

## FROM “DISPLACED PEOPLES” TO “INDIGENOUS PEOPLES”: EXPERIENCES OF THE !XUN AND KHWE SAN IN SOUTH AFRICA

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**ABSTRACT** This article examines the historical experience of the San groups known as the !Xun and the Khwe, currently living in Platfontein, South Africa, and indigenous discourse on that experience. The San of South Africa used to be believed to be almost extinct or completely integrated into the majority South African society. The !Xun and Khwe living there have only recently been displaced from their original homelands in Angola and Namibia. These groups are currently playing an important role in the indigenous rights movement in South Africa. This article raises the following question: How did these recent immigrants come to be recognised as indigenous peoples of South Africa? To answer it, this paper traces the historical experiences of the !Xun and Khwe in Angola, Namibia, and South Africa and discusses the context in which the emerging discourse on indigenous peoples in South Africa is taking place. By analysing how these groups were once marginalised and then given legitimacy in particular places at particular points in time, this article clarifies the possibilities and ambiguities inherent in the claims of and aspirations for the indigenous, particularly in the African context.

**Key Words:** San; Indigenous peoples; Platfontein; Post-apartheid; Historical experiences.

### INTRODUCTION

Today, more than half a century after the Year of Africa in 1960, all former European colonies in Africa have achieved independence. However, the independence of these states was only the most visible part of a long and complex process of decolonisation (Shimizu, 2008). Moreover, internal colonisation, that is, the oppression of ethnic minorities, was preserved or even enhanced in the new postcolonial states. This issue, because it has remained unresolved, has grown into a serious challenge, having become particularly challenging after the end of the structure the Cold War gave to world affairs. A challenge to this difficulty is found in the recent global indigenous rights movement.

The notion that indigenous peoples should have the right to maintain their distinct cultures, lifestyles, and territories began developing in settler countries such as Australia, New Zealand, and the North American states in the 1960s. Over the past two decades, this concept has become widely accepted within the international community. Indeed, indigenous peoples are now rapidly emerging as important actors in international arenas, as reflected in such phenomena as the United Nations' International Decade of the World's Indigenous People from 1995 to 2004, and Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples promulgated in

2007.

Over the past two decades, a growing number of marginalised ethnic groups in Africa have begun to use the term “indigenous” to describe themselves in an attempt to draw attention to the form of discrimination from which they suffer. Representatives of different African ethnic minorities are beginning to form connections with the global indigenous rights movement and seek to draw attention to how dominant groups have repressed and marginalised them.

At the same time, the concept of indigenous peoples is highly contested in Africa compared to the more consensual state of affairs in White settler nations in North America and the Pacific (e.g., Saugestad, 2001; Pelican, 2009; Hodgson, 2011). Africa’s long and ongoing history of migration, assimilation, and conquest has resulted in varied and multifaceted relationships between its original occupants and incoming groups. This recurrence does not allow a consensus distinction that would clearly and permanently divide “first nations” from “dominant societies” (Pelican & Maruyama, 2015).

In 2006, the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR) clearly stated that in Africa, the term “indigenous” does not always refer to first inhabitants (ACHPR, 2006). The commission noted that constitutive elements or characteristics of indigenous peoples in Africa include self-identification; a special attachment to and use of traditional lands; and marginalisation, exclusion, or discrimination due to cultural differences in lifeways and/or modes of production. Unlike the cases of the settler nations of the Americas or the Pacific, the indigenous rights movement in Africa developed not only as a criticism of European colonialism and imperialism but in response to the policies adopted by independent, postcolonial African states. This movement highlights internal relationships that persist after liberation from colonial dominance.

The San, or Bushmen, a group of nomadic hunter-gatherers living in southern Africa, have been referred by the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights as a typical example of indigenous peoples (ACHPR, 2006). They have been involved in the global indigenous rights movement for the past two decades. In South Africa, the San are referred to together with the Khoi-Khoi pastoralists as *Khoi-San* and are regarded as “indigenous peoples of South Africa” by international organisations, the South African government, international and local nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), and the San themselves. The !Xun- and Khwe-speaking San in Platfontein, near the city of Kimberley, Northern Cape Province, are the well known indigenous groups in South Africa and play an important role in the indigenous rights movement (ILO/ACHPR, 2009). In 1999, they were granted Platfontein, 1.3 million hectares of land, by the South African government. This was hailed by many as a landmark in the struggle for the rights of indigenous peoples in Africa, where many governments are reluctant to even recognise the concept of indigenous rights.

However, the !Xun and Khwe do not reflect the typical image of indigenous peoples living a traditional way of life in their ancestral land. In South Africa, unlike Botswana or Namibia, it had long been believed that the San had nearly disappeared or were completely integrated into the majority South African society, and the !Xun and Khwe San had been displaced from their original home-

lands in Angola and Namibia and were only recently moving to South Africa to become citizens. This paper primarily addresses the following question: How did these recent immigrants become transformed into indigenous peoples of South Africa?

To answer this question, the first part of this paper traces the historical process of the !Xun's and Khwe's loss of their land in Angola, Namibia, and South Africa. The second part addresses the context of the emerging discourse on indigenous peoples in post-apartheid South Africa, focusing on the land gain movement, Khoi-San revivalism, and current economic circumstances. Unlike other indigenous rights movements, such as those for the rights of the San in Namibia and Botswana (Hitchcock & Vinding, 2005; Maruyama, 2012; Pelican & Maruyama, 2015), the case of the !Xun and Khwe has a unique trajectory because of the complex historical background of these groups. Examination of the situation can bring to the fore the possibilities and ambiguities inherent in the concept of indigenous, particularly in the African context. Several articles have already been written on the histories of the !Xun and Khwe, although most focus on a few select periods, particularly militarisation in Namibia and the first several years of the groups' residence in South Africa (e.g., Gordon, 1992; Lee & Hurlich 1982; Robbins, 2004; Uys, 1993). Based mainly on narratives by the !Xun and Khwe and historical documents, with reference made to academic articles and reports by NGOs and the government, this paper aims to cover the history of these groups, beginning from their lives in Angola to their current daily lives in Platfontein, to understand their claim of being indigenous peoples.

The main data for this paper were collected during field research in August 2010, August and September 2011, and September 2013 at Platfontein. Interviews in Platfontein were conducted with the help of local research assistants who interpreted in !Xun, Khwe, and English. Most informants were Khwe speakers, because the author was studying their language. Interviews were also conducted with non-San focusing on Platfontein issues, such as NGO workers, government officers, and military veterans.

## A HISTORY OF THE LOST HOMELAND OF THE !XUN AND KHWE SAN

The San are Khoi-San-speaking hunter-gatherers who have historically lived in southern Africa. They have been displaced and impoverished for many years because of the intrusions of Bantu-speaking agro-pastoralists, European colonialism, large-scale infrastructure projects, and concessions of land to corporate interests. Indeed, they are the most marginalised ethnic group in southern Africa, accounting for only a small percentage of the populations of Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, and Angola, their population totalling approximately 100,000 (Cassidy et al., 2001). They are subdivided into three main language groups, each consisting of many smaller language groups, such as !Xun, Khwe, Ju, G|ui, G|ana, and Hai||om (Güldemann, 2014).

The San currently living in Platfontein are !Xun and Khwe speakers who originally came from the southern part of Angola and the Caprivi Strip in the

northern part of Namibia. Their total population is estimated to be 6,500. A population study undertaken in 2010 counted 4,569 !Xun and 1,755 Khwe in Platfontein (SASI, 2010). The !Xun and Khwe can be divided into several language/area groups on the basis of differences in dialect and/or place of residence (Brenzinger, 2001: 58–62). Among the !Xun lived in southern Angola, three groups—the West !Xun, Mpungu !Xun, and Vasekela !Xun—were recognised, and the last two of these, which can be classified as Angolan !Xun, and the Northern cluster of the North-western branch of the Ju group (Takada, 2015: 12) are now found in Platfontein. The Khwe were widely distributed east of the !Xun's living area. Among the Khwe, five subgroups are reported: The ||Xom Khwe, Buma Khwe, and Ngarange Khwe lived in Angola, whereas the ||Xo Khwe and Buga Khwe were found in Namibia and Botswana. With the exception of the Buga Khwe, all of these groups are found in Platfontein.

The current Platfontein residents can be divided into three groups according to their route of migration. The first group mainly consists of the Vasekela !Xun and the ||Xom, Buma, and Ngarange Khwe. They moved from southeastern Angola to the Caprivi Strip in Namibia. The second group, mainly made up of Mpungu !Xun, moved from southeastern Angola to Otjozondjupa, former “Bushmanland” in Namibia. The third group is made up of the Khwe groups that originally lived in the Caprivi Strip (Fig. 1). Focusing on the Khwe in the first group, the largest of the three groups, the following sections describe their experiences of the moves. According to a report written in 1996, among all adult populations in South Africa at that time, 901 !Xun and 431 Khwe came from Angola, while 93 !Xun and 113 Khwe were born in Namibia (Archer, 1996).

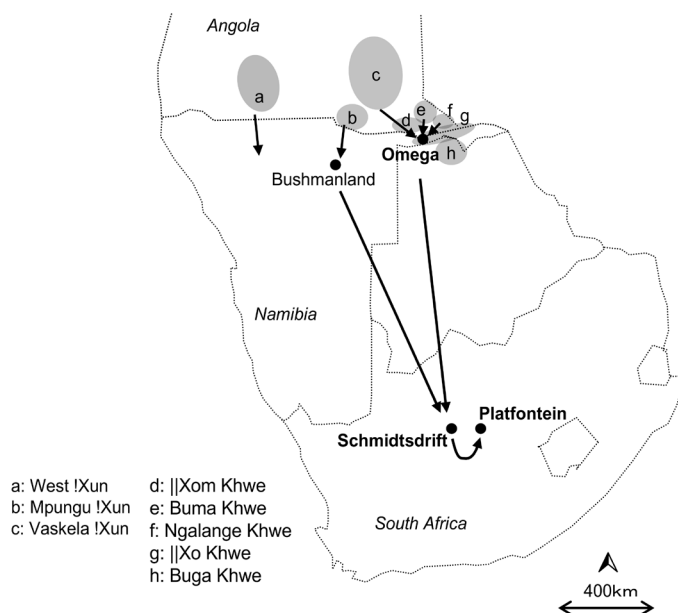


Fig. 1. Map of the migration route

## I. Fighting under the Portuguese in Angola

Until the 1960s, the majority of the Platfontein San lived in Angola and Namibia. Although relatively little is documented of the life of the San at that time, Estermann (1976) reported that 5,000 San were living in Angola in 1950s. He studied the !Xun peoples in Angola, finding that certain groups followed a life of hunting game and gathering wild fruit as late as 1954, while others were engaging in small-scale agriculture and livestock husbandry alongside their traditional hunting and gathering. Most of them had social and economic interactions with the powerful neighbouring Bantu-speaking agro-pastoral peoples (Estermann, 1976: 4–7). Among the San who moved from Angola to the Caprivi Strip, 70% had livestock and cultivated regularly (Gordon, 1992: 185). According to a middle-aged Khwe woman, A, life in Angola followed the following pattern: *My family had a small field. After planting, we left the field and went on hunting and gathering trips. We often moved to the riverside for fishing. When the harvest season came, we returned to our field to eat its products. Our life was mobile, depending on the season. (recorded 11/03/2010)*

B, an old Khwe man, did seasonal mine work in South Africa. This is estimated to have taken place in the 1950s: *Around our residence, there was plenty of wildlife. When I was a young man, I was a good hunter and made my clothes from animal skins. After I got married, my best friend and I went to South Africa as mine workers. We worked there for more than one year. On the way back to Angola, we stopped in a small town called Shakawe in northern Botswana. I bought six cattle and one plough with the wages of the mine and took them to my home. (recorded 08/30/2011)*

With the beginning of the Angolan war for independence in 1961, the lives of the informants changed drastically. Angola had been colonised by the Portuguese since 1483, but colonial power had had only a limited impact on the daily life of the San. Once the war for independence started, the Portuguese Army created units called Flechas (“bow and arrows”) composed mostly of San (Uys, 1993: 3–6). The Flechas were armed with rifles, and they specialised in tracking in bush environments, fighting against liberation forces such as the Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (MPLA), União Nacional para la Independência Total de Angola (UNITA), and Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola (FNLA).

The Khwe man B continued his story, telling of his first encounter with soldiers in Angola: *One night, I heard strange sounds from where my cattle were. The elders told me “it might be an ostrich. If it is ostrich, don’t kill it. An ostrich visiting a person’s residence may be a human who has changed form into an ostrich.” I went to the cattle kraal and carefully looked around. When I found some soldiers hiding in the bush, I was scared and started to shake. But they didn’t kill me. They just asked me if other soldiers had passed this area or not. They were an Ovambo [agro-pastoral peoples living in southern Angola and northern Namibia] man with two Khwe men. Then, the Ovambo soldier tried to recruit me, but I refused. I didn’t want to work under the Ovambo, because they had always mistreated us. After that, liberation soldiers came to our area several times, but my wife and I always escaped them. One day, a well-known Khwe*

*elder visited us with a Portuguese soldier. He told us that Portuguese soldiers are the people who helped when the Ovambo attacked. I liked the Khwe elder and decided to join the Flechas with him. (recorded 08/30/2011)*

The “Khwe elder” in this story was named Kamama, one of the first Flechas recruits. He and a !Xun soldier, Matoka, called their peoples to join the fight. One of the main streets in Platfontein, Kamatoka, is named after both of them together. They are still held in respect among the San in Platfontein.

In interviews, some former Flechas soldiers noted that they were distrustful of the freedom fighters because most of them were Bantu speakers, from groups that had wielded repressive control over the San for many years. The Portuguese army might have used these strained relations to recruit the San to their side. Others, when explaining why they had joined the Portuguese Army, said that they needed work, because it was no longer easy to travel to the South African mines to earn money. The Portuguese army could offer attractive economic benefits to the San.

Once many San started to join the Flechas, San were increasingly attacked by liberation forces. An elderly Khwe woman, C, remembered an attack: *One day, our village was attacked by armed guerrillas. I was still a young woman at that time. Some of us ran away, and others were killed. I was stabbed in my thigh. I tried to keep quiet and pretended I was dead. I knew that once I made a noise, I would immediately be killed. Luckily, they didn't find me. After waiting a while, I sat up and checked around me. It seemed that all the guerrillas had left already. My body started to tremble. The next day my family returned to take me to a clinic at a Portuguese army base. (recorded 11/03/2010)*

In 1975, Angola gained independence from Portugal, and the Portuguese withdrew. Conflict continued among MPLA, UNITA, and FNLA.

## II. The army camp as a centre of a development programme in Namibia

After Angola achieved independence, the Flechas were dismissed. Some of them joined FNLA, whereas others were attacked by other nearby peoples and fled south (Uys, 1993). They escaped to the Caprivi Strip with their families, fearing the conflict and retaliation in Angola. Many of them hid in the bush and came out only at night. An elderly woman, D, vividly remembered her long travel: *We travelled south with our neighbours. We were three families living in the same village. Every day, we walked in the bush, hunted small animals and gathered wild vegetables. My two small sons were excited to eat honey in the bush, but it was hard on us. One day, we passed a small village and found a !Xun man who used to work with my husband at a mine in South Africa. He showed us the way and we travelled together for a few days. Finally, we reached the river that is the border between Angola and Namibia. I was relieved. On the other side of the river, some of our relatives were waiting for us, and they took us to the army base. The news that the South African army was recruiting San people in Caprivi had gotten around. (recorded 08/30/2011)*

At the time of Angolan independence, Namibia, then called South West Africa, was under the control of the South African apartheid government. The South



Africa Defence Force (SADF) fought the Namibian liberation forces People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN) and the military wing of the South-West African People's Organisation (SWAPO) and carried out cross-border operations to intervene in the internal Angolan conflict among MPLA, UNITA, and FNLA. The South African government supported UNITA to demonstrate their solidarity with the West because MPLA was supported by the Soviet Union and Cuba. In opposition to the South African government, SWAPO collaborated with MPLA and attacked SADF from the Angolan side (Aoki, 2001). The San living in Namibia and Angola were drawn into this complicated conflict reflecting the structures of the Cold War and the independence movement in southern Africa.

Alpha, an SADF base, was established in the western Caprivi Strip, which was strategically important for intervention and defence. Under the apartheid regime, SADF organised all units in Namibia according to their tribe. At Alpha, only the San living in the area, mainly Khwe, were recruited and trained. Later, ex-Flechas soldiers escaping from Angola were also organised into the same unit.

Approximately 1,000 Ngarange Khwe had left Angola by the mid-1970s to join SADF (Brenzinger, 2001: 62). Between 1974 and 1978, approximately 6,000 !Xun left Angola because the Portuguese had withdrawn. Approximately 2,000 Vasekela !Xun went to live at Alpha, and 4,000 !Xun, mainly Mpungu !Xu, went to West Bushmanland in Namibia (Brenzinger, 2001: 56)

The numbers of those housed at Alpha were growing. SADF established a new army base for them, called Omega. The Omega unit, Battalion 31, was referred to as the "Bushman Battalion". In 1980, Omega housed 600 San soldiers and 250 White officers and soldiers. In addition, 700 women, 1,200 children and 200 older dependents lived at the base (Lee & Hurlich, 1982).

Omega was "the centre of a large-scale development programme" (Fourie, 1978, quoted by Lee & Hurlich, 1982: 339). The wages of SADF soldiers were sufficiently high, and their families got work as cooks and cleaners at the base. Furthermore, Civic Action Programmes were introduced there to provide medical services, teaching, technical training, veterinary services, and agricultural assistance (du Pisani, 1988). A school, a church, a hospital, stores, and skills training centres were set up. By 1982, 6,000 San soldiers and their families were housed at Omega.

According to Uys (1993), in 1978, 250 San children were enrolled in the Omega primary school and were studying in Afrikaans. Doctors and nurses were stationed at the hospital, and lectures on public health were given to the San women. The wives of White officers and soldiers also taught needlework, cooking, and baking to San women. Farms were established in some of the villages around the base to provide food for the army, leading resident San to learn farming skills and animal husbandry. Some San were baptised at the church. A "Bushman Council" was set up as a medium of communication between White officers and San leaders. Some members of SADF claimed that by militarising the San, they had taken the first step toward bringing them into modern society and civilisation.

The three groups of living quarters at the base were apportioned to Whites, !Xun, and Khwe, and no intermingling was allowed among them, in accordance

with the policies of apartheid. It was also strictly prohibited for the Bantus living nearby to enter the base. In an interview with the author, a former White SADF soldier emphasised that maintaining tribal divisions was “the most important discipline” at Omega. E, a middle-aged Khwe man who was employed by SADF, remembered the following: *Whites praised our skills and experience for living in bush. They sometimes believed that we had supernatural power! But we were never allowed to enter their living quarters. No, no. We just saw them from a distance. We were always separated from each other. (recorded 09/10/2013)*

The life of the San depended greatly on SADF, which was “the government of the area, the main employer, the main or sole source of health care and education and dominant source of ideology” (Lee and Hurlich, 1982: 336–337). The Bushman Battalion was important for SADF not only for its unique skills in survival in the bush but also because it showed them as the guardian of the San, giving their relationship a humanitarian appearance to evade critiques of apartheid (Robbins, 2004).

SADF worked to preserve certain aspects of traditional San culture. A newspaper from 1981 quoted a lieutenant as saying, “Our aim is not to Westernise them, but to make them better Bushmen.” Cultural events were held frequently, and San schoolchildren were regularly taken into the bush to encourage them to carry on their parents’ culture (Lee & Hurlich, 1982). It was believed that, through these cultural activities, they could retain their natural instincts and knowledge of the bush, which would enhance their capacity to track and perform well as soldiers.

Hunting and gathering among the San increased independent of SADF control. When they were escaping from Angola to the Caprivi Strip, they depended much more on hunting and gathering than before. The younger generation learned the knowledge and skills of hunting and gathering at that time. In addition, there were sufficient natural resources surrounding Omega, which had previously been less populated. Particularly in the late 1980s, short hunting and gathering trips occurred because military operations were less common, according to F, a young Khwe man: *My father was a soldier but later worked as cleaner and mechanic at Omega. My mother passed away when I was still very small, and my sister took care of me. Her husband was a soldier too. All of us were based in Omega, and sometimes stayed in its surrounding villages. Every day of the week, we were given meat and vegetables. While we had enough food, my family members loved to go fishing and gathering, and I always followed them. (recorded 11/09/2013)*

G, a primary school student at that time, told of his childhood days: *My father worked on the road maintenance for the Omega base and then got job at a restaurant serving the military. Most of the time, however, he was in the bush. He liked hunting and gathering a great deal. At the time when rumours of the end of the war were getting around, the soldiers went hunting with my father, because they had a lot of free time. That was the time when I learned how to hunt wildlife. The base gave us enough food and other necessities, so we just enjoyed hunting as a cultural activity. (recorded 09/09/2013)*

SADF withdrew from combat in Angola in 1988 and withdrew from Namibia in 1989. In the mid-1980s, economic sanctions were imposed on South Africa to



pressure its government to end apartheid. As a result, the government was forced to cut war expenditures in Angola and Namibia (Aoki, 2001: 106). Subsequently, SWAPO won the election in South West Africa, and that country became independent as Namibia in 1990. The San at Omega were urged to choose whether they would remain in Namibia now that it was ruled by their “enemy” SWAPO. E remembers a feeling of fear: *Everyone was afraid that SWAPO would come to kill us as soon as the SADF left. We discussed it every day. Everyone was scared. Most of us clearly remembered the fear we felt in Angola after Portuguese withdrawal. (recorded 09/10/2013)*

SADF gave the soldiers and their families the choice of moving with it to South Africa. G explained the reason his family decided to move to South Africa: *My parents told me that we should go to South Africa for my education. I didn't know anything about South Africa, but if I could go to school in South Africa, I needed to go. That is what I thought. (recorded 09/09/2013)*

Most of the !Xun and Khwe, such as G, had little information about South Africa. But time was limited. Half of them, about 3,720 individuals, ultimately chose to obtain South African citizenship and went to the Schmidtsdrift base.

### III. New life in South Africa

Schmidtsdrift base is located in the Northern Province of South Africa. It is surrounded by farming area, and the nearest town is 53 km away. At the base, the San were housed in 900 tents. SADF provided them a school, a clinic, and grocery stores as well as drinking water. The !Xun and Khwe set up their tents on either side of the centre of the settlement, and their living quarters were separated from each other. Up to that point, their unpredictable lives in tents had been going on for 13 years. The political transition in South Africa in the meantime greatly impacted their situation. In particular, after the post-apartheid Mandela government came to power in 1994, the status of the !Xun and Khwe became problematic.

In March 1993, near the end of the apartheid era, Battalion 31 was officially disbanded because SADF was no longer able to support the soldiers. According to Robins (2001: 9), by May 1999 only 360 San soldiers had been integrated into the post-apartheid South African National Defence Force (SANDF). Although others were employed by SANDF as clinic staff and cleaners or were producing arts and crafts projects the majority remained unemployed.

In addition, as part of land reform after the end of the apartheid regime, the Schmidtsdrift base was reclaimed by the Tswana-speaking Batlahpin community, which had been removed from the area in the 1960s when the original army base had been established. In 1994, the claim of the Batlahpin was accepted, and the government announced that Schmidtsdrift belonged to them.

According to a report written by a research group consisting of Platfontein residents (SASI, 2010), fears and uncertainty about the future were growing among the San at Schmidtsdrift in the early 1990s. The report found that at Schmidtsdrift during that period, the security provided by the army was disappearing, the new reality was looking increasingly threatening, unemployment

was beginning to be a serious problem, and disillusionment and feelings of having been betrayed were growing.

One of the research group members said that the population was greatly worried about their future: *Where should we go in this world? Will we be sent back to Namibia? Or will we be sent back to Angola? Everywhere, we are regarded as "enemies of Africans." Where can we live? That is how we thought in those days. (recorded 09/10/2013)*

Another woman, who was a high school student at the time, mentioned a different type of anxiety: *After we moved to South Africa, we met many people who had San ancestors. But they had forgotten their languages and cultures. They were just called "Coloured". I was afraid. We had now lost our place to live. Soon, we will be like them. We will forget our language. We will forget where we came from. I was scared. (recorded 09/13/2013)*

Because the !Xun and Khwe had fought against the allies of the new government, they believed that they would be considered enemies or an unpleasant reminder of the evils of apartheid. The situation reminded them of the hostility they had encountered in Angola and Namibia. Remaining in the new South Africa was challenging. At the same time, they knew that they could not return to Angola or Namibia and that they had to negotiate with the government to obtain land on which they could settle.

The independence of Angola and Namibia and the end of the apartheid regime did not mean liberation for the !Xun and Khwe. Rather, these historical events created new fears and oppression for these marginalised groups.

## EMERGING INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' DISCOURSE AMONG THE !XUN AND KHWE

This section analyses the emergence of an indigenous peoples' discourse among the !Xun and Khwe in post-apartheid South Africa. It focuses first on the experience of the !Xun and Khwe in land negotiations, second on the political landscape of post-apartheid South Africa, and third on the current economic situation of the San.

### I. Looking for land in South Africa

The !Xun's and Khwe's claims of being indigenous peoples were not automatically assured, because they had moved into South Africa with SADF only recently. Furthermore, they were regarded as having been supporters of the colonial and apartheid regimes. It was therefore crucial for them to change their image and to find a place in post-apartheid South Africa. At the same time, because of their long experience in military service, they had acquired knowledge, albeit imperfect, of modern negotiation styles, and they were able to initiate negotiations for land with the government. Many local organisations played important roles in the negotiations. At the same time, the !Xun and Khwe were looking for a way to be recognised as truly African rather than as supporters of colonial intruders.

Soon after the Battalion 31 was dismissed, they recognized the need to set up their own organisation and shape their own leadership structure to ensure their own future. First the former Bushman Council established at Omega was reorganised as the !Xun Traditional Council and the Khwe Traditional Council. Whereas the Bushman Council had been a reflection of the worldview of SADF, the !Xun Council and Khwe Council in Schmidtsdrift acted as “traditional leaders”, negotiating with the army, the government, other organisations, and the international community.

In 1993, the !Xun and Khwe Trust was created as a development body for the San (Robins, 2001: 13). The trust was expected to take on the responsibility of addressing the needs of the San in Schmidtsdrift. The trust consisted of 20 representatives of the !Xun and Khwe and 10 outsiders, representatives of the civilian and military realms. The trust brought in funding from overseas donors and supported San artwork as well as media coverage on the San. The trust also facilitated the presence of San representatives at international fora of indigenous peoples.

The trust soon had overwhelming debt and internal conflict among its members. In 1996, the Community Property Association (CPA) was set up, enabled by the CPA act of 1996, which allowed communities to form judicial persons to own and manage property. CPA displaced the trust and took responsibility for land issues.

Local NGOs also played an important role in finding new land. The South Africa San Institution (SASI) in particular, created in 1996, was responsible for the training and capacitation of community members and the enhancement of the !Xun and Khwe cultures. In 1997, the San people become part of SASI management structures (SASI, 2010) and entered into negotiations with the government to determine where they would be relocated.

International, regional, and local NGOs supporting indigenous peoples increased their activity in southern Africa in the mid-1990s. These NGOs built networks, worked together across borders, and connected global movements for indigenous rights (Pelican & Maruyama, 2015). SASI was one of the main actors in this group. It was originally founded with the support of a regional NGO called the Working Group for Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa (WIMSA), which provides support to indigenous minority groups in southern Africa, and became a member of KURU Family, an active Botswana-based NGO network dealing with San issues. Furthermore, SASI worked closely with the Indigenous People of Africa Community Council (IPACC), which deals with international issues related to indigenous peoples and has a seat on the Human Rights Commission of the United Nations. Through this indigenous network, the leaders of the councils, the trust, CPA, and SASI were often invited to international meetings dealing with indigenous peoples’ issues.

After a long and difficult process, in May 1999 the !Xun and Khwe finally obtained title deeds to the Platfontein from President Mandela during a special ceremony. Platfontein is an expansive landholding with a workshop, grazing land leased to European ranchers, a gypsum mine, rock art, a settlement with 6,500 residents, a road, and houses provided by the government. This marked important

progress for the indigenous rights movement in South Africa. It was through this process that the !Xun and Khwe identification as the “indigenous people of South Africa” was continually reinforced.

## II. Khoi-San revivalism in post-apartheid South Africa

How were the claims of the !Xun and Khwe of being indigenous peoples accepted or encouraged in the post-apartheid political landscape? To understand this, it is important to examine the history of the San in South Africa. The idea of the indigenous peoples of South Africa emerges at the point where two histories intersect: the migration history of the !Xun and Khwe San and the history of the decline of the San within South Africa.

Until 1994, it was believed that the South African San were a “dying race” (Barnard, 1992). Thousands of years ago, the Khoi-San were the exclusive occupants of significant portions of southern Africa, including the current country of South Africa. The two words in the expression “Khoi-San” refer San (also known as Bushman) or “hunter-gatherers” and Khoi-Khoi or “pastoralists”.

No later than the 4th century, Bantu-speaking African people, who now form the bulk of South Africa’s population, arrived in the area. The Khoi-San began to have relations and intermarry with these Bantu Africans and were eventually assimilated in some parts of southern Africa.

From the 17th century onward, colonialism placed enormous pressure on the Khoi-San living in what was to become South Africa. This differed from the situation of the San in Botswana or Angola, where colonial power was relatively limited. The British in particular made a great effort to develop colonial South Africa, as it was an important base from which they worked to expand their colonial power northward. The Khoi-San of South Africa guided early explorers into the interior, and later, in the face of European expansion, they fought to preserve their land, although most were killed or incorporated into colonial society. Some are now labourers on colonists’ farms or have intermarried with the Whites and their descendants, creating mixed-race offspring known as Bastards or Griqua. The original groups of the Khoi-San in South Africa thus became disorganised and lost their original languages.

According to Besten (2009), under colonial rule, the identities and political categories of the Khoi-San also changed. In the 19th century, the Khoi-San’s descendants were inconsistently classified as “Coloured” or “Native”. Certain colonial laws categorised all Khoi-San and Bantu people as “Aboriginal Native”, but other laws classified only the Griqua, the group of Khoi-San mixed with other ethnic groups, as “Coloured” and identified other Khoi-San descendants as “Native”. In the censuses of the early 20th century, all Khoi-San were included under “Coloured”, but in 1951, the San and Khoi-Khoi were again excluded from “Coloured” and classified as “Native”. From 1961, populations censuses used the term “Bantu” in place of “Native” and the San and Khoi-Khoi were thus classified as “Bantu”. However, many Khoi-San descendants were in practice treated as “Coloured”, a category that became increasingly associated with racial mixture in the 20th century. In this way, the Khoi-San became extinct in the eyes of the

law and at the census level, becoming assimilated with the “Coloured” and “Bantu” groups.

As part of the post-apartheid project of revising the White-centric histories of South Africa, the status of the Khoi-San was drastically changed. Instead of being associated with primitiveness and backwardness, the San or the Khoi-San identity was now reframed in a positive light.

First, representations of the San or Khoi-San came to characterise them as a community linking the past with the future or the singular and unified structure of South African culture. The San are seen as a group that preceded the many divided groups that now make up South Africa and therefore transcends them. A Khoi-San language is used for the motto on the South African coat of arms, “Diverse people unite” (Barnard, 2003).

For South Africa’s new government, there was an urgent need to have a symbol of nation building and to reconcile racial animosities. Furthermore, as a result of reflecting on apartheid, the government emphasises multiculturalism and respect for minority rights, at least in principle. The San can be a symbol of this post-apartheid regime, and thus the South African government is relatively open to negotiations with the San.

Second, the new regime ushered in the dawn of a new era in the identity politics of being “Coloured”. The development of identities more appropriate than the classification of “Coloured” was discussed, as many saw this category as belonging to the artificial impositions of apartheid. After the transition to democracy, some of the 2.5 million “Coloured” South Africans began to explore their roots and came to identify themselves as Khoi or San. Furthermore, the Khoi-San revivalism coincided with and was affected by the acceleration of the global indigenous movement, supported by international organisations in the late 1990s. The former “Coloured” Khoi-San proclaimed that their indigenous identity entitled them to access to resources.

The “Coloured” were the original inhabitants of territories that later became South Africa but had lost their languages, an important part of their distinctive cultures, and traditional ways of life, which could have been used to legitimise their indigenous identity. The !Xun and Khwe, in contrast, were seen as authentic San who had maintained their language and culture. Thus, they could be welcomed as important members of the indigenous peoples of South Africa. For the !Xun and Khwe, networking with other Khoi-San activists with more experience in political movements worked well.

Indeed, since the late 1990s, delegates from the !Xun and Khwe have participated in United Nations’ meetings as representatives of the indigenous peoples of South Africa, together with other groups of former “Coloured” Khoi-San peoples. At the national level, their presence as indigenous peoples is visible, along with a redefinition of their political ties to other San or Khoi-San in South Africa who worked for their official recognition. Representatives from the Schmidtsdrift/Platfontein community are important members of the National Khoi-San Council, a negotiating forum set up by former President Mandela to address the constitutional accommodation of the Khoi-San’s historical leadership and land rights. In this Council the !Xun and Khwe are considered the three main

San peoples in South Africa, together with the #Khomani in southern Kalahari. An interesting coincidence is that the Schmidtsdrift army base was located close enough to have direct communication with Grikwastad, a major town of the Grikwa people, a politically active group leading the Khoi-San revivalism. In addition to communicating among activists, the peoples of Schmidtsdrift and Grikwastad instruct one another through daily interactions.

### III. Economic circumstances in neoliberal South Africa

In considering the claims of the !Xun and Khwe to be indigenous peoples in South Africa, it is also important to mention the economic circumstances to which they were subjected. In South Africa, the post-apartheid government embraced the neoliberal free market paradigm and encouraged the economic independence of the San from the army, which was revamped under the new regime and was no longer able to support them. Together with the land rights movement, a movement for indigenous identity also grew, and the understanding of the San as indigenous peoples characterised by cultural distinctiveness is widely shared in public. It is understood that this image has great potential to yield economic benefit. NGOs, CBOs, and private companies became active in the post-apartheid era, creating jobs and economic opportunities related to the image of indigenous peoples.

NGOs were able to use the concept of the indigenous peoples to raise funds from international donors and to use some of the money raised to promote indigenous culture. Some NGOs, including SASI, engage in community tourism and cultural activities such as traditional dances, music, storytelling, and arts and handicrafts. Two cultural villages were established in the !Xun and Khwe residential areas and are used for cultural festivals, tourism, and meeting places for the !Xun Traditional Council and Khwe Traditional Council. Several cultural events took place during one short research period of only 2 weeks in 2010. On one day, a workshop was held in which youths discussed traditional San culture: on another day, San groups presented traditional dances for a German media group, and the largest cultural event was a 4-day workshop of San arts, with 200 people participating per day. During the same research period, a drama project showing the San's historical experiences was in progress, and the actors and actress chosen from the community were practising every day for public performances in a few big cities in South Africa.

The largest national broadcasting company in the country, the South African Broadcasting Corporation, employs the San as directors and employees of community FM radio broadcasting in the !Xun and Khwe languages. These broadcasts began in 2000, when the San were still at Schmidtsdrift. At that time, CPA expressed concern over the deterioration of their language under the influence of Afrikaans as abridging language, and they asked to be allowed to set up community radio (The Development Connection, 2005). The programme in the !Xun and Khwe languages air from 6 AM to 6 PM and include national and international news and music, announcements of local events, interviews with traditional leaders, and traditional stories from elderly individuals.



The rock art of the Platfontein and the museum showcasing it make up an attractive tourist destination and are educational facilities as well. A few San are employed as guides, and others can sell their arts and crafts at the museum shop. Galleries in Kimberley also buy San handicrafts and arts to sell to wealthy South Africans. Furthermore, one security company preferentially employs the San, because many White South Africans believe that the hunter-gatherers and former soldiers, with their extensive knowledge of the bush, are better ranch guards.

These activities and jobs have created opportunities for some San to have relatively high incomes, engage constantly with their history and culture, and reinforce their identity as indigenous peoples of South Africa. Opportunities are limited and cannot cover the entire community, with its more than 6,000 people. Those who have managed to find employment in Platfontein are mainly highly educated, richer individuals or those who come from the families of soldiers with high status. Still, the discourse and information on the San's history and indigenous identity are disseminated at workshops, at meetings, through community radio broadcasts, and in daily life. During a workshop for youth and traditional leaders meeting during one research period, the participants frequently discussed their indigenous identity in a very broad sense. They argued that the whole of modern South Africa was historically the San land, as reflected in rock paintings found by archaeologists in various locations in the country. Furthermore, they argued that with the arrival of the Bantu people and the European colonial intruders in historical times, they were pushed northward until they arrived in Angola, but now they were back on their ancestral land. They engage constantly with their history and culture, even if they reconstruct themselves from a contemporary viewpoint, for example by reading books about rock paintings, listening to radio interviews with elders about the old days, and collecting individual family histories.

## CONCLUSION

The possibilities and limits of the claims of indigenous peoples in the African context are finally being openly discussed. In 1960s, the !Xun and Khwe received special treatment from the colonial government, namely, their recruitment in Angola and Namibia by colonial armies, because they were “San/Bushman hunter-gatherers”. Because of this treatment, the !Xun and Khwe lost their traditional ways of life at an earlier point in time, but acquired much experience with self-organisation while serving in the army. In the 1970s and 1980s, they experienced sedentarisation and a development programme at the Omega army base in Namibia, which was continued at the Schmidtsdrift army base in South Africa. The apartheid regime in Namibia and South Africa strengthened tribal divisions and enhanced the group's San-ness.

In the 1990s, the !Xun and Khwe lost their land a third time. In 1993, near the end of the apartheid era, the Bushman Battalion was officially disbanded and the Schmidtsdrift base was reclaimed by the Batlahpin peoples. These events coincided with the global indigenous rights movement expanding to include Africa.

Immediately after their displacement, the global movement provided a platform where they could put forward their claims against the postcolonial governments and the majority populations who had marginalised them.

The !Xun and Khwe, along with other “Coloured” peoples, were victims of the long period of colonialism and apartheid, and they remain marginalised even after their countries’ liberation from colonial dominance. Use of the concept of indigenous peoples allowed them to obtain access to land and resources, economic opportunity, and political recognition. Their success appears to be due to the unique combination of their long history of struggle to find a place to settle, the post-apartheid political landscape, and global neoliberal economic circumstances.

For those who were marginalised in postcolonial states, decolonisation is still a progressive issue. The earnest hope of the !Xun and Khwe to find their place in the state motivated them to connect with the global indigenous rights movement. Compared to groups of San in different countries, such as those in the Central Kalahari in Botswana, where much ethnographic work has been done (Solway, 2011; Maruyama, 2012; Pelican & Maruyama, 2015), it is clear that the !Xun’s and Khwe’s participation in the indigenous rights movement was more self-driven and upheld by individuals who were already experienced in self-organisation and political activism. In addition, the network among the Khoi-San or “Coloured” activists, who have different sociohistorical backgrounds and experiences in political movements, was well developed. In South Africa, as this paper shows, the concept of indigenous peoples was reconstructed not to exclude migrants from other countries such as !Xun and Khwe and even people mixed with other ethnic groups, such as the “Coloured”. This was achieved by their long-term political activism.

At the same time, it should be pointed in the end that a new type of exclusion is emerging among people who may identify themselves as indigenous peoples. Emphasizing the cultural distinctiveness of indigenous peoples runs the risk of excluding minorities who have already lost much of their distinctive cultures. The indigenous rights movement in Africa grew in response to the policies of postcolonial African states, as this case shows. Today, discussions of indigenous African peoples focus not only on European colonialism but also on cultural distinctiveness and attachment to land, which are considered common and important indigenous attributes. However, these latter points are the cause of certain dilemmas within the indigenous rights movement in Africa. As has happened with the “Coloured”, because of long-term oppression, some groups have lost their culture and language. For individuals who willingly or unwillingly relinquished much of their distinctive culture, and who for better or worse have adopted different lifestyles, it is not easy to claim to be indigenous peoples.

Even the culture of the !Xun and Khwe, which is often considered authentic San culture, has been reshaped by exposure to the apartheid army and more recently by indigenous movements, perhaps even by the groups themselves for their own commercialisation. Recognition of indigenous rights and the commodification of indigenous cultures do not eliminate the compulsion to equate authentic indigeneity with the premodern. This state creates the risk for a retraditionalisation of the San, just as SADF tried to preserve San-ness. Today,

there exist peoples who do not have opportunities to practice their traditional cultural activities or the employment opportunities provided by NGOs and corporations in Platfontein. Moreover, it is difficult for the !Xun and Khwe to manage their lives in Platfontein, on the outskirts of the city of Kimberly, where neither subsistence hunting-gathering nor agro-pastoralism is suitable. Many San have recently left Platfontein to work as manual labourers in commercial farms owned by Whites located hundreds of kilometres away. The irony is that although the San have gained the legal right to the land, some are in fact excluded from it for economic reasons. This newly emerging exclusion remains a significant future challenge.

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