being an account of a visit to Damaraland in 1851*, The Minerva Library of Famous Books, Ward, Lock and CO (1891); C. J. Anderson, *Notes on Travel in South-Western Africa*, New York, G. P Putnam's sons (1875)

<sup>83</sup> Bruwer, *South West Africa: The Disputed land* (note 71)

<sup>84</sup> Loeb, *In Feudal Africa* (note 47)

<sup>85</sup> Bruwer, *South West Africa: The Disputed land* (note 71)

<sup>86</sup> Loeb, *In Feudal Africa* (note 47)

<sup>87</sup> Salakoski, *How Kings are made – How kingship changes: A study of rituals and ritual change in pre-colonial and colonial Owamboland, Namibia* (note 15); See also, Loeb, *In Feudal Africa* (note 47)

<sup>88</sup> Tönjes, *Owamboland* (note 47); See also, Loeb, *In Feudal Africa* (note 47)

<sup>89</sup> Loeb, *In Feudal Africa* (note 47).

Furthermore, laws of the kings had protected fruit trees such as *Scrolocarya birrea caffra* (Marula), *Berchemia discolor* (Bird plum) and *Diospyros mespiliformis* (Jakkalsbessies).

Land was not automatically heritable as people only received user rights.<sup>90</sup> However, the subjects could allocate fields or land plots to individuals such as close families and relatives. Land transactions involved payments normally in form of cattle and were paid to the councillors and headmen. For example, a field could be sold for one adult ox or cow.<sup>91</sup> However, individuals utilised the land during their lifetime.<sup>92</sup> Still ownership rights basically existed only in a form of “land as abode” which aimed at excluding other groups from resource utilization. The rights of land as abode were very much influenced by sacred connection of people to a specific area of land such as ancient shrines and ancestral graveyards<sup>93</sup> that precluded the purchase of any land from Owambo.<sup>94</sup>

## **CATTLE MANAGEMENT IN OWAMBO CULTURE**

Cattle are the most important livestock for people in the north-central Namibia. They are the most visible features of every household.<sup>95</sup> The most common cattle are the traditional Owambo Sanga, which belongs to Longhorn/ Lateral Zebra group (*Bos indicus* or *Bos bubalis*). The Owambo Sanga is the smallest of the Sanga types found in Namibia and the common ancestor of the three different ecotypes of Sanga breeds in the country, namely, Caprivi, Kavango- and Kunene Sanga. Sanga cattle are ancient breeds which might have originated at about 1600BC and which have been adapted to the African environment about 1500 years.<sup>96</sup> They are known to have entered Namibia via the southern parts of Angola and north-western Botswana. They are selective grazers and

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<sup>90</sup> Bruwer, *South West Africa: The Disputed land* (note 71); See also C. Tapscott, *The Social Economy of Livestock Production in the Owambo Region*, The Namibian Institute for Social and Economic Research (NISER) (1990)

<sup>91</sup> Loeb, *In Feudal Africa* (note 47)

<sup>92</sup> Bruwer, *South West Africa: The Disputed land* (note 71)

<sup>93</sup> Ibid

<sup>94</sup> Loeb, *In Feudal Africa* (note 47)

<sup>95</sup> Salakoski, *How Kings are made – How kingship changes: A study of rituals and ritual change in pre-colonial and colonial Owamboland, Namibia* (note 15).

<sup>96</sup> Rawlinson, *The Meat Industry of Namibia: 1935-1994* (note 14)

browsers, very adaptable, highly fertile, docile, heat tolerant and, diseases and tick resistant. The animal is strong with high endurance and can stay for a number of days without drinking water. The carcass of the Owambo Sanga weighs about 400 lbs or 181 kg which is lesser than the carcass of the extinct Herero Sanga that weighed about 600 lbs (272 kg).<sup>97</sup>

From descriptions given by Rawlinson,<sup>98</sup> during the colonial administration in Namibia in the early 1900s the Owambo Sanga played an important role in the development of agriculture in the country, particularly in the meat and dairy industry. In order to meet demands in milk and meat the Sanga, that normally breeds naturally and freely in the *veld*, was cross-bred with exotic cattle such as Brahman (for meat) and Afrikaners (milk). This cross-breeding was very successful and, at one time the progeny of cross-bred Owambo Sanga was selected as the best cattle at the cattle show in the small Namibian town of Omaruru. As a result, the demand for the Owambo Sanga by European commercial farmers in Namibia increased on a large scale in 1960s. Later the demand decreased due to the outbreak of animal diseases such as lung-sickness, foot-and-mouth disease and black quarter (*oshimwenyo*) in north-central Namibia. This later resulted in the restriction of movement of people and animals between the northern communal areas and commercial farming areas in the south. The prevalence of animal diseases also led to the neglect and isolation of the cattle industry in north-central Namibia by the colonial administration and this has been one of the major challenges facing the development of the meat industry in northern Namibia today.<sup>99</sup>

Despite the role played by the Owambo Sanga in agricultural development, the colonial administration did not really recognize Ovawambo as “cattle people” like other Namibian peoples such as Ovaherero. Ovawambo were perceived as “horticultural-oriented”, the “tillers of the soil”, who kept large numbers of cattle mostly for their intrinsic value and who had no interest in their cattle.<sup>100</sup> As Rawlinson states:

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<sup>97</sup> Spotlight on Agriculture, No. 58, *Sanga: One breed or many?* Ministry of agriculture, Water and Rural Development, Directorate of Agricultural Research and Training, Windhoek (2002)

<sup>98</sup> Rawlinson, *The Meat Industry of Namibia: 1935-1994* (note 14)

<sup>99</sup> Rawlinson, *The Meat Industry of Namibia: 1935-1994* (note 14).

<sup>100</sup> Rawlinson, *The Meat Industry of Namibia: 1935-1994*, (note 14), 13.

“[The Owambo people] tended their flocks as they best knew how, and of course, they knew only what they had learn from their forefathers and from the experience gained in their day to day task of tending their highly priced earthly possessions”. *These often are defined in terms of numbers of heads of cattle*”.<sup>101</sup>

Cattle have an economic, socio-cultural, religious or spiritual and political significance for the people in north-central Namibia.<sup>102</sup> At the household level cattle provide milk, butter, manure, meat and, are useful draught animals. Some other products such as hooves, hides, horns, stomach (rumen) are useful in industries such as pottery, food processing and manufacturing of traditional clothes and shoes. Cattle are slaughtered for own use and during major events such as death, wedding ceremonies, cattle shows, political victories, and so forth.

In trading cattle serves as a medium of exchange and as a currency. Even today cattle can be used as currency to buy land rights either for cultivation or grazing as well as to pay fines and debts. Cash and pearl millets are exchanged with meat at people’s homesteads, local open markets (*omatala*) and village Cuca-shops or shebeens. Earlier in local trade, cattle could be exchanged with iron, millet, salt, other cattle (e.g. exchange male with female) and so forth. However, this changed with the coming of the Europeans as cattle were exchanged with rifles and ammunition, beads and cash between Europeans and African peoples.<sup>103</sup>

At the social level, cattle play an important role in the religious or spiritual life of the Ovawambo. However, Owambo cattle are not regarded as sacred.<sup>104</sup> Rituals performed at birth and death, and in relation to rainmaking are strongly linked to the cattle. The Ovawambo also have a wedding ox, seer cow, and cattle are sacrificed to ancestors during special circumstances such as healing of illnesses.<sup>105</sup> Because of these multiple functions of the cattle owning cattle to the Owambo have personality/ character significance for men. The recognition of Ovawambo men is not based on monetary value

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<sup>101</sup> Rawlinson, *The Meat Industry of Namibia: 1935-1994*, (note 14), 12; Emphasis is mine.

<sup>102</sup> Loeb, *In Feudal Africa* (note 47); Tönjes, *Owamboland* (note 47); Also, my own personal observations

<sup>103</sup> Anderson, *Notes on Travel in South-Western Africa* (note 82); Bruwer, *South West Africa: The Disputed land* (note 71); Loeb, *In Feudal Africa* (note 47).

<sup>104</sup> Kreike, *The Owambo Agro-Silvipastoral System: Traditional Land Use and Indigenous Natural resources Management in Northentral Namibia* (note 6): See also Marsh & Seely, *Oshana: Sustainable people, Environment and Development in Central Owambo, Namibia* (note 7).

<sup>105</sup> Miettinen, *On the Way to Whiteness: Christianisation, Conflict and Change in Colonial Owamboland, 1910-1965* (note 15).

but on their owning of cattle.<sup>106</sup> Without cattle they are not fully appreciated by the society and have such demeaning names as *ovainga* (*omwiinga*, sing.). Every male household head that owns cattle normally owns a bull among his cattle, which represent him as a man and which must be slaughtered on his death. As Ovawambo are matrilineal, cattle were only inherited matrilineally by male clan members particularly nephews and brothers. However, men could allocate cattle among their herds to their children as part of their inheritance before they die.<sup>107</sup> Thus, traditionally a person who owns a large number of cattle is regarded as wealthy. Wealthy people are more respectable in the society and, politically, they gain more power to influence on decision making processes.<sup>108</sup>

The ownership of cattle in north-central Namibia has historically been unequal in relation to households and individuals. It has been reported, for example, that differences between wealthy cattle holders can be enormous, with 20 per cent of wealthy households holding 80 per cent of the total cattle herds.<sup>109</sup> For example, King Mandume yaNdemufayo of Oukwanyama was reported to have owned between 7000 and 8000 cattle in the 1910s.<sup>110</sup> Again Loeb<sup>111</sup> also reports that the average number of cattle held by a household that had four wives (a polygamous family) were 50 cattle. In Ondonga, Galton<sup>112</sup> reported about 5 to 6 cows per household. Keeping a large number of cattle is not only seen as a symbol of wealth, but also as a strategy to minimize risks associated with severe droughts and frequent outbreak of diseases. However, the inequality of cattle ownership does not reduce access to cattle products by the poor households.<sup>113</sup>

As the Ovawambo have a cattle sharing system, it is difficult to determine cattle ownership due to the fact that not every cattle holder has certain rights.<sup>114</sup> The system is very much influenced by the saying “*omushiinda shaNangobe iha ningi omwiinga*”,

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<sup>106</sup> Interview with Shitaleni and F. Shilunga (note 67).

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Mendelsohn, et. al, *The profile of the North-Central Namibia* (note 19); See also, Namibia Central Bureau of Statistics, *Annual Agricultural Survey of 1999/2000 : Basic analysis of communal agriculture*, National Planning Commission of Namibia (2001).

<sup>110</sup> Loeb, *In Feudal Africa* (note 47).

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Galton, *Narrative of an Explorer in Tropical South Africa: Being an account of a visit to Damaraland in 1851, page 207* (note 82).

<sup>113</sup> Kreike, *The Owambo Agro-Silvipastoral System: Traditional Land Use and Indigenous Natural resources Management in Northcentral Namibia* (note 6).

<sup>114</sup> Namibia Central Bureau Statistics, *Annual Agricultural Survey of 1999/2000: Basic analysis of communal agriculture* (note 109).

meaning “a neighbour of a cattle-owner never becomes cattle-less”.<sup>115</sup> Therefore cattle owners may give some of their cattle to their friends, neighbours and relatives, who may not necessarily live in the neighbourhood. Distributing cattle minimises risks associated with the variation of rainfall patterns and grazing availability at different places. Ultimately this prevents livestock ownership inequality.<sup>116</sup> Among the Owambo people the number of cattle owned by households is often not made public since it is generally believed that disclosing this information might result in bad luck for both cattle owners and cattle.<sup>117</sup> The unrevealing of cattle numbers was, therefore, seen as a cultural barrier to obtaining accurate information about cattle populations during annual animal censuses that were conducted in north-central Namibia during colonial time.<sup>118</sup>

Cattle owned at household levels can vary because of several reasons. For example, since they are considered as valuable animals stealing of cattle has been a common problem in north-central Namibia.<sup>119</sup> Hence every year people lose their cattle as a result of theft. The cattle population can also vary at the household level through unguided searching for grazing by the cattle themselves and killing by wild animals.<sup>120</sup> Cattle-raiding was a common phenomenon during the reign of kings. It could take the form of an organized crime or raid (locally called *okasava*) against the subjects, commanded by the King.<sup>121</sup> Cattle raiding became an important issue between 1885-1900 that contributed to internal wars among the Ovawambo and between the Ovawambo and Ovankumbi. Cattle could be stolen from one ethnic group by another ethnic group in order to supplement herds, ultimately strengthening the stock at the local level.<sup>122</sup> On the arrival of Europeans, stolen cattle and at times people (potential slaves) could be sold to

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<sup>115</sup> Oshiwambo proverbs, also discussed with F. Shilunga (2007).

<sup>116</sup> Interview with Shitaleni and F. Shilunga (note 67). See also, R. Moorsom, *Transforming a waste land*. The Catholic Institute for International Relations. London (1982).

<sup>117</sup> Loeb, *In Feudal Africa* (note 47); Tönjes, *Owamboland* (note 47).

<sup>118</sup> Tönjes, *Owamboland* (note 47).

<sup>119</sup> Loeb, *In Feudal Africa* (note 47).

<sup>120</sup> Personal observations.

<sup>121</sup> G. Clarence-Smith & R. Morsom, *Underdevelopment and class formation in Owamboland*. In: B. Wood, *Namibia 1884-1984: Readings on Namibia's History and Society*. Namibia Support Committee - Namibia Support Committee - Action on Namibia Publications (1988)175-189.

<sup>122</sup> Salakoski, *How Kings are made – How kingship changes: A study of rituals and ritual change in pre-colonial and colonial Owamboland, Namibia* (note 15).



European traders in exchange for European commodities.<sup>123</sup> However, internal wars and cattle theft did not affect local trade and relations between different ethnic groups.<sup>124</sup>

Before the German occupation of Namibia attempts were made to prevent cattle theft. For example, King Ueyulu yaHedimbi who ruled Oukwanyama between 1883-1903 had passed a law prohibiting cattle theft at settlements and cattle posts.<sup>125</sup> Despite this historical effort cattle theft remained one of the most regulated crimes by traditional authorities and the state. Livestock owners branded their animals for identification and easier tracking. For this reason driving cattle between different localities requires a written permission from the local Traditional Authorities and the Namibian Police. The search for lost cattle in north-central Namibia has been made easier by the local Oshiwambo radio (Namibian Broadcasting Corporation - NBC) where announcements about lost cattle are presented almost daily. Such announcements contain information such as the date the animals got lost, the place where it got lost, cattle characteristics (for example, the type of colour and horns), the animal status and sex, and the names of contact persons and their phone numbers, and sometimes a reward.<sup>126</sup> The cattle huntsman, *omukongi wongobe*, could walk for up to 50 km or more looking for his cattle. He would walk from one village to another, from waterhole to waterhole, and from homestead to another, asking everyone who might have seen his cattle. And if he found it slaughtered he could identify it by its horns and the color of the hides.<sup>127</sup>

## **CATTLE TRANSHUMANCE DURING COLONIAL PERIODS: 1800-1989**

The history of transhumance Pastoralism in North-eastern Namibia can be divided into two major phases: the colonial phase that covers the period between 1800 and 1989 and the independence period that covers the period 1990-2006. My focus will mainly be on the interaction between African people, particularly the Bantu speaking group, and Europeans during the colonial phase. Focus will also be directed at the effects of

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<sup>123</sup> Clarence-Smith & Morsom, *Underdevelopment and class formation in Owamboland* (note 124).

<sup>124</sup> Salakoski, *How Kings are made – How kingship changes: A study of rituals and ritual change in pre-colonial and colonial Owamboland, Namibia* (note 15).

<sup>125</sup> Loeb, *In Feudal Africa* (note 47).

<sup>126</sup> Namibia Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) Eyakulo Program (2007).

<sup>127</sup> Interview with A. Muleka (2007); Also interview with N. Nekongo (2007), and personal observations

European influence and colonial state administration on Owambo transhumant pastoralism, the relationships between African people as well as their relationship with the natural environment.

The earlier history of Namibia shows that the African peoples in the north were an important source of cattle for the European ranchers and traders in the south of the country. In southern Africa the Boer Trekkers of the mid-nineteenth century<sup>128</sup> were particularly reliant on the cattle from African pastoralists. Environmental historians such as Jacobs<sup>129</sup> and Krieke<sup>130</sup> had mostly focused on environmental change and farming, but less on livestock production among African populations. These studies were, however, important since they put into perspective human environmental relations during the pre-colonial and later periods.

From them we can deduce that human-environmental relations are mediated through cattle-transhumance. This study attempts to highlight the adaptation of transhumant pastoralists to new grazing situations and transhumance practices caused by Europeans and colonial administration. The emphasis is on the period before and during formal colonisation of Namibia. These periods were characterised by mercantilism, introduction of Christianity, liberation wars and the political doctrine of apartheid.

Namibia was colonised by Britain from 1878 to 1884, by Germany from 1884 to 1915, and by South Africa from 1915 until 1990.<sup>131</sup> Formal and direct colonial administration was never established in Owambo as in the central areas of Namibia until 1915.<sup>132</sup> However, the German administration had indirect control of Owambo through Fort Namutoni which was established in Etosha National Park since 1911.<sup>133</sup> Again, the European influence in Owambo was very strong before the formal colonisation of Namibia in 1884. Owambo people had contacts with the Portuguese in the late 15<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Rawlinson, *The Meat Industry of Namibia: 1935-1994* (note 14)

<sup>129</sup> Jacobs, *Environment, power, and injustice, A south African History* (note 3)

<sup>130</sup> E. Kreike, *Re-creating Eden, land use, environment, and Society in southern Angola and Northern Namibia*, Greenwood Press (2004); See also, Kreike, *The Owambo Agro-Silvipastoral System: Traditional Land Use and Indigenous Natural resources Management in Northcentral Namibia* (note 6)

<sup>131</sup> Republic of South Africa, *Official Yearbook of the Republic of South Africa* (note 27); See also K. Dierks, *Chronology of Namibian History from pre-historical times to Independent Namibia*. Namibia Scientific Society (1999).

<sup>132</sup> Bruwer, *South West Africa: The Disputed land* (note 71).

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

century<sup>134</sup> and later with other European traders, explorers, miners; hunters and missionaries who had penetrated the area in the 1840s.<sup>135</sup> The early European travellers to Owambo in the 1850s such as Galton<sup>136</sup> and Anderson<sup>137</sup> had noticed that transhumant pastoralism was already in existence at the time and cattle posts (seasonal grazing) were established at distant places away from settlements. They also registered certain environmental challenges such as land degradation, water scarcity, high population, bush encroachment, and the decrease in huntable wild animals.<sup>138</sup> Galton<sup>139</sup> experienced grazing scarcity for his alien ox-wagon cattle (from the south of Namibia) that were not adapted to Owambo conditions and he had to buy water for his animals. Additionally, the system of transhumant Pastoralism was undergoing changes.

The colonial influence had contributed to changes in land use. As Silvester and others<sup>140</sup> point out in this regard, the Owambo have undergone social and economic transformation. The transformation has ultimate effects on the development of pastoralism in the region especially in relation to the rangeland size, animal husbandry, the use and management of communal grazing as well as the future practise of transhumance. The changes were structural as the systems of management that were enforced during the colonial period restricted the traditional system of transhumance.<sup>141</sup>

Early trade between Ovawambo and Europeans also played an important role in the transformation of Owambo society and the natural environment. Cattle trade, for example, was central in the exchanges between Owambo people and the European traders. Through trade Europeans introduced new values and commodities such as money, firearms and modern European clothes as Owambo bartered them with ivory, cattle and “slaves”.<sup>142</sup> The trade was under the control of traditional rulers who allowed

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<sup>134</sup> Republic of South Africa, *Official Yearbook of the Republic of South Africa* (note 27).

<sup>135</sup> Anderson, *Notes on Travel in South-Western Africa* (note 82); See also P. Hayes, et. al, *Namibia under South African Rule: Mobility & Containment 1915-1946*, Out of Africa Publishers (Pty) Ltd (1998) 172.

<sup>136</sup> Galton, *Narrative of an Explorer in Tropical South Africa: Being an account of a visit to Damaraland in 1851* (note 82).

<sup>137</sup> Anderson, *Notes on Travel in South-Western Africa* (note 82).

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> Galton, *Narrative of an Explorer in Tropical South Africa: Being an account of a visit to Damaraland in 1851* (note 82).

<sup>140</sup> J. Silvester, M. Wallace, & P. Hayes, *Mobility & Containment: An overview 1915-1946*. In: P. Hayes, et.al, *Namibia under South African Rule: Mobility & Containment 1915 - 46* (1998).

<sup>141</sup> Rawlinson, *The Meat Industry of Namibia: 1935-1994* (note 14).

<sup>142</sup> Loeb, *In Feudal Africa* (note 47); See also, Tönjes (note 47).

foreigners neither to enter Owambo countries nor to trade with their subjects without their approval.<sup>143</sup> Kings were the first to participate in such trade before they approved any trading by their subjects. The dominant role the kings played in tapping into external sources of trade was therefore perceived as individualistic since they often acted in an autocratic way.<sup>144</sup>

Such trade peaked during 1844-1885, the period known as the Mercantile Era. A large number of firearms were bought in Owambo during the 1850s and 1860s. This was also the period when huge quantities of cattle and ivories were exported from the Owambo.<sup>145</sup> For example, on one occasion one European trader had collected 1,811 oxen and cows from Oukwanyama in 1930s.<sup>146</sup> In the 1850s, the Swedish trader and explorer, Charles Anderson, had transported some 4, 00 heads of cattle from Owambo to the Cape (South Africa) which he exchanged with European goods valued at approximately £5,000.<sup>147</sup> Anderson<sup>148</sup> also states that on one occasion he collected 3000 lbs (1361 kg) of ivory from Owamboland. On another occasion, Anderson received an elephant tusk weighing 45 pounds (20 kg) and a cow and its calf from Oukwanyama King Mweshipandeka which he exchanged with two pounds (1kg) of coarse powder and 50 pounds (23 kg) of common beads. Firearms were mainly used for hunting purposes particularly hunting of large animals.<sup>149</sup> The effects of firearms on transhumance during this period were unknown. However, there was evidence about changes in the values of cattle versus fire arms and cattle versus land. For example, by 1895 the cost of a single modern firearm had increased from 12 heads of cattle in 1891 to 7 heads of cattle.<sup>150</sup> In Oukwanyama, during the reign of King Uejulu yaHedimbi (1883-1903), the land value had increased from one adult ox or cow to 5 oxen or 20 American dollars plus gifts of

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<sup>143</sup> Anderson, *Notes on Travel in South-Western Africa* (note 82).

<sup>144</sup> Anderson, *Notes on Travel in South-Western Africa* (note 82); See also, Rawlinson, *The Meat Industry of Namibia: 1935-1994* (note 14).

<sup>145</sup> Clarence-Smith & Morsom, *Underdevelopment and class formation in Owamboland* (note 124), 179.

<sup>146</sup> P. Hayes, *The 'Famine of the Dams': Gender, Labour and Politic in Colonial Owamboland 1929-1930*. In: Hayes, et. al, *Namibia under South African Rule: Mobility & Containment 1915-1946* (note 22) 117-146.

<sup>147</sup> Bruwer, *South West Africa: The Disputed land* (note 71).

<sup>148</sup> Anderson, *Notes on Travel in South-Western Africa* (note 82), 250.

<sup>149</sup> Tönjes, *Owamboland* (note 47).

<sup>150</sup> Clarence-Smith & Morsom, *Underdevelopment and class formation in Owamboland* (note 124).

beads, ivory, and clothing.<sup>151</sup> The increase in land prices were also influenced by more demands for land from an increased Owambo population.<sup>152</sup>

The changes in value of land and controls of livestock from various sources overshadowed the ecological necessity of livestock mobility. Thus, when the colonial frontiers were established the traditional transhumance was the first to suffer. By comparison, the white settler farmers adopted the method (rotational grazing) on their commercial farms. From the literature we have evidence that livestock mobility and rangeland size started to decrease from 1906 when the German Administration established the fenced Police Zone (*Politizei*) between southern Owambo and the rest of the country. The Police Zone, which became known later in the early 1960s as the Red Line and/or the Veterinary Cordon Fence (VCF), restricted the movements of people and livestock between the northern communal areas and the commercial areas in the south. The restriction of animals aimed at preventing the spread of animal diseases such as *ondenga* or foot-and-mouth diseases (FMD), anthrax (*ombulwa*), and *epunga* or lung sickness (Contagious Bovine Pleuropneumonia or CBPP) which are prevalent in the northern communal areas.<sup>153</sup> The Police Zone did not only reduce the rangeland but also blocked the traditional routes of livestock movements such as Etosha. The change ultimately contributed to the ending of the traditional cattle-based long-distance trade which existed between the peoples in Owambo and peoples in areas south of Owambo before the arrival of Europeans.<sup>154</sup> Despite the Police Zone, the long-distance trade was significantly affected by the rindepest outbreak of 1897 which killed nearly 90 per cent of

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<sup>151</sup> Loeb, *In Feudal Africa* (note 47).

<sup>152</sup> Loeb, *In Feudal Africa* (note 47); See also, Mendelsohn, et.al, *The profile of the North-Central Namibia* (note 19).

<sup>153</sup> Bishi & Kamwi, *Veterinary science, transboundary animal diseases and markets: pathways for policy in Namibia* (note 16); See also, Rawlinson, *The Meat Industry of Namibia: 1935-1994* (note 14); Kreike, *The Owambo Agro-Silvipastoral System: Traditional Land Use and Indigenous Natural resources Management in Northentral Namibia* (note 6 ); According to Kreike (note 6) Owambo farmers lost a large numbers of cattle from diseases especially the lung sickness that they consider as more fatal than the FMD and anthrax. For example, 10 per cent of cattle died from diseases during 1979/80. However, there has been as gap between the interest of the state and the northern farmers since the state interventions were aiming at preventing the spread of diseases into commercial areas than to protect cattle herds for communal farmers. Furthermore, the traditional Sanga cattle are resistant to local diseases; however in combination of other factors such as drought cattle conditions can worsen resulting in death.

<sup>154</sup> Hayes, *The 'Famine of the Dams': Gender, Labour and Politic in Colonial Owamboland 1929-1930* (note 146).

cattle in the northern Owambo.<sup>155</sup>

The prevalence of animal diseases in northern Namibia also led to the establishment of a fence along the Namibian-Angolan border in 1958 that stretched from Kavango to Kunene River. According to Bishi and Kamwi<sup>156</sup>, the first FMD outbreak in northern Namibia was recorded in Kavango in 1945 after the first outbreak was reported in Gobabis (commercial and south of Red Line) in 1934. Other FMD cases in northern Namibia occurred in 1946, 1949, 1956, and 1958 and were suspected to have spread from Angola and Botswana. Other cases were recorded in north-central Namibia in 1962, 1969 and 1970,<sup>157</sup> and in the 1980s.<sup>158</sup> The control of FMD therefore became a major contingency factor that reduced the traditional systems of transhumance in addition to the closed trans-frontier grazing routes.

The Namibian-Angolan border fence also restricted the livestock trade between Angola and Namibia since the border fence was meant to prevent the spread of animal diseases in Namibia. Despite the protection fences between the two Frontiers illegal (informal) trans-frontier livestock trade had continued. For example, between August 1957 and May 1958 approximately 12,000-15,000 cattle were exported illegally from Namibia into Angola.<sup>159</sup> It has been reported that Namibia had formally exported about 6,000 head of cattle to Angola in 1969<sup>160</sup>, which represented about 1.5 per cent of the cattle population in Owambo. The fence was removed during liberation war.<sup>161</sup>

The changes in livestock mobility and rangeland size were connected to wars that took place from 1915 to 1917 between Owambo kings and European colonisers, particularly Portugal and South Africa. The war led to the death of King Mandume

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<sup>155</sup> M. Boling, *In Precolonial & Early Colonial Northern Kaokoland 1860s – 1940s*. In: Hayes, et. al, *Namibia under South African Rule: Mobility & Containment 1915-1946* (note 22) 182. Boling also referred to the work of G. Clarence-Smith, 'Capitalist Penetration among the Nyaneka of Southern Angola, 1970s to 1920s,' *Africa Studies* (1978).

<sup>156</sup> Bishi & Kamwi, *Veterinary science, transboundary animal diseases and markets: pathways for policy in Namibia* (note 16) also using much information from H. P. Schreider (1994).

<sup>157</sup> Mendelsohn, et. al, *The profile of the North-Central Namibia* (note 19).

<sup>158</sup> Kreike, *The Owambo Agro-Silvipastoral System: Traditional Land Use and Indigenous Natural resources Management in Northentral Namibia* (note 6).

<sup>159</sup> Kreike, *The Owambo Agro-Silvipastoral System: Traditional Land Use and Indigenous Natural resources Management in Northentral Namibia* (note 6).

<sup>160</sup> AGR: *South West Africa Administration: The 1979/1980 Annual Report for Agriculture*. Directorate of Agriculture, The National Archives of Namibia (NAM), In: Kreike, *The Owambo Agro-Silvipastoral System: Traditional Land Use and Indigenous Natural resources Management in Northentral Namibia* (note 6).

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

yaNdemufayo in 1917 and the partitioning of Owambo between two countries, Angola and Namibia. King Mandume was the 16<sup>th</sup> king of Oukwanyama. In the same year, approximately 5000 Africans were killed during the Mandume-Portuguese war.<sup>162</sup>

The division of the Owambo after the death of Mandume disrupted the mobility patterns of people and livestock in northern Owambo following the establishment of the borderline (*onhaululi*) between 1926 and 1929. The borderline which stretches from the Kunene River in north-western Owambo to the Okavango River in north-eastern Owambo was established to separate Namibia or *South West Africa (Suid Wes Africa)* from Angola by a no man's land about one kilometre in width and 1600km in length.<sup>163</sup>

The borderline affected interactions among Owambo people and the transhumant pastoralism. The Frontier placed the same people under different colonial states, each with different rules and regulations that had adverse effects on human settlement and mobility. In 1926, approximately 40,000 Ovakwanyama emigrated from Angola into Namibia because of repression under Portuguese direct rule.<sup>164</sup> This resulted in nearly 75 per cent of Ovakwanyama inhabiting smaller areas with poorer grazing and much forest land<sup>165</sup> in northern Namibia. Consequently, the borderline became a veritable source of tension because of shortage of land for grazing and allocation for settlements. There were other additional changes to the internal territorial boundaries.<sup>166</sup>

Traditional routes of livestock migrations such as Oshimholo were blocked, significantly reducing the rangeland especially in Namibia, while in Angola animal mobility was strictly enforced with quarantines and national registration cards. The latter enforcement was also repeated in Namibia.<sup>167</sup> The Owambo herders from Namibia were then required to pay cattle taxes to the Angolan authorities in order to be able to herd their cattle in Angola.<sup>168</sup> In Namibia cattle taxes, which were payable by either cash or

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<sup>162</sup> Silverster, et. al, *Mobility & Containment: An overview 1915-1946* (note 140). In: Hayes, et.al, *Namibia under South Africa Rule: Mobility & Containment 1915 - 46* (note 22).

<sup>163</sup> G. Korff , *19 with a bullet. A South African Paratrooper in Angola*. 30 Degrees South (2009)

<sup>164</sup> Loeb, *In Feudal Africa*, (note 47), 37

<sup>165</sup> Loeb, *In Feudal Africa* (note 47).

<sup>166</sup> Hayes, *The 'Famine of the Dams': Gender, Labour and Politic in Colonial Owamboland 1929-1930* (note 146)

<sup>167</sup> Loeb, *In Feudal Africa* (note 47).

<sup>168</sup> Loeb, *In Feudal Africa* (note 47).

millet into the Tribal Trust Fund, were introduced in Owambo since 1929.<sup>169</sup> Other problems that arose between the two Frontiers included difficulties in controlling theft of cattle across the borderline, in getting access to Angolan grazing resources, and the emigration of people out of Angola which was considered a threat to the Angolan labour market.<sup>170</sup>

The restriction in livestock mobility also caused transhumant movements in Namibia to become more longitudinal rather than the normal cyclical ones.<sup>171</sup> However, cyclical movements were still implemented, albeit on a reduced scale, in some areas in Ondonga and Oukwanyama up to 1970s.<sup>172</sup>

Changes in livestock mobility in north-central Namibia were also caused by the introduction of modern systems of ranching in which long-distance mobility was not necessary. Furthermore, the choice of new breeds also meant that they were less adaptive to mobility as the indigenous Owambo breeds. Mobility therefore became difficult with modern cattle such as Brahman which have become common in the region despite their unsuitability to mobility and low endurance to walking long distances without drinking water.<sup>173</sup> But other environmental factors might have played important roles in either promoting transhumance or discouraging it. Other factors are demographic changes and the patterns of human settlements. I therefore in the section below examine the demographic changes as a possible driver.

## **HUMAN POPULATION GROWTH 1876-2000**

We have some ideas about changes in human populations in northern Namibia and how it might have contributed to changes in the use of the environment. The changing land use patterns I have described in this study might actually be driven by population distributions with overarching influences by such factors as climate variability, colonial frontiers and control and political insurgency towards independence period. The earlier

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<sup>169</sup> Hayes, et.al, *Namibia under South Africa Rule: Mobility and Containment 1915-46*, (note 22); See also, Rawlinson, *The Meat Industry of Namibia: 1935-1994* (note 14).

<sup>170</sup> Loeb, *In Feudal Africa* (note 47).

<sup>171</sup> Hapulile (note 45).

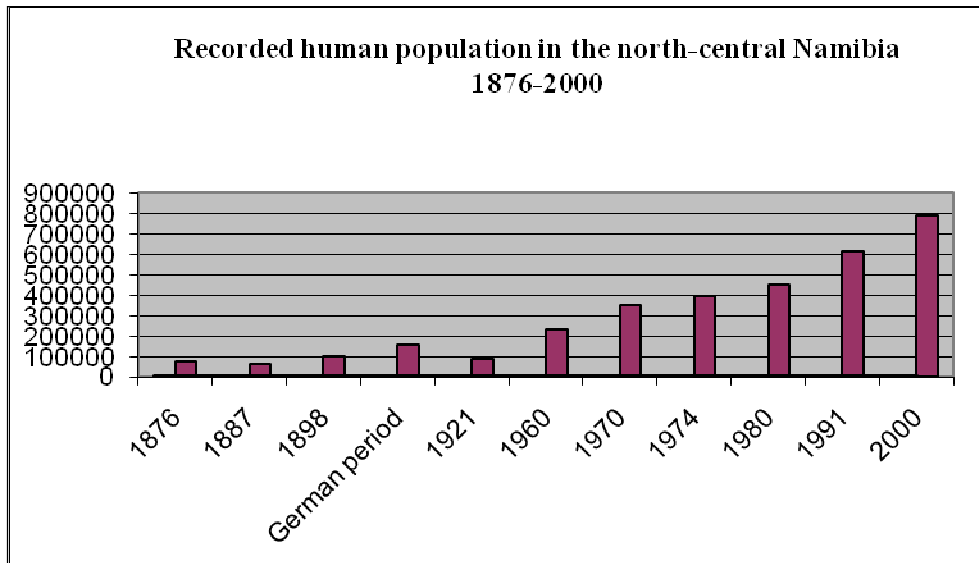
<sup>172</sup> Mukwayu (note 45).

<sup>173</sup> Rawlinson, *The Meat Industry of Namibia: 1935-1994* (note 14).



population estimates were made by travellers such as the ones in mid-1800s and were rough and not based on census. From that point the statistics suggest a gradual population growth from the late-1800s.

**Figure 3: Human population dynamics in north central Namibia 1876-2000**



During the German rule in Namibia (1884-1925), at one time the population of Owambo was estimated at 159,000 people.<sup>174</sup> At this particular period, the population was higher than that in 1921 when the north-central population decreased to approximately 90,000 people.<sup>175</sup> The killing of people during Mandume-Portuguese war and the famine and pestilence of the nineteenth century might be the reason for population decline.

According to Williams<sup>176</sup> the human population in Owambo was estimated at 75,000 people in 1876,<sup>177</sup> 65,000 people in 1887,<sup>178</sup> and 103,000 people in 1898.<sup>179</sup>

<sup>174</sup> Tönjes, *Owamboland* (note 47), 3-5.

<sup>175</sup> Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), *Socio-economic and Production Systems Diagnostic Study, Namibia Northern Livestock improvement Project* (1992) 25 in: SIDA (1992) 19

<sup>176</sup> F. Williams, *Precolonial communities of South West Africa: A History of Owambo Kingdoms, 1600-1920* (note 50).

<sup>177</sup> Palgrave (1977) 49. In: F. Williams, *Precolonial communities of South West Africa: A History of Owambo Kingdoms, 1600-1920* (note 50).

<sup>178</sup> Schinz (1891) 283. In: F. Williams, *Precolonial communities of South West Africa: A History of Owambo Kingdoms, 1600-1920* (note 50).

<sup>179</sup> Tuupainen (1970) 159. In: F. Williams, *Precolonial communities of South West Africa: A History of Owambo Kingdoms, 1600-1920* (note 50).

Erkkilä & Siiskonen<sup>180</sup> considering official national population censuses in Namibia indicate growths between the 1920s and the 2000s. In 2000, the Ohangwena Region had about 203,700 inhabitants and a population density of 21 people per sq km. The 2000 Ohangwena population represents about 25.9 per cent of the estimated 786,500 north-central inhabitants, which represents about 46 per cent of the Namibian population.<sup>181</sup> The north-central population has been on the increase and, in 1980 and 1991 the population had increased from 452,000 to 615,000 respectively.<sup>182</sup> In 1960 the north central population was estimated at 230,000 people,<sup>183</sup> which is almost equivalent to the population of Ohangwena in 2000. The population had increased to approximately 353,000 people (excluding the San group) in 1970, again representing about 46.3 per cent of the total Namibian population.<sup>184</sup> Again in 1974, the population had increased to approximately 396,000, which represented about 46.5 per cent of the Namibian population.<sup>185</sup> From Figure 4 the highest population density of between 100 and 300 people per sq km is found in the Cuvelai, leaving the Eastern Kalahari Woodland with the lowest population density from less than 10 to 100 people per sq km.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> A. Erkkilä & H. Siiskonen, *Forestry in Namibia 1850-1990*, University of Joensuu (1992).

<sup>181</sup> Mendelsohn, et. al, *The profile of the North-Central Namibia* (note 19).

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Marsh & Seely, *Oshana: Sustainable people, Environment and Development in Central Owambo, Namibia* (note 7).

<sup>184</sup> Republic of South Africa, *Official Yearbook of the Republic of South Africa* (note 27).

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Mendelsohn, et.al, *The profile of the North-Central Namibia* (note 19).



believed was caused by the presence of missionaries in their area.<sup>188</sup> Again, Tönjes<sup>189</sup> states that approximately 20,000 people died of hunger during 1907-08 which he describes as ‘*disastrous famine that swept the land, claiming countless victims*’. The 1907/08 famine was caused by a combination of drought and severe locust damage on crops. During the war between King Mandume and the Portuguese in 1915-1917 approximately 20,000-30,000 people died of hunger which occurred in combination with army worms’ outbreak.<sup>190</sup>

On the country level the human population has been on increase, albeit with negative growth. According to South Africa<sup>191</sup> the population of Namibia was estimated to have increased from 762 184 to 852 000 between 1970 and 1974. The Namibia National Census of 2001 reported that there were approximately 1.83 million people living in Namibia increasing from about more than 1.5 million people in 1991. This indicates a negative growth with the population decline from 3.1 per cent to 2.6 per cent during the period between 1991 and 2001. In the same period the average number of children per woman decreased from 6.1 to 4.1 per cent.<sup>192</sup>

Other causes linked to population variations include the occurrence of both internal and external migrations within Namibia and between northern Namibia and southern Angola. Migrations which were mostly driven by environmental change and by an unfavourable political climate had also caused major population variations regionally and countrywide. In addition to labour migration out of north-central Namibia Owambo people were also sold as slaves to Europeans, particularly the Portuguese.<sup>193</sup> Labour migration mostly by productive men had also contributed to variations on population structure and size of north-central Namibia.<sup>194</sup> In 1926 the north-central regions received approximately 40,000 Angolan refugees who fled from Portuguese rule.<sup>195</sup> During the “famine of the dams” between 1929 and 1931, a large number of people from north-

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<sup>188</sup> Tönjes, *Owamboland* (note 47).

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Mendelsohn, et. al, *The profile of the North-Central Namibia* (note 19); See also, Hayes, *The ‘Famine of the Dams’: Gender, Labour and Politic in Colonial Owamboland 1929-1930*, (note 146).

<sup>191</sup> Republic of South Africa, *Official Yearbook of the Republic of South Africa*. (note 27), 908.

<sup>192</sup> Namibia National Census, *2001 population and housing census: preliminary report* (note 27).

<sup>193</sup> Tönjes, *Owamboland* (note 47)

<sup>194</sup> Mendelsohn, et. al, *The profile of the North-Central Namibia* (note 19).

<sup>195</sup> Mendelsohn, et. al, *The profile of the North-Central Namibia* (note 19); See also, Loeb, *In Feudal Africa* (note 47).

central Namibia (mainly Ovakwanyama) migrated to Angola.<sup>196</sup> Again, due to the Angolan civil war that took place between 1975 and 2000 more Angolan refugees continued to migrate to the north-central regions. The migration of people from the north-central regions into exile during the Namibian liberation war which started in the early 1960s and lasted until 1989 is another important factor affecting population variations. At this particular period the exact number of refugees who migrated from the north-central regions is unknown. However, approximately 13,000 Namibians are known to have died in exile during the war.<sup>197</sup> Nearly 43,000 Namibians were repatriated to their country in 1989.<sup>198</sup> The returnee population from exile (minus the number of heroes and heroines who died during war) also contributed to population increase. The high prevalence of HIV/Aids in Namibia has also contributed to population variations.

### **The changing patterns of settlement and transhumance 1870-2000**

The change in the pattern of human settlement in north-central Namibia is very much connected to war, environmental change, land scarcity, resource/ grazing depletion, and development initiatives and infrastructural development. The Mandume-Portuguese war had, for example, caused a large number of people to flee from northern Owambo (Namakunde-Cuvelai floodplains) to southern Owambo.<sup>199</sup> The refugees went to settle in the north-eastern areas of Owambo that were formerly regarded as inhospitable and were only occupied by the San hunter-gatherers at that time.<sup>200</sup> Those who settled in Okongo ('the place of the hunter') and Eenhana introduced the transhumance system and gradually permanent settlement which escalated in the mid-1900s.<sup>201</sup> Some of the north-eastern areas such as Okongo used to be governed by the Ondonga Traditional Authority.

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<sup>196</sup> Mendelsohn, et. al, *The profile of the North-Central Namibia* (note 19).

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *The State of the World's Refugees 2000: Fifty Years of Humanitarian Action - Chapter 6: Repatriation and peacebuilding in the early 1990s (2000)* 134-136.

<sup>199</sup> Kreike, *The Owambo Agro-Silvipastoral System: Traditional Land Use and Indigenous Natural resources Management in Northcentral Namibia*(note 6); See also, Kreike, *Re-creating Eden, land use, environment, and Society in southern Angola and Northern Namibia* (note 130)

<sup>200</sup> Ibid, See also, A. Sheuyange, *Landscape level vegetation change in relation to fire history in eastern Ohangwena Region, Namibia*. NORAGRIC Master Thesis (2002 )

<sup>201</sup> Sheuyange, *Landscape level vegetation change in relation to fire history in eastern Ohangwena Region, Namibia* (note 194)

Since the new settlers were mostly from Oukwanyama border disputes over land began to emerge as Ondonga Traditional Authority started to claim their former lands.<sup>202</sup>

Migration from northern Owambo during the Mandume-Portuguese war was also caused by the famine in 1915, locally referred to as *ondjala yekomba*, which killed approximately between 20,000 and 30,000 people.<sup>203</sup> The famine might have also contributed to King Mandume's defeat as his army was weakened by lack of food.<sup>204</sup> In addition to wars, the Ovawambo were used to internal migrations driven by environmental changes such as drought and famines.<sup>205</sup> Migrations were therefore intense during bad years and less during good years.<sup>206</sup> However, food-aid initiatives and Christianity influenced migration and settlement patterns in new directions. For example, during the famine of 1908 the Ovawambo received food aid from the Germans and Portuguese.<sup>207</sup> A food-for-work program was also implemented in Ondonga during the "famine of the dams" (*ondjala yomatale*) that occurred between 1929 and 1931.<sup>208</sup> According to Siiskonen<sup>209</sup> there was migration of people towards parishes and mission stations which increased in number by the 1930s. Christianity was introduced into Owambo in the early 1870s.<sup>210</sup> Missionary stations and parishes were as a result established in Owambo. In addition to spreading the Christian message missionary stations and parishes also offered formal education. In the north-eastern areas of Ohangwena, parishes were established at Eenhana, Omundaungilo and Okongo. Siiskonen further states that parishes, which kept population registers or history books were the "nuclei for population clusters". According to Tönjes<sup>211</sup>, who was at one time stationed at the Engela Mission, many people had approached the station in expectation

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<sup>202</sup> Siiskonen, *Trade and socioeconomic change in Owamboland, 1850-1906* (note 32)

<sup>203</sup> Hayes, *The 'Famine of the Dams': Gender, Labour and Politic in Colonial Owamboland 1929-1930* (note 146).

<sup>204</sup> Tönjes, *Owamboland* (note 47)

<sup>205</sup> H. Siiskonen, *Migration in Owamboland: The Oshigambo & Elim Parishes 1925-1935*. In: Hayes et. al, *Namibia under South Africa Rule: Mobility & Containment 1915 - 46* (note 22) 219-240.

<sup>206</sup> Hayes et.al, *Namibia under South Africa Rule: Mobility & Containment 1915 - 46* (note 22), See also, Tönjes, *Owamboland* (note 47).

<sup>207</sup> Hayes, *The 'Famine of the Dams': Gender, Labour and Politic in Colonial Owamboland 1929-1930*. (note 146).

<sup>208</sup> Siiskonen, *The Oshigambo & Elim Parishes: 1925-1935* (note 199); See also J. Silvester, et.al, *Mobility & Containment: An overview 1915-1946* (note 140).

<sup>209</sup> H. Siiskonen, *The Oshigambo & Elim Parishes: 1925-1935* (note 202).

<sup>210</sup> Tönjes, *Owamboland* (note 47).

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

of food, medicine, attending schools and church baptism from missionaries. The famines particularly of 1908, 1915 and 1929-1931 contributed to the increase in Christianisation.<sup>212</sup> Permanent settlements on formerly unoccupied areas were a response to the increased demands for land and the competitions between different land users.<sup>213</sup> The scarcity of land, which also led to internal migrations, was already noticeable from the late 1800s.<sup>214</sup> A retired herder tatekulu Kandume kaMukwayu<sup>215</sup> states that pastoralists started to settle on their cattle posts to secure their grazing rights as some opportunistic farmers started to occupy vacant cattle posts. It became risky when herders moved from one cattle post to another since there was no guarantee that their cattle posts would be available to them when they returned to the same place. Recounting his experiences in this regard tatekulu Kandume from Ohangwena region (Oukwanyama), who used to move with his cattle in Ondonga (Oshikoto region) states:

“When the Aandonga noticed that we (herders) had taken our cattle back to our settlements/countries, they began to settle in our cattle posts. As the cattle posts were cleared of bushes and the kraals had plenty of manure, this made it easier for Aandonga to settle down. On return from our countries, we found out that our cattle posts had become fields which Aandonga had already cultivated! Then we started to clear new cattle posts and made sure that we cultivated so that we would not lose our land any longer. Afterwards cattle posts would be turned into fields, until they became villages (*oilongo*), and no longer cattle posts”.

It is important not to misunderstand Tatekulu Kandume’s account as an ethnic issue between the Ovakwanyama and the Aandonga. His account depicts the risks and opportunities involved in cattle mobility resulting in the establishment of private ownership of land in the formerly seasonal grazing areas. This can be seen as the adoption of Owambo traditional patterns of settlements at the household level, since historically, the establishment of Owambo villages or permanent settlements began as cattle posts.<sup>216</sup> The implication here is that the cattle posts facilitated the development of settlements that resulted in the establishment of private land tenure systems.

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<sup>212</sup> Silvester, et. al, *Mobility & Containment: An overview 1915-1946* (note 140).

<sup>213</sup> Mendelsohn, et. al, *The profile of the North-Central Namibia* (note 19).

<sup>214</sup> Loeb, *In Feudal Africa* (note 47); Tonjes, *Owamboland* (note 47).

<sup>215</sup> Mukwayu (note 45).

<sup>216</sup> Discussion with L. Nangolo (2007).





deployed. Owamboland south of the borderline was a major infiltration route for SWAPO fighters into Namibia, especially during the raining season when SWAPO was very active. Owamboland was, therefore, placed under strict law enforcement<sup>221</sup> by South Africa. Since the 1970s the borderline served as a buffer zone for monitoring the movements of SWAPO freedom fighters (PLAN) who operated between Angola and Namibia and “any cattle or person crossing it was open game to be shot”.<sup>222</sup> Due to the suspicion that Owambo pastoralists in the Frontier were offering support to SWAPO, they were harassed by the South African defence forces.<sup>223</sup> The Ovawambo and other peoples were also forced to move away from the borderline and some were pressurised to move closer to military bases.<sup>224</sup> As a consequence during the early 1980s the ‘no man’s land’ appeared to be “an overgrown, [the] lost Garden of Eden, untouched for years by human hands, hungry cattle and goats.”<sup>225</sup>

The South African military suspecting Ovawambo for cooperating with the SWAPO’ PLAN fighters burnt crop fields or drove heavy army vehicles<sup>226</sup> through them as punishment for the farmers who failed to provide information about the presence of the “terrorists.” Cattle grazing along the borderline were also shot as indicated by Granger Korff.<sup>227</sup> However, the extent to which the shooting of grazing cattle had contributed to a decrease in the cattle population in north-central Namibia is unknown

The forced removal of people led to a high concentration of people in the Cuvelai, especially between Oshakati and Ondangwa.<sup>228</sup> The war caused many Owambo people to flee their area into exile. They became refugees in Angola and other countries and this led to reduction in the population. The reverse was the case during the Angolan civil war when refugees from Angola crossed into Namibia between 1975 and 2000.

The Namibia-South Africa war made it impossible to implement development programmes for improving agriculture and land use and contributed to the maintenance

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<sup>221</sup> Korff, *19 with a bullet. A South African Paratrooper in Angola* (note 163)

<sup>222</sup> Korff, *19 with a bullet. A South African Paratrooper in Angola* (note 163), 95; See also Cock & Nathan, *War and Society: The Militarisation of South Africa* Palgrave Macmillan (1989).

<sup>223</sup> Cock & Nathan, *War and Society: The Militarisation of South Africa* (note 222).

<sup>224</sup> Cock & Nathan, *War and Society: The Militarisation of South Africa* (note 222).

<sup>225</sup> Korff, *19 with a bullet. A South African Paratrooper in Angola* 95 (note 163), 95

<sup>226</sup> The common South Africa army vehicles include Buffels, Casspers and Tatels.

<sup>227</sup> Korff *19 with a bullet. A South African Paratrooper in Angola* (note 163)

<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

of wilderness areas.<sup>229</sup> Infrastructural development such as road construction and water supplies were undertaken mainly to aid the South African military effort in northern Namibia.<sup>230</sup> There is little information available about the extent to which the liberation war had affected the transhumance, especially regarding the difficulties pastoralists experienced during mobility. According to Tapscott<sup>231</sup> there is limited information about grazing practise at cattle posts. However, some collaboration seemed to have taken place between herders and SWAPO fighters. As one of the evicted herders from Kavango, Shomwoongo<sup>232</sup> points out:

‘Our leaders seem to forget quickly, because they know that these cattle owners they now want to arrest are the same people who were assisting the PLAN fighters when they were in that area, especially in 1985, with food and meat. But now that some of these people are well off, they forget about us, and want to call us criminals and arrest us’.

The change in transhumant Pastoralism is also connected to the development and expansion of both rural and urban infrastructure as well as the implementation of development initiatives in Namibia, particularly in the Ohangwena region. The availability of such infrastructure caused a change in the pattern of land use as Owambo pastoralists started to penetrate areas that were difficult for grazing.<sup>233</sup> The development of gravel and tarred roads, towns, artificial water supply, schools and hospitals has contributed to a decrease in rangeland size. The development of roads and increase usage of vehicles as mean of transport has also some effects on transhumance especially in relation to the need to drive animals back to settlements. Livestock and their products such as milk and butter can now be easily transported between settlements and permanent settled cattle posts.<sup>234</sup> Again, milk products are available in local shops making them available throughout the year and not seasonal as before. Though there is a shortage of sufficient herders, livestock owners are now able to make regular visits to their livestock

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<sup>229</sup> Mendelsohn, et. al, *The profile of the North-Central Namibia* (note 19).

<sup>230</sup> Cock & Nathan, *War and Society: The Militarisation of South Africa* (note 222).

<sup>231</sup> Tapscott, *The Social Economy of Livestock Production in the Owambo Region* (note 21).

<sup>232</sup> O. Shivute, *Farmers evicted from Kavango ‘ready to die with their cattle ‘in: Shipala Shomwoongo, The Namibian*, [http://www.namibian.com.na/index.php?id=28&tx\\_ttnews\[tt\\_news\]=23678&no\\_cache=1](http://www.namibian.com.na/index.php?id=28&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=23678&no_cache=1) (02.02.2006).

<sup>233</sup> Mendelsohn, et. al, *The profile of the North-Central Namibia* (note 19).

<sup>234</sup> Hapulile (note 45); Also, personal observations.

at the “cattle posts”.<sup>235</sup> Problems of water scarcity in the cattle post areas have been solved through development of water piping systems and boreholes.<sup>236</sup> For example, the water pipeline and taps were extended from Kunene (Ruacana water fall) to Engela (in the Cuvelai) in 1975.<sup>237</sup> Boreholes were increased in the north-eastern areas of Ohangwena since 1940<sup>238</sup> after the construction of the first water dam project at Ondonga in 1929.<sup>239</sup>

## Changing grazing and land rights

Perhaps the greatest factor that influenced the changes in transhumance was the reduction of the communal grazing lands from 4.3 million hectares to 3.45 million hectares.<sup>240</sup> The changes were closely related to changes in grazing tenure rights. Communal grazing in the formerly unoccupied areas has been transformed into privately owned “farms” which posed a serious threat to the future of transhumance practices and the management of livestock grazing. Privatisation of communal grazing is not only connected to the adoption of private ownership of land which exists in settlements, but was also a response to the changing lifestyles of people. Farmers fenced off large areas of land as a strategy to cope with the shortage of herdsmen at household level, protect croplands from animals during cropping time, make livestock husbandry more manageable and prevent animals from disappearing.<sup>241</sup>

In the late 1980s, some areas of land in the north-eastern areas of Ohangwena were allocated to “large” scale cattle holders and this has left small scale holders either without any or limited grazing. A retired herder Shitaleni states “*we lost the land just in the same way we (Ovambo) have chased the Bushman*” and “*the government brought farms to Owambo which do not benefit the poor.*” According to Shitaleni the land which he could buy at Omboloka for 1000 NAD in the late 1980s is now valued at more than 4000 NAD.

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<sup>235</sup> Discussion with T. Nghiwanapo (2007).

<sup>236</sup> Mendelsohn, et.al, *The profile of the North-Central Namibia* (note 19).

<sup>237</sup> Marsh & Seely, *Oshana: Sustainable people, Environment and Development in Central Owambo, Namibia* (note 7).

<sup>238</sup> Shitaleni (note 40).

<sup>239</sup> Siiskonen, *The Oshigambo & Elim Parishes: 1925-1935* (note 205); See also, Hayes, *The ‘Famine of the Dams’: Gender, Labour and Politic in Colonial Owamboland 1929-1930* (note 146). (note 146)131.

<sup>240</sup> Tapscott, *The Social Economy of Livestock Production in the Owambo Region* (note 21).

<sup>241</sup> Tapscott, *The Social Economy of Livestock Production in the Owambo Region* (note 21).

The inability of small holders to buy farms has caused them to buy grazing rights (including water) from farm owners. The buying of grazing rights on fenced farms in the north-eastern areas also takes place between farmers who have fenced off communal land especially during bad years or dry seasons when grazing is much degraded.<sup>242</sup>

The fencing of large areas can also be viewed as an adoption of some farming practices in commercial farming areas of Namibia.<sup>243</sup> Privatisations of communal grazing also resulted in conflicts between different land users within and across regional boundaries.<sup>244</sup> The “formal” land titling based on individual land tenure rights were introduced since the German occupation of Namibia. However, it was only strictly for whites who were given large commercial farms. Black pastoralists, who were perceived by Europeans as people without legal land rights were confined to “homelands”.<sup>245</sup> Again, traditional land rights were misunderstood by the Europeans leading to a misconception that communal land rights were open access rights. Owambo and other northern communal areas were not affected by the introduction of the individual land tenure rights because such rights had already existed in an “informal” way in these areas.<sup>246</sup> However, the clearly defined patterns of settlement in Owambo and existence of conflicts over “land as abode” had influenced the later development of ethnically based homelands or reserves during the South African Administration.<sup>247</sup> Homelands, which were categorised as communal farming areas, were established in Namibia in order to protect the rights of occupation for the indigenous peoples.<sup>248</sup> Owambo or Owamboland was firstly proclaimed as a homeland in 1929 and was one of the 10 homelands that were formally established in 1968 under the Bantustan Policy of South West Africa (Namibia), others being Hereroland, Kaokoland, Damaraland, Bushmanland, Kavangoland, Namaland, Basterland, Tswanaland and Caprivi.

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<sup>242</sup> Mendelsohn, et. at, *The profile of the North-Central Namibia* (note 19).

<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

<sup>244</sup> Mendelsohn et. at, *The profile of the North-Central Namibia* (note 19); Verlinden & Kruger, *Changing grazing systems in the north-central Namibia* (note 18).

<sup>245</sup> Bruwer, *South West Africa: The Disputed land* (note 71).

<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

<sup>247</sup> Bruwer, *South West Africa: The Disputed land*, page 89-91 (note 71).

<sup>248</sup> Bruwer, *South West Africa: The Disputed land*, page 91 (note 71).

## Power of the chiefs

The decrease in communal grazing is also linked to changes in the power of traditional rulers. Following the transformation of the traditional kingship system under the homeland system, the power of traditional rulers in the management of transhumant pastoralism began to weaken. Though the South African administration recognised the traditional Kingship system they exerted more control on it by transforming into the Traditional Authority System. The role and responsibilities of the traditional authorities were clearly defined by the South African administration.<sup>249</sup> In Owamboland eight traditional authorities were established for each Owambo country. The structure of the traditional Kingship system was not changed, but in the absence of the king, a country was administered under leadership of the Senior Councillor. Traditional Authorities were established on each homeland to administer the “tribal” affairs, including the use and management of natural resources.<sup>250</sup> Under the South African administration traditional authorities failed to maintain some of the major traditional activities such as *epena*, a ritualistic event that was performed by the King before the beginning of transhumant movement.<sup>251</sup> Furthermore, the colonial control and protection (by guarding) over traditional authorities had also caused mistrust between traditional rulers and their subjects, especially during the war of national liberation.<sup>252</sup>

## Migration and animal husbandry

Animal husbandry in north-central Namibia was also affected by the Contract Labour System which was introduced in Namibia since the 1920s. Labour migration was also a strategy to cope with drought and famines.<sup>253</sup> Owambo was the main supplier of contract workers and a large number of adult men from these areas were recruited as contract labourers on commercial farms, in the mines, and railways in the south of the

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<sup>249</sup> Bruwer, *South West Africa: The Disputed land*, page 94 (note 71).

<sup>250</sup> Hayes, *The ‘Famine of the Dams’: Gender, Labour and Politic in Colonial Owamboland 1929-1930* (note 146)131.

<sup>251</sup> Tönjes, *Owamboland* (note 47).

<sup>252</sup> Loeb, *In Feudal Africa* (note 47)

<sup>253</sup> R. Moorsom, *Underdevelopment and labour migration: The Contract labour system in Namibia*. Working Paper WP 1997:10, Michelsen Institute, Bergen (1997), 83.

Police Zone.<sup>254</sup> Most young and productive men aged 20-35 years were involved in labour migration during the peak years from the 1960s up to the 1970s.<sup>255</sup> By 1970 nearly 45 per cent of Owambo men were working as contract labourers south of the Red Line.<sup>256</sup> Job contracts which varied from six months to two years caused adult men to be absent from home (household). Some of the Owambo men also had to flee from their homes in order to escape the South African atrocities and join the military training in either the PLAN of SWAPO or the South African Forces.<sup>257</sup> For example, many Owambo men were recruited into the Black 101 troops which were also called Battalion 101, one of the South African Territorial Forces (SWAFT) that operated in Owambo during the liberation war. By 1980, about 24,000 Owambo men had joined the SWAFF.<sup>258</sup> Thus, women and children remained at home where they were obliged to take up men's main responsibilities such as herding. The emigration by men created shortages of well-experienced herdsman for managing transhumant migrations.<sup>259</sup> The shortage of herdsman therefore opened new employment opportunities for the Angolan herders and the marginalized San hunter-gatherers.

According to Shilunga<sup>260</sup>, contract labour changed the views of Owambo regarding transhumance. As herders were known to be strong and fit, the transhumance system was seen as a training institution which could produce physically capable men for the contract labour system. Hence the men who felt unfit for the contract jobs or perhaps got rejected preferred to participate in the transhumance ventures, with the intention of meeting the requirements<sup>261</sup> for contract job recruitment afterwards.<sup>262</sup>

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<sup>254</sup> Ibid; See also, Hayes, et. al, *Namibia under South African Rule: Mobility & Containment 1915-1946* (note 22); V. Ndadi, *Breaking Contract: The story of Vinnia Ndadi*, IDAF Publications LTD, (1989)

<sup>255</sup> Mendelsohn, et. al, *The profile of the North-Central Namibia* (note 19).

<sup>256</sup> R. Moorsom, *Transforming a waste land*. The Catholic Institute for International Relations. London (1982); See also, Moorsom, *Underdevelopment and labour migration: The Contract labour system in Namibia* (note 253)

<sup>257</sup> Cock & Nathan, Cock & Nathan, *War and Society: The Militarisation of South Africa* (note 222).

<sup>258</sup> J. Cock & L. Nathan, *War and Society: The Militarisation of South Africa* (note 222)

<sup>259</sup> Tapscott, *The Social Economy of Livestock Production in the Owambo Region*. Page 14 (note 21).

<sup>260</sup> Discussion with F. Shilunga.

<sup>261</sup> The criteria for the contract labour recruitment involved the physical examination of the body and grading of body condition such as *Grade A* (very strong and healthy boys), *Grade B* (boys in good health but not so strong) and, *Grade C* for the youngest and weakest boys (Sources: V. Ndadi, *Breaking Contract: The story of Vinnia Ndadi*, IDAF Publications LTD, (1note 247)18; H. Shitjuwete, *Never Follow the Wolf: Autobiography of a Namibian Freedom Fighter*, Mayibuye Books, South Africa (1987).

<sup>262</sup> Interview with Shitaleni (2007).

Among all the factors environmental variability had perhaps played an important role in the transformation of cattle transhumance.

#### **ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS ON TRANSFORMATION OF TRANSHUMANCE: 1930-2006**

The aim in this section of the study is to understand the livestock population dynamics in the Ohangwena Region which can only be understood in relation to the entire northern Namibia. I have used two types of data systems, namely rainfall data and livestock data. Regarding the rainfall data, we have meteorological records from 1935 to 1989 for the stations in western Kavango (Mpungu), Ohangwena (Engela) and Oshana (Ondangwa).

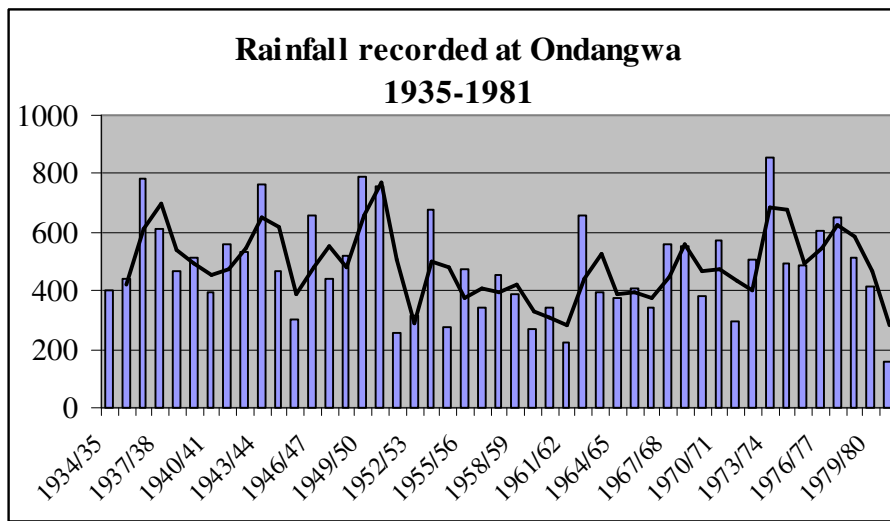
The livestock census data has huge gaps but nonetheless provide us with an interesting picture of the dynamics over time [1935-2005, but with several years of data missing]. Up to 2001 animal populations in the north-central regions were recorded from Ondangwa Veterinary Station (today located in Oshana Region). The livestock population data did not reflect regional or territorial differences.<sup>263</sup> Animal statistics for Ohangwena Region dates back to only after Namibia's Independence (1990), following the division of north-central Namibia into four political regions and the later establishment of Ohangwena State Veterinary Office at Eenhana in 2006. The available animal population statistics in north-central Namibia are mainly estimates that were made by state veterinarians (during vaccinations campaigns) and private individual travelers to northern Namibia.<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> NASSP, *Report on the Study to identify the optimal geographical sites for the selected state veterinary offices* (note 23).

<sup>264</sup> Mendelsohn et.al, *The profile of the North-Central Namibia* (note 19); See also, Rawlinson, *The Meat Industry of Namibia: 1935-1994* (note 14); and, Loeb, *In Feudal Africa* (note 47).

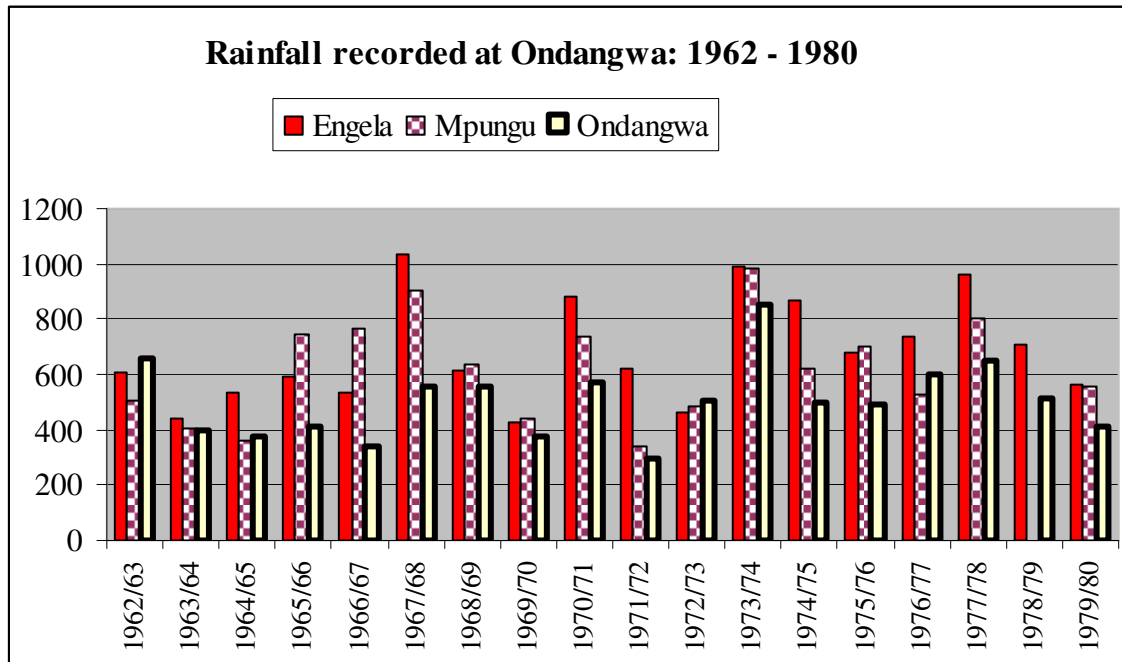
**Figure 6: Long-term rainfall of Ondangwa representing North-central Namibia**



From the various data sets I tried to understand possible relationships between the two data systems. It is important to note that the region being semi-arid has highly variable rainfall. The long-term running mean shows a fluctuating trend that corresponds with periods of high or low rainfall and drought years. Periods where the region received less or just about 200 mm per year were most obviously drought years [See Figure 6]. The rainfall variability had direct influence on the patterns of transhumant Pastoralism. Periods of dry or drought years were likely to be periods of long distance movements between the grazing in present day northeastern Namibia and southern Angola. Prolonged dry seasons were likely to lengthen the periods of long-distance movements between the grazing in the present day northeastern Namibia and southern Angola (because cattle could not be driven back to settlements in bad years). During the wet years when forage conditions were favorable, livestock movements were within the region and tended to be cyclical.



**Figure 7: Rainfall recorded at three northern weather stations during 1962-1980**



The real effects on the livestock populations were increases in the herds during the years of above average rainfall and declines through induced mortality during drought years. In the shorter-term, we can illustrate this by using Figure 8 that compares total population of cattle in six regions between 1996 and 2000.<sup>265</sup> We see both regional and local effects on the cattle population dynamics. Among the years for which we had the data, the years 1998/99 which were also wet years recorded one of the highest cattle populations throughout the region. Then using this benchmark years, we were able to deduce approximate total herd growths per households between 1997 and 1999. These were 10 percent for Kavango, 33 percent for Ohangwena, 40 percent for Omusati, 33 percent for Oshana and 13 percent for Oshikoto. The declines in 1990/2000 probably implied drought induced mortality or the combinations with diseases. Whereas, we find high variability in the populations of bulls in the herds, the numbers of reproductive cows in the regional herds appeared to be less varied except in 1997/98. By comparison, it was quite possible that a significant number of females in the region herd had perished. The changes can be explained from the perspectives of drought vulnerability and off take. The

<sup>265</sup> Animal data for were obtained from The Namibian Central Bureau of Statistics, *1999/2000 Annual Agricultural Survey: Basic Analysis of communal agriculture*. National Planning Commission (2001).

bulls being the main financial capital for most households, their numbers might be reflected by the intensities of marketing. In any case, bulls have better survivability than cows and immature under drought stress as other studies in Eastern Africa have shown.<sup>266</sup> However, a depressed population of this category of cattle might be an indicator of financial pressure at the household level. The numbers of bulls in the regional herds had remained about 17 percent of the 1996/97 levels compared to the rest of the years [Fig. 9]. The less variability by the oxen category might be reflecting the importance that the households attached to this category of cattle. They are mainly used for traction and other household functions such as pulling Carts for carrying goods and farm produces. Surprisingly, the data for the immature cattle remained relatively low, implying poor herd recruitment for the periods we had the data. There is also the possibility that data variability might be related to the systems of collection and storage. We, however, assumed within some limitations that the data can be used to give some broader levels of cattle population dynamics in relation to herd structure.

For the natural resource managers, there are presumptions that livestock numbers and the carrying capacities of the rangelands are somewhat related. This relationship is usually expressed in terms of stocking units per units of land. It is also, perhaps wrongly assumed that the stocking rates were fixed. For example, the FAO estimates for stocking units for the rangelands of North-central Namibia is taken as 1 Livestock Unit [1 LU = 450 kg cow, which converts to 0.7 sheep] requires 8-10 ha. The numbers, however, fluctuate in relation to fluctuating forage resources which varied from years of heavy rainfall and years of drought, the former showing higher potential for stocking rates and the later less. This can be demonstrated by the three year data from Oshana and Ohangwena (Fig. 10). This means that the oft claimed overstocking problems associated with the communal grazing lands in Namibia are limited to below average years. This is mostly attributable to reduced range production as opposed to increased livestock population. Thus, the different stocking potential between two areas such as Oshana and Ohangwena might just reflect the local environmental variability that also reflected different carrying capacities. As shown by the Ohangwena case, this could also vary

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<sup>266</sup> A. Angassa & G. Oba, *Relating long-term rainfall variability to cattle population dynamics in communal rangelands and a government ranch in southern Ethiopia*. *Agricultural Systems* **94**: (2007) 715-725.

between the very wet and dry years. We can relate these changes to long term regional cattle population data.

Figure 8

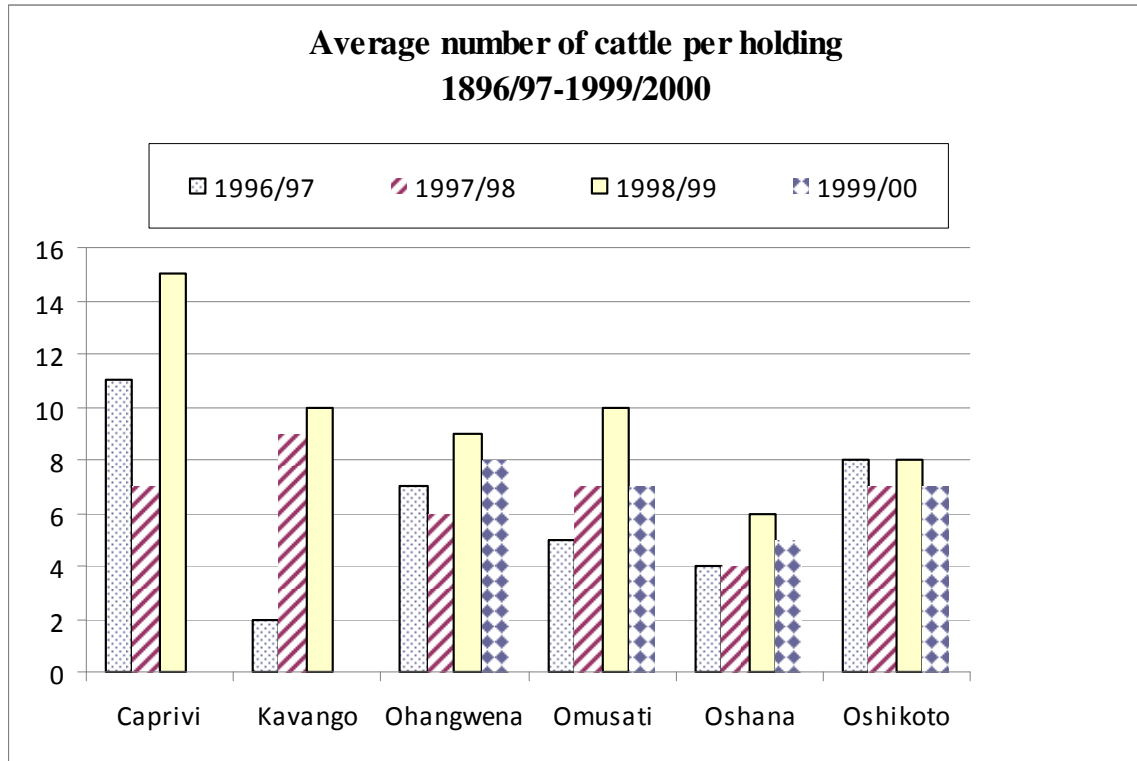


Figure 9

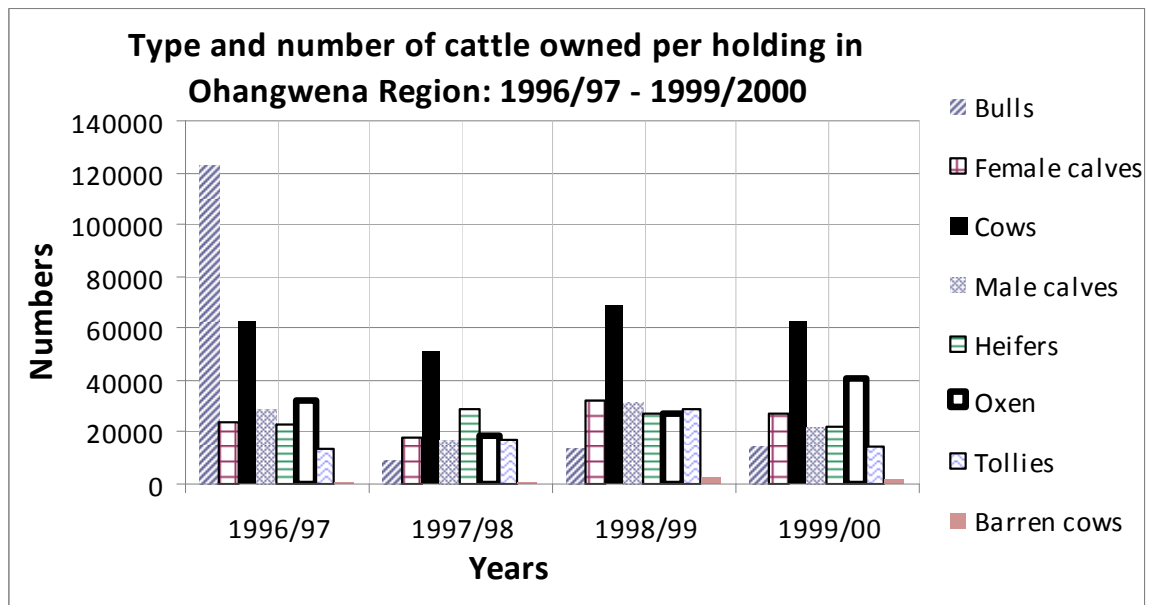
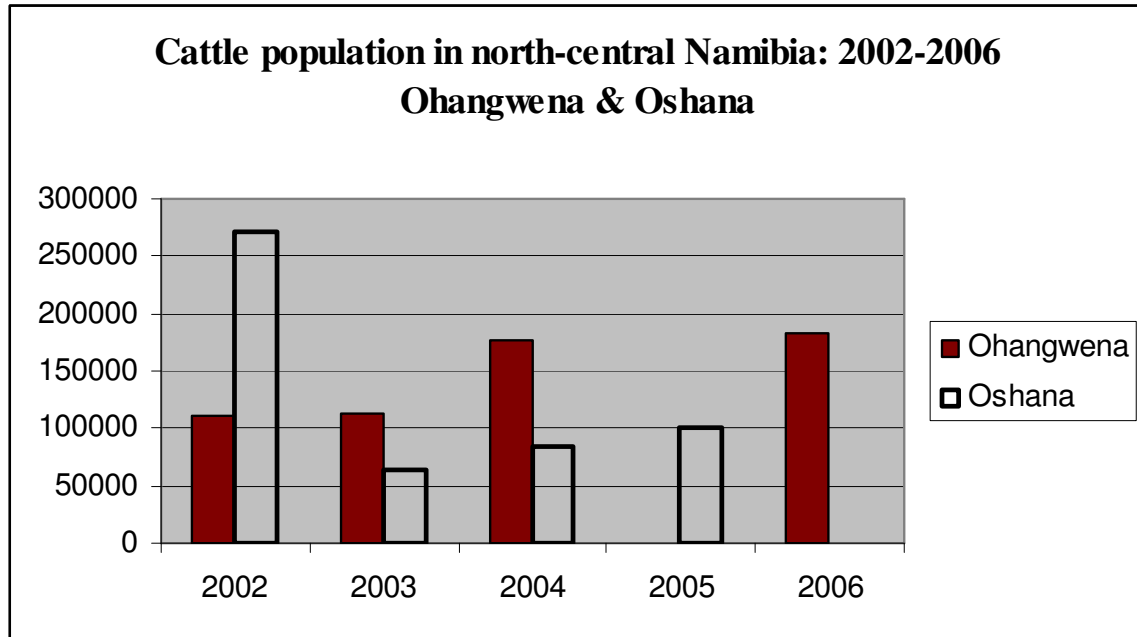


Figure 10



### Long-term trends in cattle population in North-central Namibia, 1935-2006

Figure 11(a) and 11(b) show the long term regional cattle population data for North-central Namibia. Although there are gaps in the data between 1935 and 1970, the data from 1980 to 2006, provide an interesting trend.<sup>267</sup> There are two very obvious pictures that emerge from the trend. Firstly, there were fluctuations in the population from one year to another. Secondly, there was a gradual increase in the regional cattle population over these periods. If we assume that regional population of 400,000 heads implied an average year, then for the periods between 1980 and 2006 [n = 26], we have about 46%

<sup>267</sup> Most of the data were collected from the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry (MAWF) in 2007, and NASSP, *Report on the Study to identify the optimal geographical sites for the selected state veterinary offices* (note 23). Data for 1970 is obtained from B. N. Hochobeb, *Reliance of rural communities in Namibia on long term weather forecasts and development of effective communication tools and products to transfer the seasonal forecast information for the rainy season from the Namibia meteorological services to these communities*. Namibia Institute of health and safety CC (Reg.No. 98/1308 (2002); Data for 1935, 1962, 1969, 1972 and 1992 were obtained from Rawlinson, *The meat industry in Namibia* (note 14).

of the periods disclosing populations at or below this level. These were probably years of stress, while the periods such as 1981/2 were very severe drought years. Such regional data with varied qualities and reliability might be questioned as for example, where the general trend in increase is taking place. Has cattle become a source of capital accumulation, are the Owambo shifting back to Pastoralism from horticulture, due to repeated crop failures or are the trends reflecting the increasing commercial outlets for cattle and therefore the reasons why many might be getting involved? We are not certain of these questions but nonetheless, they remain valid. The present data was reconstructed both from the vaccination and slaughter data that might be under reporting. The population structure shown in Fig. 11(b), where I have tried to show all the years with data as continuous, provide a profile, showing period of depression in the populations such as between 1965 and 1997 before the population increased again. It is probable that parabolic shape is a pattern that repeats itself at perhaps 30-50 year intervals, while the year to year fluctuations might be characteristic for the region.

It was probable that the cattle populations in North-central Namibia, even earlier than these periods [albeit data lacking] had been fluctuating. Periods of epizootics such as 1890s resulted in decimation of cattle. Loeb<sup>268</sup> has used historical sources to reach the conclusion that cattle populations may have increased after the Owambo wars in the late 1800, but using the missionary sources he reports that the drought and the famine of 1893 collapsed the regional cattle population. The historical sources were however insufficient to tell us the extent of the losses. We also know that this period coincided with increased trade with Europeans where cattle were the main means of exchange for the luxury goods and acquisitions of guns. The internal political turmoil of slave raiding and cattle robbing might have shifted cattle populations from one area to another. This was certain, but what were not are the numbers involved and the recovery of the cattle after the periods of the turmoil. For the most recent events such as the 'period covered by the SWAPO war of liberation might have produced external political instability that reduced livestock populations as well as mobility. From Figure 6 again we may deduce that the period was also when the regional cattle numbers had substantially declined. Whereas we have no data on the direct cause of the war on cattle population, we may speculate that the war

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<sup>268</sup> Loeb, *In Feudal Africa* (note 47).

might have had two possible impacts. Firstly, the war would obviously have broken the traditional patterns of transhumance. Both the SWAPO guerrillas and the South African Defence force might have targeted the cattle for different reasons; the first as a food source [probably coerced or freely provided] and the later perhaps, destroying the cattle outside the condone areas for the suspicion that it provided food for the guerrillas.<sup>269</sup> There might be different views on this varying between the pro-SWAPO and those who might have also considered them as predators similar to the South Africa Army that had to target the pastoral system in order to undermine the local support for the fighters.<sup>270</sup> The pro-SWAPO view that because the SWAPO fighters were supported by local communities SWAPO would therefore not have affected the pastoral transhumance adversely might just be missing the realities of war.<sup>271</sup> The third possible impact was that within the condoned areas, cattle might have lacked grazing and consequently greater mortalities might have been experienced due to hunger. My informants confirmed that the conditions under which the cattle were grazed were difficult as the herders were forced into quarantined areas. Oral sources also suggest that major causes of overgrazing might have occurred at this time.

Returning to the more recent periods, there is a tendency for reporting to link population dynamics with overgrazing.<sup>272</sup> This is obviously a misunderstanding. We cannot have livestock population increasing if overgrazing is the problem. Another possible source of weakness in the data is that it is only for the recent events for which we have reliable rainfall data. The reasons for the increased cattle population, when there was a slight decline in rainfall cannot be explained by the evidence available to us. What is however possible is that animal health has significantly improved and more animals lived longer than was the case when the facilities did not exist. This corresponds with the work of Bishi & Kamwi<sup>273</sup> who linked the livestock population variations with institutional service delivery such as veterinary and extension work. We could not discount population changes attributable to regional livestock migrations, such as from

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<sup>269</sup> C. Leys & J. S. Saul, *Namibia's liberation struggle: The two-edged sword*, James Currey (1995).

<sup>270</sup> Ibid.

<sup>271</sup> Cock & Nathan, *War and Society: The Militarisation of South Africa* (note 222).

<sup>272</sup> NASSP, *Report on the Study to identify the optimal geographical sites for the selected state veterinary offices* (note 23).

<sup>273</sup> Bishi & Kamwi, *Veterinary science, transboundary animal diseases and markets: pathways for policy in Namibia* (note 16).

Angola to Namibia and vice versa. As far as we know there are no condone fences in this part of the country that interfered with cattle movements. Thus, it is quite possible that we are dealing with shifting regional cattle populations that might not be related to local conditions. Since these numbers had increased after the independence one would even speculate that the picture is in favor of the transhumance system picking up again. From the data we are not able to pick such a possibility though. However, we might also have local variations. This is clearly shown by the Oshana system where with the exception of 2002, the population had remained low compared to the Ohangwena system (Fig. 10).

**Figure 11a: Long-term trends in cattle population in North-central Namibia, 1935-2006**

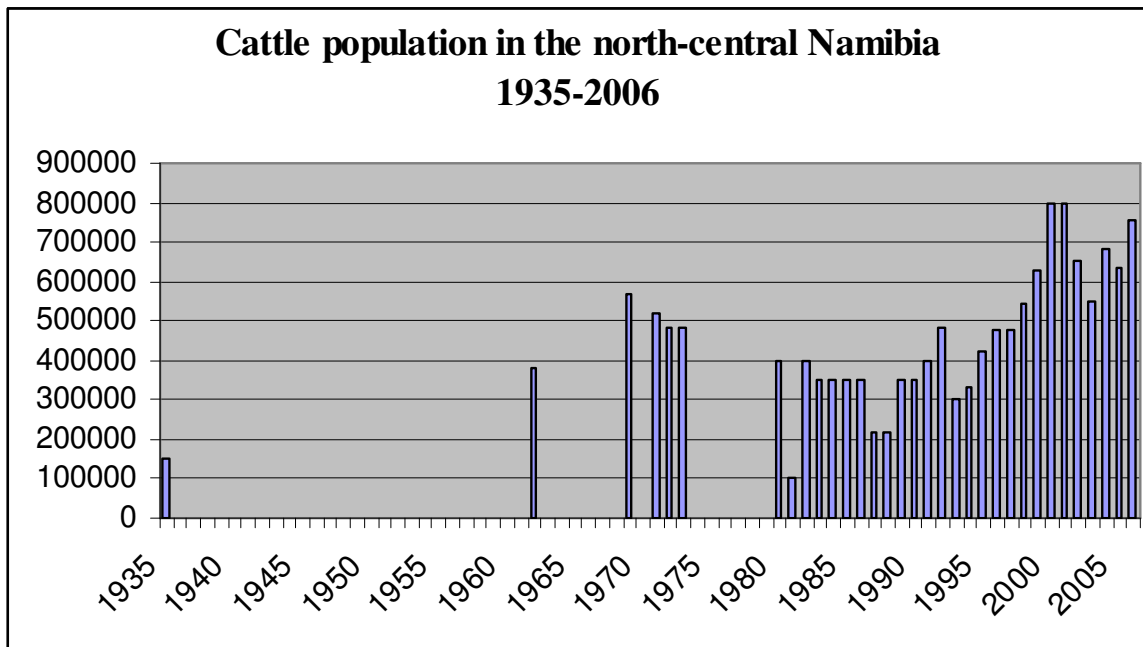
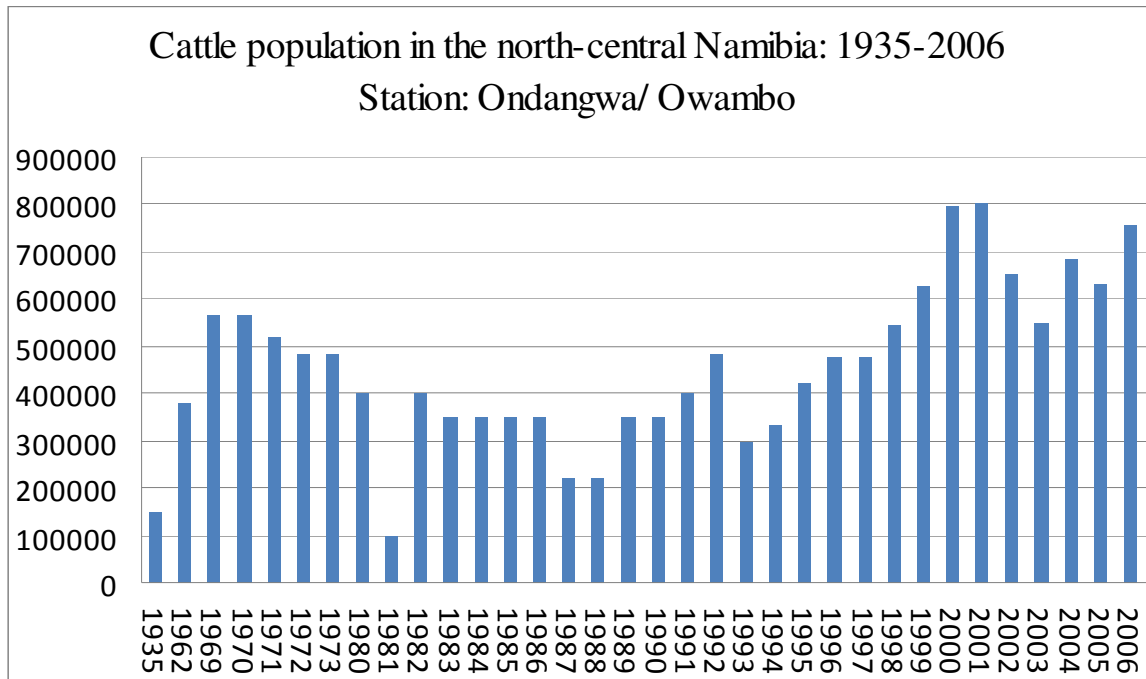


Figure 11b: Only recorded years for figure are shown



## CHANGES IN LAND USE AFTER INDEPENDENCE

The post-colonial phase focuses mainly on interaction between different land users within and across the north-central regions after Namibia's Independence in 1990. The emphasis is on challenges facing the northern communal farming areas with regards to sufficient grazing and communal grazing rights, the relationships between different land users as well as their relationship with the natural environment. Adaptation of transhumant pastoralists to new land administration and transhumance practices in independent Namibia shall be highlighted.

Namibia's Independence from South Africa in March 1990 did not bring drastic changes in land laws. On the contrary Namibia adopted outdated colonial land laws after Independence.<sup>274</sup> This allowed the management of communal land to remain under traditional authorities. The country had also inherited weak institutional capacity to deal with challenges of environmental change and this facilitated the continuation of past land

<sup>274</sup> Government Gazette of the Republic of Namibia, *Namibia Communal Land Reform Act, 2002*. Act 5 of 2002, Government Gazette No. 2787.



use and management practices.<sup>275</sup> One weakness was the lack of coordination between implementing institutions for development plans.<sup>276</sup> Despite the continuation of such a policy, recent studies have however shown that communal grazing decreased to 20 per cent.<sup>277</sup> Despite the decline Bishi<sup>278</sup> and Shoombe<sup>279</sup> estimated in 2006 that nearly 90 per cent of cattle were involved in transhumant pastoralism. However, these movements have changed as the settlements were established in formerly unoccupied areas and cattle posts fragmented through illegal fencing. Since the end of the liberation war, fencing became easier to maintain. Fencing in north-central Namibia is done mainly by Owambo elites who are mostly absentee farm holders.<sup>280</sup> By 2000 nearly 7,900 sq km of land in the north-central regions was divided into 150-250 large fenced farms, each covering 1000 hectares of land or more.<sup>281</sup>

As the quality of grazing deteriorated and communal grazing decreased in the north-eastern areas, Owambo herders continued to move their cattle as far as western Kavango and into south-eastern Angola where communal grazing was still available.<sup>282</sup> After Independence cross boundary migrations between northern Namibia, Angola and Kavango had continued. Based on Figure 12 below, three types of migration can be discerned; 1) longitudinal migrations between the densely settled and north-eastern areas, 2) vertical migrations between densely settled and north-eastern areas and, between Namibia and Angola, 3) winding migrations between densely populated areas and north eastern areas and, 4) parallel-short distance migrations between densely populated areas and less populated areas in the north-east. Transhumant migrations took place during the dry period to areas that were preserved during rainy seasons. The maps do not reflect any traditional circular migrations.

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<sup>275</sup> J. Sweet, *Livestock Coping with Drought: Namibia – a case study, Northern Regions Livestock Development Project*, Tsumeb, Namibia (1998).

<sup>276</sup> Marsh & Seely, *Oshana: Sustainable people, Environment and Development in Central Owambo, Namibia* (note 7).

<sup>277</sup> Mendelsohn et.al, *The profile of the North-Central Namibia* (note 19); See also Tapscott, *The Social Economy of Livestock Production in the Owambo Region*. (note 21), 14

<sup>278</sup> Bishi (note 20).

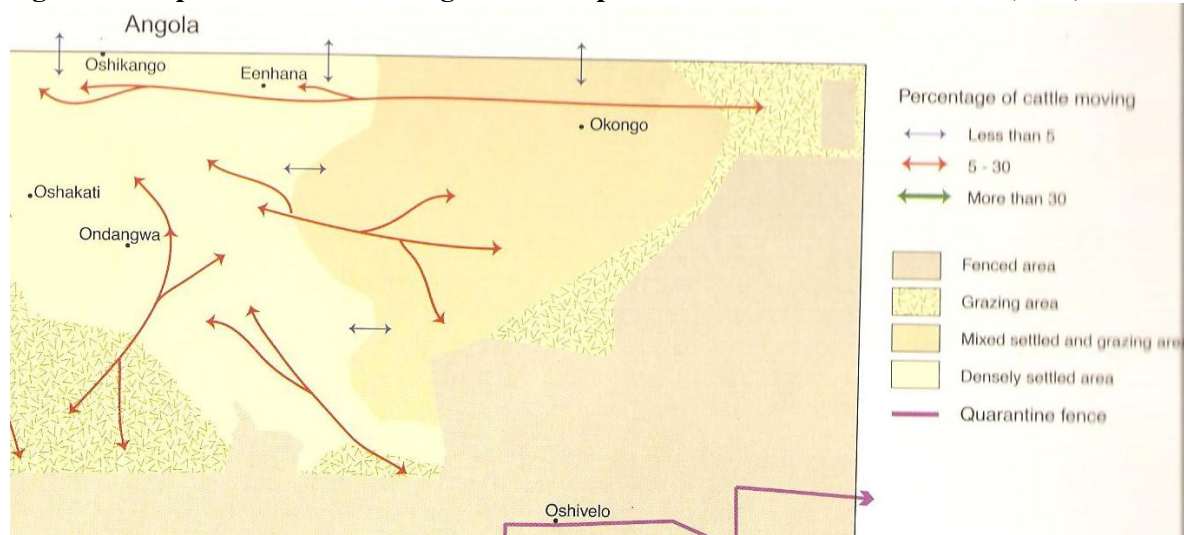
<sup>279</sup> Shoombe (note 20).

<sup>280</sup> Bishi & Kamwi, *Veterinary science, transboundary animal diseases and markets: pathways for policy in Namibia* (note 16)

<sup>281</sup> Mendelsohn et.al, *The profile of the North-Central Namibia* (note 19).

<sup>282</sup> NASSP, *Report on the Study to identify the optimal geographical sites for the selected state veterinary offices* (note 23); See also, Mendelsohn, et. al, *The profile of the North-Central Namibia* (note 19)

**Figure 12 Map on transhumant migrations adapted from Mendelsohn & others (2000).**



According to Mendelsohn et. al.<sup>283</sup> less than 5 per cent of cattle in the region are moved to Angola, and between densely populated areas and mixed settled and grazing areas. Again 5-30 per cent of cattle are moved to north-eastern areas and southern areas and, more than 30 per cent are moved to north-western and south-western areas.

A social anthropological study conducted by the International Development Consultancy (IDC) in 2005 showed that nearly 70,000 cattle from Ohangwena and Omusati Regions were moved into Angola.<sup>284</sup> In 2004 and 2005 the cattle population in Omusati was 233,655 and 244,765 respectively.<sup>285</sup> During the same period the cattle population of Ohangwena was estimated at 175,981<sup>286</sup> in 2004 and 103,000 in 2005.<sup>287</sup> Based on these statistics livestock migration from the north-central Namibia into Angola varied between 17 and 20 per cent in 2004 and 2005. However, the figures do not reflect regional differences in migration. According to the statistics, Ohangwena had relatively a high

<sup>283</sup> Mendelsohn et.al, *The profile of the North-Central Namibia* (note 19).

<sup>284</sup> Bishi & Kamwi, *Veterinary science, transboundary animal diseases and markets: pathways for policy in Namibia* (note 16). Much of their data is obtained from Anon, *Services of a Sociologist/Social Anthropologist to Support the Expansion of the Foot and Mouth Disease Free Area to Namibia's Northern Border*, report prepared by the International Development Consultancy, Namibia Development Corporation (2005b).

<sup>285</sup> Statistics obtained from the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry (MAWF), Namibia (2007)

<sup>286</sup> Ibid

<sup>287</sup> Bishi & Kamwi, *Veterinary science, transboundary animal diseases and markets: pathways for policy in Namibia* (note 16).

number of cattle in both years. Furthermore the figures suggest variations in the number of livestock involved in migrations every year, even though the population had decreased in 2005. It has been assumed that the lack of access to Angolan grazing resources would lead to a high number of livestock in the regions that would double the pressure on available grazing capacity.<sup>288</sup> In recent years grazing in the Cuvelai landscape has been severely degraded due to reduced mobility of livestock.<sup>289</sup>

It is difficult to show transhumant destinations in recent years using figure 12 because the change in pastoral land use over the years especially before 1990 cannot be demonstrated. In this study an attempt has been therefore made to demonstrate the present land use situation on the ground by using photographs from Google Earth [e.g. Fig. 13]. The photographs indicate settlement patterns in the north eastern areas of Ohangwena of the Kalahari woodlands [Appendix 3] and the densely settled areas of Cuvelai landscape [Appendix 4]. The photographs show that there seems to be more unoccupied and unfenced areas of land in the north-eastern areas than in the Cuvelai. The croplands (*omapy*), private lands (*omakove*) and communal lands used for grazing seem to be very distinct in both areas. However, it is difficult to identify unsettled or partly settled cattle posts (which have no cultivation fields) in the communal land. This suggests that transhumance is invisible and so may therefore exist only on a limited scale lending credence to the common perception as argued by Verlinden and Kruger<sup>290</sup> that transhumance has reached its dead end.

The photographic patterns provide clues to changing patterns of settlements and expansion of croplands. Croplands (*omapy*) in the north-eastern areas seem to



Patterns in the

<sup>288</sup> Ibid.

<sup>289</sup> Marsh & Seely, *Oshana: Sustainable people, Environment and Development in Central Owambo, Namibia* (note 7).

<sup>290</sup> Verlinden & Kruger, *Changing grazing systems in the north-central Namibia* (note 18).

be larger than in densely populated areas. In the Cuvelai fencing of fields (entire land) is more common than croplands as is the case in the north-eastern areas. This could be caused by the need to protect crops from livestock in the absence of either the landholders or guided livestock herding in the north-eastern areas.

Land use at the border between Namibia and Angola as shown in Appendix 3 (Omboloka and Olupale) seems to be quite complex because of the visible connection on fenced areas of land between the countries, including the borderline area. The complexity suggests a more complicated land rights and management between the countries, especially in the “no man land” areas (1km wide) which does not belong to any of the countries. However, there is an agreement between Angola and Namibia which allows a free movement of people and livestock in both countries within 30km from both sides of the border.<sup>291</sup> The agreement involves access to grazing resources, particularly water resources in the Cunene Province in Angola<sup>292</sup>

A decrease in transhumant migrations has also led to tensions between the north-central neighbouring regions such as Kavango and Kaokoland.<sup>293</sup> The critical issue in the new occupied areas has been an increase in privatisation of communal grazing by fencing of large areas of land which has led to severe grazing or land-related conflicts among different land users within and across regional boundaries.<sup>294</sup> The major problem is that fencing in communal areas has been complicated by conflicts between communal grazing rights as stipulated in traditional laws and modern statutory laws whereby fencing is illegal under traditional laws, but legal under modern statutory laws. A communal farmer has a right to fence less than 10 hectares of land provided it is not in conflict with other resource users.

Land-related conflicts which have become quite common in northern Namibia have been conceived in most cases as ethnically based conflicts. The most outstanding grazing conflict occurred in western Kavango where north-central cattle holders particularly from

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<sup>291</sup> Bishi and Kamwi, *Veterinary science, transboundary animal diseases and markets: pathways for policy in Namibia* (note 16).

<sup>292</sup> Kreike, *The Owambo Agro-Silvipastoral System: Traditional Land Use and Indigenous Natural resources Management in Northcentral Namibia* (note 6).

<sup>293</sup> Mendelsohn, et.al, *The profile of the North-Central Namibia* (note 19); See also, Marsh & Seely, *Oshana: Sustainable people, Environment and Development in Central Owambo, Namibia* (note 7).

<sup>294</sup> Verlinden & Kruger, *Changing grazing systems in central north Namibia* (note 18); See also, Mendelsohn, et.al, *The profile of the North-Central Namibia* (note 19);

Ohangwena and Oshikoto were evicted by the Oukwangali Traditional Authority and Namibian Police. The eviction which took place since 2005 involved about 50 holdings which had nearly 60 000 cattle.<sup>295</sup> Cattle holders from north-central Namibia were evicted because they were accused of having no grazing rights in western Kavango.<sup>296</sup> Simultaneously, they were accused of violating the Namibian Constitution and Communal Land Act of 2002.<sup>297</sup> However, evicted herders claimed that they had legal grazing rights that they obtained from the Oukwangali Traditional Authority (which rejected such claims) and have been demanding the government to provide them with alternative grazing land.<sup>298</sup> The accusation arose since the influx of the so called “illegal farmers” from the north-central regions into western Kavango. In this context, the illegal farmers are the cattle holders who had no grazing rights from Oukwangali Traditional Authority which the local traditional authority for western Kavango. Another problem about the eviction is that the north-central farmers have been increasingly fencing off communal grazing in western Kavango which has not been a common practise in that particular area.<sup>299</sup>

The western Kavango conflict is highly politicised and involves quite a number of elites and high ranking politicians (including parliamentarians) from the north-central regions.<sup>300</sup> The conflict received much attention from the local media, which have been also reporting on difficulties that illegal farmers experienced during the eviction process such as the inability to drive their livestock during very hot months of eviction, injury to personal properties, cattle theft, illegal cattle slaughters, poisoning of wells, intimidations, and burning of cattle posts. Some crimes were committed in retaliation for

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<sup>295</sup> C. Maletsky, *Govt names farmers illegally grazing cattle in Kavango*. In :The Namibian Newspaper, [www.namibian.com.na](http://www.namibian.com.na), (31.01.2006).

<sup>296</sup> Shivute, *Evicted farmers protest, demand grazing* (note 1).

<sup>297</sup> C. Maletsky, *Govt names farmers illegally grazing cattle in Kavango* (note 295).

<sup>298</sup> O. Shivute, *Police drive evicted farmers from Kavango*. In: The Namibian, [www.namibian.com.na](http://www.namibian.com.na), (30.08.2006); See also, A. Shigwedha, *Evicted farmers stay put in west Kavango*. In: The Namibian (07.12.2005); Shivute, *Evicted farmers protest, demand grazing* (note 1).

<sup>299</sup> Verlinden & Kruger, *Changing grazing systems in the north-central Namibia* (note 18), See also, Namibia National Society for Human Rights (NSHR), Press Release: *Illegal Kavango cattle farming symptom of Ovambo conflict*, <http://www.nshr.org.na/index.php?module=News&func=display&sid=537> (12.12.2005).

<sup>300</sup> Verlinden & Kruger, *Changing grazing systems in the north-central Namibia* (note 18); W. Mbangula, *Land dispute between regions continues – by kae* (2003). In New Era, [www.newera.com.na](http://www.newera.com.na) (28.07.2003).

not leaving western Kavango.<sup>301</sup>

According to the National Society for Human Rights (NSHR)<sup>302</sup>, the western Kavango conflict is quite complex as it has political, economic and social dimensions and its root causes are twofold. The first is the past relations between Ondonga and Oukwanyama about the land ownership claim in the north-eastern areas of Owambo. Secondly, the politicisation of land conflicts in the northern communal areas is also connected to existing tensions in the ruling SWAPO party which led to the formation of the new political party, Rally for Democracy and Progress - RDP. In this case, the NSHR therefore regards the conflict as “*analogous to a gigantic tree with its branches in western Kavango and its trunk and roots situated in the former Owambo*”. The politicisation of western Kavango conflicts has also caused evicted herders to form Ovawambo Herders Association in 2006. The Secretary of the Association is one of the evicted farmers who was also jailed for ignoring the eviction order and, he is a member of RDP.<sup>303</sup> Furthermore there is also a perception among RDP affiliates who blame the government for the eviction that, it is the SWAPO-led government that destroyed the good and long-established relations between Kavango and Owambo which existed before Independence.<sup>304</sup> The herders’ position in the country’s politics can easily affect their relationship with the current SWAPO-led government which is supposed to resolve the land conflicts. In the north-central regions evictions of this nature have been performed since Namibia’s Independence and the most controversial eviction involves the Senior Headman George Nelulu from Ohangwena Region. Nelulu was evicted from his communal farm which he lawfully bought in 1986 and fenced in 1998 (before Independence).<sup>305</sup> On the orders of the former President Sam Nuyoma, Nelulu was

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<sup>301</sup> O. Shivute, *Livestock suffer in Kavango’s ‘great trek’*. In: The Namibian, [www.namibian.com.na](http://www.namibian.com.na) (25.10.05).

<sup>302</sup> NSHR, *Press Release: Illegal Kavango cattle farming symptom of Ovambo conflict* (note 299).

<sup>303</sup> O. Shivute, *Defiant farmers organized*. In: The Namibian, [http://www.namibian.com.na/index.php?id=28&tx\\_ttnews\[tt\\_news\]=26539&no\\_cache=1](http://www.namibian.com.na/index.php?id=28&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=26539&no_cache=1) (28.03.2006).

<sup>304</sup> K. Shinana, *RDP blames SWAPO for destroying business prospects*. In: The Namibian, [www.namibian.com.na](http://www.namibian.com.na) (22.01.2008).

<sup>305</sup> Namibia National Society for Human Rights Organisation (NSHR), *Kavango conflict: GON must intervene*, [www.nshr.org.na](http://www.nshr.org.na), (18.10.2005); See also, NSHR, *Decree evicting headman ultra vires* [2]. Press Release; <http://www.nshr.org.na/index.php?module=News&func=display&sid=356> (26.02. 2004).

evicted in April 2003 from Oshininamwene village which is located about 175 km east of Eenhana.<sup>306</sup>

Effective pastoral land use and management in the northern communal areas has been constrained by lack of adaptable land management and communal farming approaches to cope with environmental change.<sup>307</sup> Another constraint is the lack of effective conflict resolution measures in land-related issues and risks.<sup>308</sup> Farmers in communal area also have a very weak self-help capacity and representation and receive insufficient institutional support for their demands.<sup>309</sup> For example, up to 2005 there were no farmers' associations in Ohangwena and there was limited demand from livestock holders for the provision of clinical veterinary services.<sup>310</sup> Livestock farmers might not ask for such services if they have not changed their attitude towards government vaccinations which they frequently rejected during colonial time.<sup>311</sup>

By law communal land management has been constrained by the inconsistency between traditional and modern state land laws which Namibia adopted after Independence. Such inconsistency has since been addressed under the Communal Land Act of 2002. However, its effective implementation and regulation still remain a challenge. In the Act the traditional laws are strengthened to improve the administration of land in the communal areas, protect the land rights of the people and provide a right for all Namibian persons to reside and settle in any part of Namibia with prior approval from the local authority. Furthermore, the Act provides for the registration of all land rights in communal areas, recognises and confirms the powers of traditional leaders to allocate and revoke rights in land, and provides gender equity. The Act also distinguishes between two different kinds of rights to be recognised namely, customary land rights and rights to leasehold.

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<sup>306</sup> NSHR, *Decree evicting headman ultra vires* [2] (note 305).

<sup>307</sup> Klintonberg, et. al, *Local and national perceptions of environmental change in the north-central Namibia. Do they correspond?*(note 22); See also, A.S. Kruger, *Promoting Sustainable Rangeland Management and Improved Livestock Production in the Communal Areas of Namibia (The SARDEP Approach)*, Agriviews, Third Quarter, Vol.1. No.7 (1996).

<sup>308</sup> NSHR, *Decree evicting headman ultra vires* [2] (note 305).

<sup>309</sup> Kruger, *Promoting Sustainable Rangeland Management and Improved Livestock Production in the Communal Areas of Namibia -The SARDEP Approach* (note 307).

<sup>310</sup> NASSP, *Report on the Study to identify the optimal geographical sites for the selected state veterinary offices* (note 23).

<sup>311</sup> Kreike, *The Owambo Agro-Silvipastoral System: Traditional Land Use and Indigenous Natural resources Management in Northcentral Namibia* (note 6).



Since Independence new development initiatives have been implemented in the north-eastern areas. These have created new opportunities and services in these areas ultimately affecting transhumant pastoralism in both positive and negative ways. In Ohangwena Region existing water pipelines and taps, power supply, and roads were extended from the central areas north-eastern areas such as Eenhana. More development projects are expected to take place. For example, there is currently an improvement of the road network in the northern regions as part of the Trans-Caprivi Highway that will extend to the Cape Frio on the Atlantic Coast. The expansion of towns, human settlements and other infrastructures is also expected to occur in the north-eastern areas.<sup>312</sup> For example, some areas of land such as Okongo and Eendobe have been recently allocated to the mobile San hunter-gatherers for sedentary agriculture<sup>313</sup> posing a risk to livestock mobility, while at the same time technological improvements in communications such as use of mobile phones might improve the coordination and management of animal husbandry (conditions, problems and so forth).

One of the most important initiatives that affect transhumance and the rangeland is the translocation of the Veterinary Cordon Fence (VCF) between Namibia and Angola which is to be “re-established” (after the first failed initiative of 1958). This has led to the appointment of a VCF Task force in 1997.<sup>314</sup> The VCF is planned to improve animal health and meat development in the northern communal areas by transforming communal livestock farming into a modern industry which can also contribute to sustainable economic development.<sup>315</sup> The VCF initiative is expected to improve livestock production and rangeland management, marketing infrastructures, farmers’ competence and income which will in turn contribute to overall improvement of the quality of life in the northern communal areas.<sup>316</sup> Livestock husbandry is an important farming activity which up to 2007 contributed nearly 98 per cent to the Namibian national agriculture

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<sup>312</sup> W. Mbangula, *Okongo benefit from Trans-Caprivi Highway* (2008) in New Era, [www.newera.com.na](http://www.newera.com.na) (03.10.2008).

<sup>313</sup> D. Isaacs, *Govt doubles its effort on land* (2007), in The Namibian, [www.namibian.com.na](http://www.namibian.com.na) (24.04.2007)

<sup>314</sup> Meat Board of Namibia, *Veterinary Cordon Fence Task Force (VCF-TF) Project*, Project Document (2007); See also Murray, *Namibia through the 1990s: Turning rich resources into growth*. The Economist Intelligence Unit. EIU Economic prospects series. Special Report No. M211 (1992)

<sup>315</sup> Meat Board of Namibia, *Veterinary Cordon Fence Task Force (VCF-TF) Project Document* (note 314)

<sup>316</sup> Ibid.



income.<sup>317</sup> However, the modern meat industry in the northern Namibia is underdeveloped causing a low animal off-take from the regions. Animal off-take is constrained by the insufficient infrastructures and services, prevalence of animal diseases, socio-cultural significance of cattle to the people and food security at household level.<sup>318</sup> Other constraints are related to distant established “formal” markets, veterinary requirements, low farmer capacity, dependency on non-farm activities such as pensions and remittances, and the status of farming which is more a social activity.<sup>319</sup>

Furthermore the illegal fencing in the north-eastern areas is also closely linked to the assumptions on prospects of the Angola-Namibia VCF translocation which will raise pressure on commercialisation of communal land and grazing resources.<sup>320</sup> The application of commercial farming in the northern communal areas has been previously recommended and supported in the previous studies and the Communal Land Reform Bill.<sup>321</sup>

Between 1998 and 2000 the Community Forest Project [presented on Appendix 2] which covers 75,518 hectares of land was established about 49 km east of Okongo in the north-eastern part of Ohangwena.<sup>322</sup> Consisting of about 56 woody species the community forest aims to improve the people’s livelihood through sustainable natural resource management and conservation biological diversity, particularly the *Baikiaea plurijuga* woodlands. A study conducted in the Okongo Community Forest by the Namibian Directorate of Forestry reveals that the north-eastern woodlands are degraded due to uncontrolled grazing in combination with deforestation and the occurrence of

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<sup>317</sup> Ibid.

<sup>318</sup> Bishi & Kamwi, *Veterinary science, transboundary animal diseases and markets: pathways for policy in Namibia* (note 16); See also, Meat Board of Namibia, *Veterinary Cordon Fence Task Force (VCF-TF) Project Document* (note 316); Rawlinson, *The Meat Industry of Namibia: 1935-1994* (note 14).

<sup>319</sup> Bishi & Kamwi, *Veterinary science, transboundary animal diseases and markets: pathways for policy in Namibia* (note 16).

<sup>320</sup> Bishi & Kamwi, *Veterinary science, transboundary animal diseases and markets: pathways for policy in Namibia* (note 16). In: Anon, *Northern Regions Livestock development Project (NOLIDEP) Livestock Marketing in Northern Communal Areas (Livestock producer marketing strategies and informal trade in live animals, meat, hides and skins): A Report prepared for the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry by the University of Pretoria* (2000).

<sup>321</sup> Bishi & Kamwi, *Veterinary science, transboundary animal diseases and markets: pathways for policy in Namibia* (note 16).

<sup>322</sup> S. Angombe, T. Selanniemi & M. Chakanga, *Inventory Report on the Woody Resources in the Okongo Community Forest*, Directorate of Forestry, Namibia (2000).

uncontrolled man-made wild fires.<sup>323</sup> However, grazing degradation is not apparent, except near water points, as the pressure on available communal grazing resources is ultimately reduced when livestock migrate to other areas.<sup>324</sup> Furthermore, the adoption of different grazing strategies such as browsing and the utilization of different grazing resources at different times allow livestock to cope with grass degradation particularly during dry periods.<sup>325</sup> The problem of uncontrolled grazing and movements of livestock is also caused by the change in grazing management because previously grazing in the forest took place only during dry season and not during the wet season.<sup>326</sup> The integration of grazing with other farming activities is therefore one of the main community forest management objectives.<sup>327</sup> The perceived grazing degradation is also connected to the establishment of the Veterinary Quarantine Camp within the community forest, which ultimately reduced the communal grazing. Another problem for livestock farmers in the north-eastern areas is conservation of wildlife Reserves that were carved from the former communal grazing lands.<sup>328</sup> However, the incidents on wildlife-human and animals conflicts are very low.<sup>329</sup>

## Conclusion

My assumptions in this study were that decrease in communal grazing would engender reduction in transhumant pastoralism, but would not necessarily lead to reduction in cattle population. In fact, the cattle population might increase due to cultural drivers. Reduction in livestock mobility would lead to severe environmental degradation and conflicts between large animal herds and crop cultivation will increase.

The study has shown that transhumant pastoralism is still practiced on a large scale, between 70-90 per cent, despite the fact that communal grazing has decreased to 20 per cent. The increase in cattle population is in contradiction with grazing degradation in

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<sup>323</sup> Mulofwa, et.al, *Participatory Integrated Forest Management for Okongo Community Forest* (2003).

<sup>324</sup> Ibid.

<sup>325</sup> Verlinden & A. S. Kruger, *Changing grazing systems in the north-central Namibia* (note 18).

<sup>326</sup> Mulofwa et.al, *Participatory Integrated Forest Management for Okongo Community Forest* (note 323)

<sup>327</sup> Angombe, et.al, *Inventory Report on the Woody Resources in the Okongo Community Forest* (note 322)

<sup>328</sup> Personal communication with E. Nghilai (2007)

<sup>329</sup> Mendelsohn, et.al, *The profile of the North-Central Namibia* (note 19).

the north-eastern areas, which is most visible near water points. The study suggests that overgrazing and overstocking are not major constraints for livestock population growth compared to the normal frequent droughts, diseases outbreaks and socio-cultural factors which naturally regulate livestock population particularly at household level. This is because cattle have adopted different grazing strategies and pastoralists are able to drive their cattle into other areas such as Angola and Kavango where communal grazing is still available. The larger herds and cattle numbers per holding should be viewed under the cattle sharing system, the combining of migrating herds and the necessity for keeping large cattle herds. Reducing the number of herds also suggest a change in socio-cultural and economic aspects of people in the northern Namibia.

In exception of the loss of access to grazing areas south of the Red Line (VCF), traditional routes of transhumant migrations within Ohangwena Region have not changed; however, there have been major interruptions which are consequences of the division of Owambo into Angola and Namibia, establishment of enclosures and private ownership of land on a large scale, development and expansion of modern infrastructures, and the Kavango conflict. The lack of access to grazing resources in Kavango and Angola due to conflicts and the VCF might bring in new approaches in rangeland management as more animals will now be kept in the north-central regions. A reduction in rangeland and livestock mobility suggests severe degradation of grazing resources and increased livestock loss. The current environmental problems such as land degradation occur in combination with other factors such as demands for arable land. The recent settlement in the former transhumant destinations (*ofuka*) appeared to be a normal pattern of settlement among Ovawambo since cattle posts have paved the way for settlements and villages and Owambo patterns of settlements have been guided by the availability of environmental services and opportunities. Conflicts between crop production and livestock husbandry in the north-eastern areas seemed to be minimal and it is unlikely to increase because Ovawambo are agro-pastoralists and their settlement patterns are shaped by both horticulture and pastoralism opportunities, which are complementary to each other. People in the northern Namibia have adopted private ownership of land long before colonialism, and the intensification of large scale fencing after Independence seemed to be a response to social changes associated with the end of war, availability of

infrastructure such as artificial water supply, landholding absenteeism and VCF or new development prospects. Nowadays, with technological and social change, the private ownership of land at household or field level is marked by wire fencing than local materials such as wood and trees branches, however contradicted by the notion of large scale farming and the change in people's values towards the land. Therefore large scale fencing seemed to be the main problem facing the management of communal grazing and not really land privatizations.

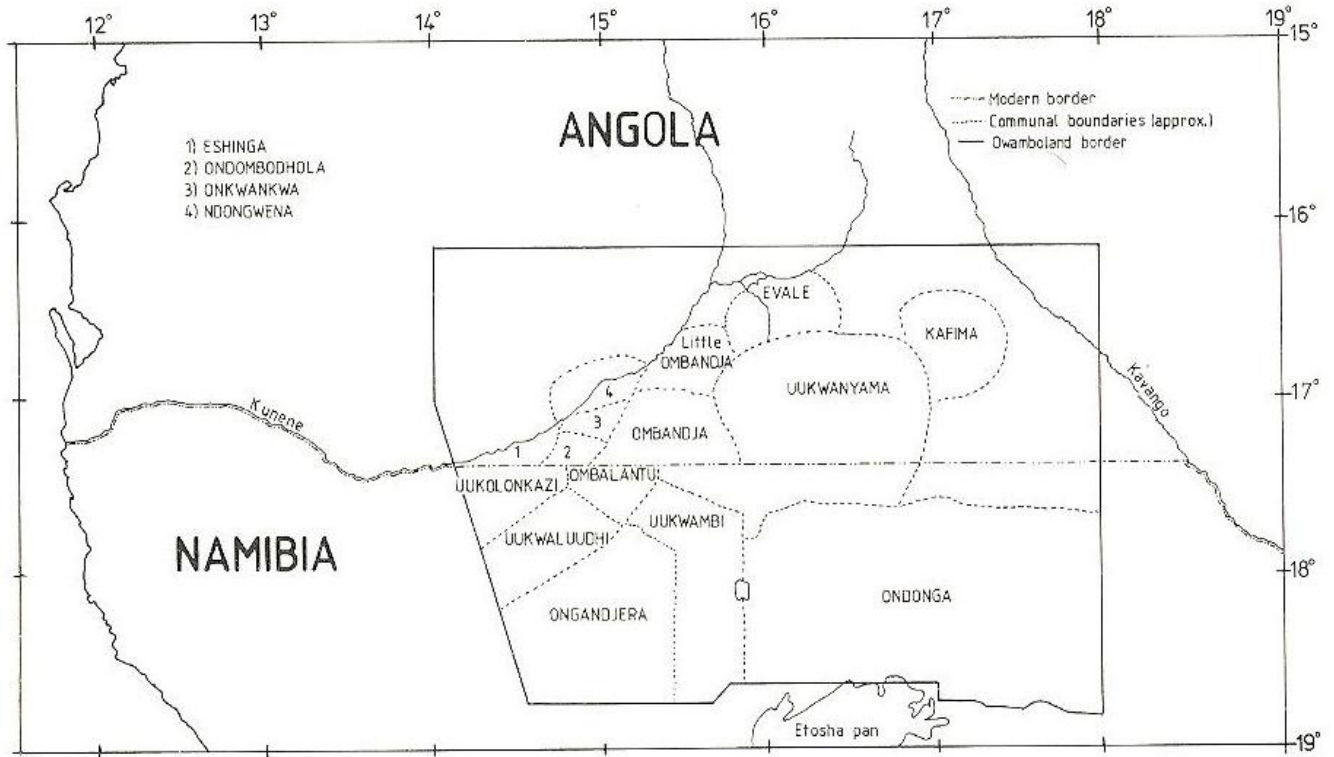
Common land conflicts seemed to be consequences of the transformation of grazing tenure rights, unclearly defined rights of exclusion for different groups of people who live in different territories or regions, inconsistency between customary and state land laws and application of inappropriate farming methods. Common land-related conflicts in northern Namibia are not based on ethnicity and lack of grazing; they seemed to be more political in nature and the lack of effective conflict resolution mechanisms. Such conflicts can only be solved at the political level. The study therefore suggests that the user rights on private land and rights of exclusion need to be clearly defined so that access to communal grazing resources will be ensured and potential conflicts minimised. Large scale farming and fencing have never been part of the traditional management of natural resources. However, due to socio-cultural changes, adaptive land management approaches and practices for transhumance and communal grazing resources are needed. Since land allocation and management are still the responsibility of the traditional authorities there is the need for them to improved their knowledge in land use planning and sustainable farming practices. It is also important to give more voices to herders on pastoral developmental issues.

Since the 20 per cent decrease in communal grazing noted above was discovered in the early 1990s, and decrease in transhumant pastoralism is based on estimations, the study suggests that in-depth quantitative studies be carried out to find out the extent to which transhumant pastoralism and communal grazing have decreased at present. This will help in the decision-making process, the implementation of development initiatives, new laws and policies in relation to agriculture, pastoralism and common natural resources in the country. Finally, I suggest that transhumant pastoralism or transhumance

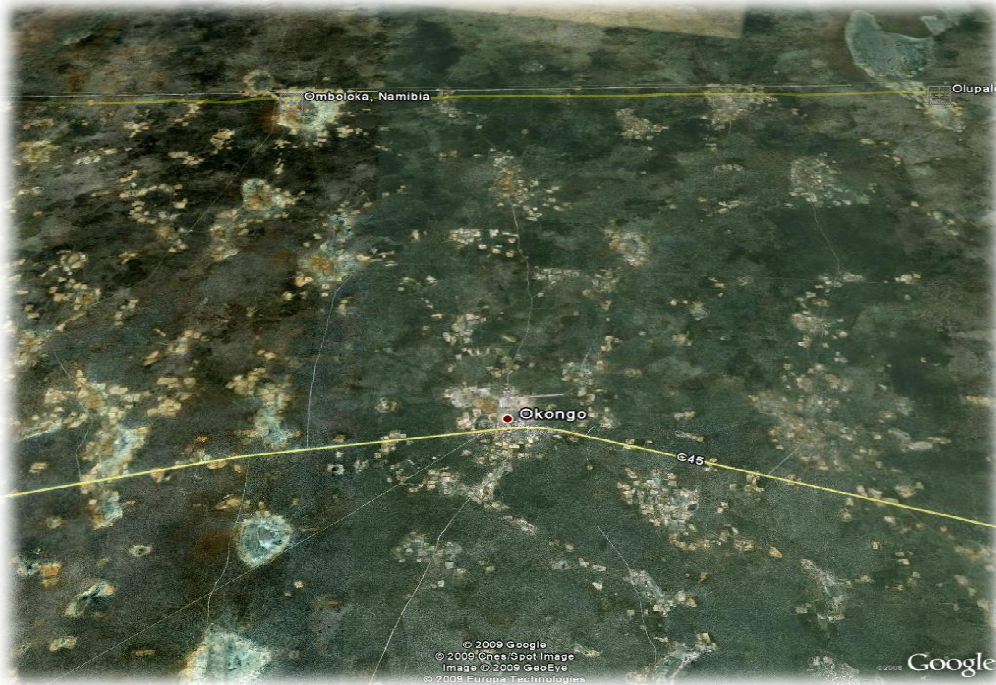
in management of dryland resources be recognized as an adaptive method or coping strategy in relation to environmental change.

# Appendixes

Appendix 1: Owambo different countries (Source: F. Williams (1991) page



**Appendix 2: Location of the Okongo Community Forestry and the Quarantine camp (Source: Angombe et. al, 2000:7)**





### Appendix 3: Land use and settlement patterns in the Cuvelai (Engela)

