"We have come out of one place: it is called Omega"  
An ethnographic study on the role of context in understanding mental suffering among the !Xun and Khwe of South Africa  
den Hertog, T.N.
Diversity behind constructed unity: the resettlement process of the !Xun and Khwe communities in South Africa

Figure 5: memorial site at the centre of Platfontein, commemorating Battalion 31 soldiers and affiliates who died in battle. Photo by author.

Published as:
CHAPTER 2

Abstract

The identity politics in the land distribution arrangement of the !Xun and Khwe were heavily dependent on the notion of one commonly shared community identity. However, this politically constructed identity does not match differences experienced on the ground. The !Xun and Khwe were resettled in 2004, moving from their temporary settlement at an army base to a township near Kimberley. To date, they do not seem to resemble a coherent community pursuing the goal of ‘cooperative production’, deemed so important by land reform policies. This paper argues that forced togetherness of the past, collective identities ascribed by others and actively taken up by the !Xun and Khwe, and the socio-political context at the time of resettlement negotiations informed the delineation of community boundaries that preferred constructed unity over experienced diversity.
Introduction

By late 2003 and early 2004, approximately 4500 !Xun and Khwe were relocated from their temporary tented camp in Schmidtsdrift, where they had lived for 13 years, to their newly developed township near Kimberley, Northern Cape, South Africa. The !Xun and Khwe came to Schmidtsdrift in 1990 when they left Namibia with the South African Defence Force (SADF) (South African San Institute, n.d.). Some !Xun and Khwe served in the SADF and were actively involved in the armed struggle against Namibian independence, the so-called border war and counter-insurgency war (Kamongo & Bezuidenhout, 2011). The first signs of possible relocation from Schmidtsdrift came in 1992 when the Batlhaping people filed a land claim on land which at that point was governmental property and was used by the SADF (Douglas, 1997). The Batlhaping claimed land rights under the land restitution arrangement, arguing that they had been wrongfully dispossessed of their land in the 1960s (Douglas, 1997; Sharp & Douglas, 1996). The approval of the land claim in 1994 meant the imminent forced relocation for the !Xun and Khwe. This made the !Xun and Khwe land redistribution and resettlement arrangement somewhat different from regular restitution or redistribution arrangements in which claimants move willingly onto their acquired land or are able to acquire the land they are already living on or using for production purposes. The so-called willing seller, willing buyer policy implies voluntary resettlement on both sides. However, in this case, the restitution land claim won by the Batlhaping people displaced the !Xun and Khwe. The negotiation for resettlement conditions of the !Xun and Khwe passed several phases in which one of the important issues was how the !Xun and Khwe would be positioned in relation to each other. According to a community member and a facilitator from outside the community, who took part in the negotiations, several options were on the table: the acquisition of different properties for both groups, two separate townships on one property and one township in which the !Xun and Khwe would be separated by shared facilities. Despite the strong wish and attempts of the !Xun and Khwe to go their separate ways during their resettlement, they were finally resettled together in one township.

In the Platfontein township, the !Xun and Khwe currently live together and share facilities such as a primary school and clinic. At the same time, the !Xun youth play sports within !Xun teams, the Khwe youth play in Khwe teams, tourism projects often involve only !Xun or only Khwe, and both the !Xun and Khwe have separate leadership structures. The !Xun and Khwe live together but appear to go their separate ways. This is most apparent in fact that the !Xun and Khwe reside on different sides of the township. In addition to geographical separation, their languages are also distinct (Sidel Saugestad, 2004a) and form a language barrier: !Xun and Khwedam languages are spoken by 56% and 35% of the Platfontein population, respectively (Letsoalo, 2010). Community members have also reported outbursts of violence between the two groups as recently as 2004/2005. Separation and signs of antagonism are not the sole characteristics of the !Xun and Khwe relationship. For

---

5 Symbols such as ‘!’ and ‘≠’ are used to indicate ‘click’ sounds in pronunciation.
6 Although intended as temporary settlement, it took on a more permanent character as years progressed.
7 Before the official dawn of the democratic South Africa in 1994, the national government sought to redress certain wrongs of the Apartheid past and created the Advisory Commission on Land Allocation to redress land issues (Douglas, 1997).
8 Interviews took place in March and April of 2012 and were done on a confidential basis, therefore, all information derived from interviews is anonymous.
9 Communication between the two groups is facilitated by translations by people who speak both languages and by using Afrikaans as a lingua franca (spoken by 43%) (Letsoalo, 2010).
example, there are known cases of intermarriage between both groups and when necessary, the !Xun and Khwe are able to work together – for example, at the local radio station. The !Xun and Khwe are also united in a Communal Property Association (CPA) in which the separate leadership structures meet to discuss issues that concern both groups and to communicate and negotiate with stakeholders from outside the township, such as the provincial government and non-governmental organisations. In addition, when venturing into tourism, they portray a united image of themselves as San or Bushmen. Despite this united image in tourism, they have separate groups in arts and crafts projects, have built two separate cultural villages for tourism and perform traditional dances separately.

Land reform and development are often considered to go hand in hand. The redistribution grant given to the !Xun and Khwe came with the condition of a ‘comprehensive resettlement and development scheme’ (Douglas, 1997: 48), which included an economic communal development plan. This is consistent with Kepe’s (Kepe, 1999) idea of a hidden presumption of cooperative production (namely, groups of people or communities who form a legal entity work together in agricultural or other production activities) in market-led land reform, specifically the application/grant- based approach. As requested by the government, an economic development plan was commissioned by the !Xun and Khwe Trust in 1996. Several scenarios for economic development were devised, such as a diversity of farming projects, tourism, diamond mining and commercial development (South African San Institute, 2010). It is unclear how decisions were made regarding the actual development of these scenarios. However, no large-scale farming projects were visible during my fieldwork, and tourism development was only present in arts and crafts projects and the Wildebeestkuil Rock Art centre. Other joint tourism developments, such as a lodge, game farming and cultural villages, had been initiated but had failed. It appears that cooperative production is a difficult goal to reach for the !Xun and Khwe and that a coherent, united community has not yet been created. The 2010 Platfontein community development plan is evident of this as it mentions the growing tension and the increasing conflicts between the !Xun and Khwe (South African San Institute, 2010). The title of the development plan, Pangakokka, translates into teamwork/cooperation (South African San Institute, 2010), which further stresses the perceived importance of overcoming tensions and conflicts for development.

Considering their explicit wish to go their separate ways during the resettlement, their sense of belonging to two distinct communities and their separate way of living in the Platfontein township, one wonders whether the apparent difficulty of ‘cooperative production’ could not have been foreseen. Resettlement from the military base in Schmidtsdrift was an opportunity for the communities to go their separate ways. Instead, the outcome of the resettlement negotiations delineated community boundaries in such a way that both groups were seen as one.

In this article, I will explore the identity politics and contextual factors that may have informed decisions regarding the delineation of community boundaries. First, the idea of natural communities will be reviewed through a historical analysis. Second, the indigenous

---

10 The naming of San communities is under continuous negotiation; names such as ‘Bushman’ are often said to have derogatory connotations. However, in other occasions, these names are actively taken up by San peoples. ‘San’ is often considered to be the politically correct name, although at times also perceived as having derogatory connotations.
identity of the !Xun and Khwe and the international indigenous peoples’ debate are discussed to increase our understanding of how an indigenous identity was taken up or ascribed, and recognized, during the resettlement process. And third, as the resettlement and its preceding negotiations took place in the period between 1990 and 2004, the socio-political context of moving from a racially segregated towards a unified democratic South Africa is taken into consideration. Before going further, I briefly reflect on experiences of delineating community boundaries in land reform processes.

Delineating community boundaries in land reform

Delineating community boundaries is a necessary part of land reform policies, first, because the beneficiaries must be defined. Even though South African land policy mentions both individuals and groups of people or communities as possible applicants (Government of South Africa, 1997), Kepe argues that the underlying assumption is ‘that coherent rural communities are the main beneficiary’ (Kepe, 1999: 417 emphasis added). The origin of this focus on communities may lie in the long history of communal tenure in (South) Africa. The disruption of these systems during colonisation and the Apartheid era now presents challenges to restoring these systems within current legal structures (Cousins & Claassens, 2005). Group-based rights, vested in a collection of people or communities, create the opportunity for a group of people to initiate a land claim and, when acquired, hold and manage the property according to the wishes of the community members. The Communal Property Associations Act facilitates this process in that it ‘enables communities to form juristic persons’ (Government of South Africa, 1996: 1). The focus on communities as beneficiaries may also be illustrated by the grant-based approach in redistribution arrangements that allow households to obtain a maximum grant of R16,000 for the purchase of land, infrastructure and development (Cliffe, 2000). Conventionally, these household grants are pooled to make joint projects possible, and this requires households to be grouped together to form a community. Second, delineating community boundaries is necessary as development through cooperative production is considered an indispensable step following procurement of land rights. Kepe (1999) argues that cooperative production is a hidden presumption in land reform. Groups of people or communities are apparently considered to be useful or ‘natural’ units for claiming land rights; however, this is not unproblematic. Both Cliffe (2000) and Kepe (1999) focus on the complexity of delineating community boundaries in land reform.

The complexity of the notions of ‘community’ or ‘local community’ is not only a challenge to South African land reform but also to other land-related approaches, such as community-based natural resource management (CBNRM). Kumar (2005), for instance, focuses on the notion of community in CBNRM, making the diversity of hidden meanings visible. Some of the characteristics that are ascribed to community are shared locality; economic, social and ethnic relations and a homogenous structure and norms and values (Kumar, 2005). Kepe (1999) distinguishes yet another range of characteristics for the notion of community in land reform, namely, that definitions of communities are often based on spatial units, economic units and units consisting of a web of kinship, social and cultural relations. Both Kumar (2005) and Kepe (1999) demonstrate the difficulties of using the ambiguous notion of community in land-related decision-making processes. For example, Kepe (1999) argues that the spatial unit is often used to describe communities in South African development planning. However, it is argued that there are many features of communities that transcend...
The notion of community and its boundaries thus appears to be highly elusive and complex in general, and problematic in its operationalisation in land reform. At the same time, it is difficult to step away from the definition entirely and solely base land reform on individual claims. Delineation of community boundaries is a dynamic process. Boundaries can, for example, be defined by spatial, economic or social relations, by a variety of actors (for example, academics, community members and governmental institutions) and may change over time. Lamont and Molnár (2002: 168) emphasise the social construction of boundaries and define symbolic boundaries as ‘conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorise objects, people, practices, and even time and space. They are tools by which individuals and groups struggle over and come to agree upon definitions of reality’. This definition of reality is a mere representation and not an absolute truth as it only serves as a tool to ‘capture dynamic dimensions of social relations’ (168). These dynamic dimensions appear to become static when a notion such as community is operationalized in land reform cases; dynamic dimensions are temporarily overlooked, ignoring the multiple realities on the ground. This case study sheds light on the dynamic dimensions of social relations of the !Xun and Khwe while they become static at other levels, such as in the land reform arrangement.

**Natural communities**

The notion of natural communities is used in this paper to describe the way in which the !Xun and Khwe are perceived as belonging to each other beyond any doubt. This natural community has probably been constructed on the grounds of historical togetherness, and the labels that have been used to describe this group of people. One community member, who took part in the negotiation process, argued that they could not be separated because they have ‘come out one place, it’s called Omega [the army base in Namibia]’, suggesting that a historical togetherness is perceived by others. The following section examines processes behind this historical togetherness and the way in which the !Xun and Khwe were considered, by themselves and others, to be similar to and different from one another. For this paper, the starting point of the historical analysis is defined as the time at which the !Xun and Khwe were involved in the Angolan War of Independence in the 1960s, the first occasion when the Angolan !Xun and Khwe started to live in close proximity.

The Angolan !Xun and Khwe lived, respectively, in the south and south-east parts of Angola when the war of independence started in the early 1960s (Sharp & Douglas, 1996). In the Angolan War of Independence, people rather than territorial ground were the main objective (Brinkman, 2005). The Portuguese were keen to involve the ‘Bushmen’ on their

---

11 Brinkman (2005) is one of the rare English sources to describe events during the Angolan War of Independence through stories of refugees. It must be said that refugees and army officials are the only ones heard; the !Xun and Khwe of the Flechas unit were not heard. Portuguese sources may yield more details concerning the involvement of the !Xun and Khwe in the Portuguese army.
side because they were thought to possess great knowledge of the area and exceptional tracking skills (Battistoni & Taylor, 2009). Many were incorporated into the Portuguese army as auxiliaries (Flechas) which was the first time that the !Xun and Khwe came to live in close proximity. Despite serving in the same unit, the Portuguese made distinctions between the !Xun and Khwe which resulted in different task descriptions: the !Xun were mostly assigned as guards, while the Khwe served in offence units (Sharp & Douglas, 1996). The reason that the Khwe were assigned to offence units is often credited to the social inequality between them and their Bantu neighbours, who were mostly supporters of União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (UNITA). The Portuguese sought to capitalise on this apparent antagonism by putting the Khwe in the front line against their former neighbours (Battistoni & Taylor, 2009; Sharp & Douglas, 1996).

After the independence of Angola, the !Xun and Khwe were facing retribution because of their involvement in the Portuguese army, with many local people even expressing a wish for their extermination (Brinkman, 2005). Most of the Khwe sought refuge in neighbouring countries (Sharp & Douglas, 1996), while some of the !Xun, on the other hand, were able to find refuge within the Frente Nacional para a Libertação de Angola (FNLA) (Battistoni & Taylor, 2009; Sharp & Douglas, 1996). The FNLA was a non-Marxist movement with close ties to the SADF and, after the disintegration of the FNLA, the !Xun used these ties to join the SADF (Sharp & Douglas, 1996). In addition, !Xun and Khwe who had found refuge in the Caprivi Strip, Namibia, were recruited by the SADF using contacts with Portuguese army officials (David Robbins, 2007). The SADF also recruited large numbers of local Khwe people from the Caprivi Strip Area.

In the SADF, the !Xun and Khwe served together in a special ‘Bushman battalion’. The SADF made the ‘Bushman battalion’ an attraction, putting them on display (Sharp & Douglas, 1996). Contradictory to the collective identity of ‘Bushmen soldiers’, distinctions were made between the !Xun and Khwe. The Angolan Khwe were of specific interest to the SADF because of their experience of serving in offensive units and because of their knowledge of south-eastern Angola. The !Xun, on the other hand, were mostly valued for maintaining the image of a ‘Bushman battalion’, as they were considered to have more stereotypical physical features. Maintaining the ‘Bushman battalion’ as an effective unit and fulfilling to stereotypes, forced them again to live and work in close proximity (Sharp & Douglas, 1996). During their time in the SADF, the !Xun and Khwe always maintained separate living quarters. Whether this was achieved through efforts of the !Xun and Khwe or forced upon them by army personnel is unclear. Robbins (2006) does mention that conflicts between groups forced rigid and apparently necessary segregation in living quarters. The different positions and qualities ascribed to the !Xun and Khwe by the SADF, and segregation in living quarters, probably helped to fuel antagonism between the two groups.

---

12 ‘Flechas’ literally translates into ‘arrows’ (Brinkman, 2005) but is also translated as ‘irregulars’ and those whose members came from different places (like arrows).
13 In the end, thousands of Angolan San were killed in the periods just before and after independence (Battistoni & Taylor, 2009; South African San Institute, n.d.).
14 The offensive role of the Khwe left them with no other choice than to find refuge in neighbouring countries (Sharp & Douglas, 1996).
15 Incentives for joining the SADF are diverse, from economic to social benefits, at the same time fear for retribution of Angolan liberation forces could also be seen as an incentive (Battistoni & Taylor, 2009).
16 The San have a long history of being put on display, see for example Gordon & Sholto-Douglas (2000) and Skotnes (1996).
CHAPTER 2

After the independence of Namibia in 1990, the SADF offered the ‘Bushmen soldiers’ the opportunity to go to South Africa. About two-thirds of one battalion and half of another battalion opted to go to South Africa (South African San Institute, n.d.), no doubt motivated by the possibility of retribution. Approximately 3000-4000 people, 500 of whom were veterans, lived in tents on the SADF army base in Schmidtsdrift from 1990 until 2004 (South African San Institute, n.d.). Their placement at the Schmidtsdrift army base put them together once again as ‘Bushmen soldiers’ from Namibia and Angola. Additionally, the ‘Bushman’ identity was further emphasized by the !Xun and Khwe when they embraced an indigenous identity (explained in more detail below) that reinforced their collective identity to the outside world. At the same time, the !Xun and Khwe saw themselves as separate communities which is evident from their separate living areas in the tented camp and the explicit use of their names in the public domain (e.g. Smith, 2004). Their aspiration for separate identities can also be recognized in the naming of a Trust17: they could have named it the Schmidtsdrift Trust or Schmidtsdrift San Trust if they had wanted to maintain a common indigenous identity. Instead, they chose to name it the !Xun and Khwe Trust, explicitly referring to the existence of two communities. The naming of other shared structures was done in a similar fashion, for example; the Xunkhwesa combined school and the XK FM community radio station.

The idea of a natural community appears to have been constructed by a variety of collective identities, ascribed by others and taken up by them. At the same time, differences between the !Xun and Khwe were evident both within the communities and to persons or institutions that were familiar with them. At times, these differences were presented to the outside world by the combined names of shared institutions and facilities. The separate representation of the !Xun and Khwe was, however, not strong enough to break their collective identity within the resettlement negotiations.

**Indigenous identity and land rights**

The use of an indigenous cultural identity to build a community identity in land reform arrangements is of particular interest for the !Xun and Khwe resettlement case as they are considered to belong to one of the indigenous peoples of Southern Africa: the San (Sidsel Saugestad, 2004b). The term indigenous is often used to describe specific groups of people, yet there is no universally accepted definition available. In addition, it is used interchangeably with ‘first nations’, ‘native’, ‘aboriginal’ and ‘tribal’ peoples. Depending on geographical area, one concept may be used more often than the other: first nations, for example, is most frequently used in Northern America, while aboriginal is most common in Australia and New Zealand. Characteristics generally attributed to indigenous peoples comprise of: being a minority with a different language, tradition and way of life; having a relationship to a specific territory which is described as special in terms of cultural/spiritual meaning; being descendants of the ‘first’ occupants or having a considerably long history of

---

17 A trust was formed to ‘address the needs and rights of the !Xun and the Khwe’ (South African San Institute, n.d.:24) and could also be seen to be as a response to the uncertain future due to the changes in the government of South Africa and also the transformation of the SADF into the South African National Defence Force.
occupancy compared to other peoples and having experienced a long period of de facto self-governance.\(^\text{18}\)

The operationalisation of indigenous identity on the basis of these characteristics is, however, highly problematic (see Bowen (2000) for further discussion). Indigenous-ness, namely, the nature of being indigenous, is fraught with additional difficulties in Africa. These are connected to the high degree of historical movements of many African peoples (De Bruin, Van Dijk, & Foeken, 2001) which makes it difficult for one group of people to claim they were somewhere ‘first’. Some governments in Southern Africa (for example, Botswana and Namibia) have consequently denied the existence of indigenous minorities and claim that all citizens of their country are indigenous, making it difficult for communities to claim rights on the basis of an indigenous identity (Hitchcock, 2002; Taylor, 2007). The fourth characteristic, experiencing a period of self-governance, is also problematic in portraying an indigenous African identity, given that colonisation effectively ended any self- governance of African communities. Nonetheless, African communities do take up indigenous identities in their struggle for land resources, generally emphasising distinctions in culture and a connection to the land in terms of spiritual/cultural meaning, subsistence pattern (for example, hunting-gathering) and period of occupancy.

Embracing a San indigenous identity is often seen as a strategic attempt to effectively separate themselves from other minorities and claim certain land rights (see, for example, Hitchcock (2002); Sylvain (2002). Even though indigenous land rights are mostly unrecognized in Southern Africa, legal frameworks focusing on land dispossession require claimants to provide clear community boundaries and a genealogical connection to the dispossessed community. This means that groups of people are encouraged to ‘package their claims in terms of ahistorical and bounded definitions of “tribal communities”’ (Robins, 2000: 60). In addition, Robins notes that lawyers representing indigenous communities have found that ‘stressing aboriginal and tribal status has tended to draw positive responses and interest from general public and state’ (60). Indeed, in several communications of the South African government, we can observe the different position ascribed to indigenous peoples, specifically KhoiSan. The Green Paper on Land Reform, for example, uses the term ‘African people’, but the authors have deemed it necessary to include in brackets ‘a definition which includes the San and Khoi’ (Government of South Africa, 2011: 2). In the State of the Nation Address of 2012, President Jacob Zuma referred explicitly to the empowerment of Khoi-San communities through the National Traditional Affairs Bill (Government of South Africa, 2012). In a recent announcement of new policy on land restitution, the African National Congress (ANC) stated: ‘A re-opening of land claims “specifically for the KhoiSan people” who had until 2013 to lodge land claims’ (Tolsi, 2012). Lastly, during the signing ceremony of the #Khomani San (a collection of San people in the southern parts of the Kalahari Desert in South Africa) land claim in 1999, Derek Hanekom, the then minister for Agriculture and Land Affairs, paid explicit attention to the cultural and indigenous identity of the beneficiaries:

\[
\text{The quest for truth has been part of the } \#\text{Khomani San}\text{'s struggle. The revivals of the language and culture gives proof that } \#\text{Khomani San are who they claim to be: the first people of this country who know the truth about the natural world and the truth}\]

\(^{18}\) These characteristics are visible in the United Nations’ Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (United Nations, 2007).
CHAPTER 2

*about our painful history.* (Hanekom, 1999 emphasis added)

**!Xun and Khwe indigenous identity**

The indigenous identity of the !Xun and Khwe has, at times, been actively pursued by the people themselves and, at other times, assigned by others. Sans’ indigenous identity is highly cultural and often contains primordial undertones, which in the past positioned them at the bottom of social hierarchy. This was also the case with the !Xun and Khwe, preceding and during their time in the Portuguese and South African armies. Army personnel ascribed primordial stereotypes, such as superior tracking instincts and animal traits, to ‘Bushmen soldiers’.

During their time in Schmidtsdrift and, later, in Platfontein, the indigenous identity, albeit without certain previously ascribed stereotypes, was actively sought after by the !Xun and Khwe Trust (to be transformed into !Xun and Khwe CPA), and especially by the !Xun (Sharp & Douglas, 1996). They did this by representing ‘Bushman qualities’ in the media, attending meetings of the International Working Group of Indigenous Affairs (Sharp & Douglas, 1996), affiliation with the Working Group of Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa and the (South African San Institute, n.d.). Their indigenous identity assisted them in raising funds from international donors and was, of course, far more beneficial than their alternative image of former Apartheid ‘mercenaries’ (Douglas, 1997; Sharp & Douglas, 1996). This indigenous ‘Bushman’ identity is also beneficial in tourism. It is actively used in cultural tourism projects, such as arts and craft making and in a project initiated by SASI called *Footprints of the San* that ‘enables the San to utilise their traditional knowledge for a commercial benefit’ (South African San Institute, n.d.: 29), and the Wildebeest Rock Art Centre. The presence of ancient rock art of the San peoples probably played a role in the decision-making process regarding the purchase of land for resettlement. Indigenousness is beyond doubt part of the !Xun and Khwe identity either constructed by others or actively pursued by themselves.

Douglas (1997) discusses ‘Bushman qualities’ and the role of the South African government in the resettlement of the !Xun and Khwe. Although there was never any official recognition of this, indigenous identity may have played a role in the decision-making process concerning resettlement. Douglas (1997) argues that if indigenous identity was, indeed, a decisive element in resettlement, it might pave the way for ethnic group-based rights which would lead to polarisation. State intervention should, instead, be endorsed in ‘accordance with the rights, whatever they may be, of South Africans’ (1997: 63). The problem of ethnic group-based rights, as posed by Douglas, lies in the history of Apartheid and its group-based rights. At several times the South African government did, however, seem to give indigenous peoples a special position. This may be explained in several ways. First, indigenous people are said to have suffered immensely under colonialism and Apartheid and would, therefore, deserve special attention in terms of reconciliation. Second, indigenous people may serve to reaffirm a shared identity as ‘African’ or ‘South African’. Positioning a group as the first people of Africa paints a picture

---

of a shared history, namely, the old and harmonious Africa before colonisation and Apartheid. For whatever reason, a recognized indigenous identity assists communities in gaining positive attention from public and politics. In the case of the !Xun and Khwe, their indigenous identity probably helped create a distance from their involvement in the SADF. This, in turn, facilitated their opportunities to attain grants from the government and donations from donors. However, delineating community boundaries, consciously or unconsciously, at the indigenous San or ‘Bushman’ level may have made their wish of living separately more difficult to achieve.

**Socio-political context**

The socio-political situation at the time of the !Xun and Khwe resettlement negotiations probably informed decision-making of government officials. The !Xun and Khwe tried to go their separate ways during the resettlement negotiations but were unable to do so, hampered by governmental officials who played an important large role in the resettlement process (Douglas, 1997). During the negotiations, a Northern Cape Provincial government official supposedly strongly argued that segregation belonged to the past. This emphasis on a new South Africa, without segregation, fits neatly into the nation-building rhetoric of the post-Apartheid era.

Since the start of negotiations between the powers that were and the powers to be in 1990\(^\text{20}\), South Africa has struggled to find a balance between recognizing diversity and building unity. On the one hand, the pluralistic character of South Africa is undeniable but, on the other hand, unity and equality for all South Africans, irrespective of race, ethnicity or religion, were considered to be an antidote to Apartheid and the threat of a civil war (see, for example, Sparks (1996); Taylor and Foster (1999). This type of nation-building that seeks to balance diversity and equality is characteristic of multicultural nationalism (Brown, 2000). Nation-building in South Africa, aside from constitutional reform, is very much a public process that aims to construct a new South Africa through a variety of symbols, thereby positioning itself further from the Apartheid past. The symbols often try to combine the recognition of diversity and unity: South Africa’s motto unified in diversity\(^\text{21}\) is a clear example. The notion of a ‘rainbow nation’ is another. The recognition of the diversity of official languages and the combination of several languages in the national anthem again acknowledges diversity and unity. The attempt to balance diversity and unity is also visible in the Bill of Rights which has a strong focus on individual rights while, at the same time, protecting the rights of religious, cultural and linguistic communities (Oomen, 1999).

The balance between South Africa’s recognition of diversity and aim for unity is a common topic of discussion. Bornman, for example, argues that the content of the national anthem seems to emphasise ‘the ideal of unity among the South African population in striving for freedom’ and concludes that ‘although the flag, national anthem and the Constitution all acknowledge diversity within South African Society to some extent, the main emphasis on the symbolism and wording falls on the promotion of unity’ (2006: 384-385). Oomen (1999: 83) considers that: ‘The ANC (... continues to promote diversity, but only subject to the

---

\(^{20}\) The release of Nelson Mandela and the unbanning of liberation organisations made 1990 an important year in the preparation for democracy.

\(^{21}\) On its website the ANC positions this phrase as a key element in their origin, political struggle and current vision.
overriding objective of national unity.’ These discussions are probably fuelled by the knowledge that Apartheid government used group-based rights as a form of oppression. It is, indeed, for this reason that Oomen (1999) discusses the debate about group-based rights in the run-up to the first democratic constitution and their ultimate rejection in favour of individual rights. This may also be the reason why diversity is acknowledged but often overshadowed by the ideology of national unity.

The contradictory nature of recognizing diversity and building unity is played out at two different levels; several authors make distinctions between the notion of ‘nation’ and ‘state’ (Oomen, 1999), ‘cultural’ and ‘political’, or ‘ethnic’ and ‘civil’ (Jones & Smith, 2001). Each of these distinctions distinguish the public level of citizenship (being a member of a country with all its obligations and benefits) and a level of personal consciousness experienced through a sense of belonging which may be vested in cultural, religious, territorial or other ascribed elements of an identity. Nation-building strategies may emphasise the ‘cultural’ and ‘political’ aspects in different ways. Bornman (2006) describes Jacobinistic nation-building and syncretistic nation-building as opposites; the former emphasises the political level of nation and has no regard for the cultural level that deals with experienced diversity, while the latter emphasises the cultural level and ascribes specific rights to cultural, ethnic or racial groupings. In some nation-building strategies, the distinction between the cultural and political level seems to become blurred, for example, when a political entity pursues the political/civic aim to provide equal rights to everyone (at the political level) and, at the same time, aims to force a sense of belonging and unity (at the cultural level) in order to further emphasise equality. This also seems to be the case for South Africa’s nation-building strategy that seems to be pulling the cultural and political levels together not only by trying to achieve equality and unity at a political level but also by trying to establish an experienced form of unity at the cultural level. Chipkin, for example, argues that the South African ‘national democratic revolution... posited the citizen as necessarily a member of a nation – as a bearer, in other words, of some or other quality of population’ (2007: 99 emphasis added). Numerous studies point towards the perpetuation of experienced differences through ethnic and racial identities (Gibson & Gouws, 2000; Moodley & Adam, 2000) with book titles such as Do South Africans exist? (Chipkin, 2007). Moodley and Adam (2000) point out that ethno-racial consciousness, as a legacy of Apartheid, is still widely present in South Africa. They argue that the ideological aim for emotionally experienced unity is, therefore, unrealistic. Instead, loyalty to the state (unity at the political level) and simultaneous recognition of diversity (at the cultural level) seems to be more realistic (Moodley & Adam, 2000).

Recognition at a cultural level should, however, have consequences at a political level. A government that recognizes experienced diversity cannot merely do so in a symbolic way. Its actions should follow this recognition, for example, in the recognition of traditional leadership structures. This results in a constant search for a balance between diversity and unity and equality. On the one hand, the South African government seems to pursue the idea that everybody is equal and similar (‘we are all South Africans’) but, at the same time, it recognizes cultural diversity. This balance becomes especially difficult in decision-making processes where recognition of diversity or aims for equality and unity become highly

---

22 Jones and Smith (2001) use the terms ‘ascribed’ and ‘voluntary’ for sense of belonging and citizenship respectively.
visible. For example, the much-needed redistribution of wealth to battle the racially skewed socioeconomic outcomes of Apartheid has increasingly become a strong focus of governmental policy land reform arrangements, a hot topic in redistribution, which are built on definitions of groups of people or communities and thereby call for a definition of boundaries. Delineating community boundaries is a process in which recognition of diversity or aims for unity become visible. Below, I will elaborate on how the delineation of community boundaries in the !Xun and Khwe resettlement seemed to be more informed by unity thinking than recognition of diversity.

**Unity and diversity in land reform arrangements**

The relocation of the !Xun and Khwe from Schmidtsdrift to Platfontein and the delineation of community boundaries should be understood within this socio-political context. The diversity and unity discussion at the political level has probably had an influence on the practice of land reform. In land reform policies, we can observe the previously discussed struggle to find a balance between recognising diversity and the aim for unity. On the one hand, these policies are aimed at equality with a specific focus on ‘de-racialization’, hinting at uniformity by reforming racially skewed land distribution. On the other hand, these policies make use of the categories of people that were devised during the Apartheid era because they aim to advance those were disadvantaged in the past. This is illustrated by the fact that the main point of reference for land restitution is the 1913 Native Land Act that based land rights on racial identities which resulted in a highly unequal distribution of land to the disadvantage of non-whites (De Wet, 1997). In addition, the Restitution of Land Rights Act 22 of 1994 states that legislative measures are ‘designed to promote the protection and advancement of persons, groups or categories of persons disadvantaged by unfair discrimination, in order to promote their full and equal enjoyment of rights in land’ (Government of South Africa, 1994: 1). In land reform policy documents (e.g. the White and Green Paper on Land Reform), the group defined as ‘Black people’ are most often mentioned as beneficiaries of land reform policies. It is, however, unclear whether this category actually means ‘non-whites’ (including former Apartheid categories ‘Coloured’ and ‘Indian’), or whether it refers to the former Apartheid category of ‘Black people.’

Simultaneously, the ‘African’ or ‘South African’ identities are used in a general sense to describe the citizens of South Africa, consistent with unity in nation-building. The resettlement of the !Xun and Khwe is unique in the sense that they did not live in South Africa for the greater part of the Apartheid era and thus did not experience the Native Land Act or Group Areas Act of 1950 at first hand. They were, however, involved with the SADF and its Apartheid ideologies (e.g. the creation of ethnic units). Thus, it could be argued that they were, according to the definitions in the policy documents, not necessarily a prime target for land redistribution. However, their relationship with the SADF, and the land restitution land claim by the Bathlaping people, made them part of a land redistribution arrangement as they would be displaced when the Bathlaping people won back their land.

In the resettlement negotiations, the !Xun and Khwe actively tried to go their separate ways, based on experienced cultural and social identities, but were unsuccessful. In other land reform arrangements, groups of people were encouraged to define their community through social and cultural identities. The development of a relationship between land and social and ethnic identities (Evers, Spiersenburg, & Wels, 2005) thereby seems to be prolonged. This relationship is most prominent in land restitution arrangements. In these
types of arrangements, the spatial aspect plays an important role, related to a past situation in which a group of people lived on or possessed a specific tract of land. The claimants have to prove that they used to possess that specific tract of land and that they were unrightfully dispossessed. Where they live at the time of the land claim is not important. Portraying an image of formerly coherent communities (at the time before dispossession) is likely to assist claimants in proving their previous communal residence or land possession, as it is easier to prove the past locality of a community than determining the past locality of each individual. For claimants to position themselves as a community without being able to depend on spatial features (because they do not necessarily share locality at the time of the land claim), they often depend on relational and cultural features to represent their former community identity. For the !Xun and Khwe redistribution arrangement, it was not necessary to delineate community boundaries based on social or cultural identities because it was primarily compensation for their forced removal. Therefore, community boundaries were first delineated based on the fact that they were at that point living on governmental property that would be returned to the rightful owners. The aforementioned role of the indigenous identity also seemed to have played a role during the organisation of the land reform arrangement, however, using this identity would have resulted in similar community boundaries. Similar to the sensitivity of recognising indigenous rights, the recognition of ethnic and cultural identities in land reform arrangements seems to be highly sensitive and unity seems to be informing decisions rather than recognition of diversity. The nation-building rhetoric of South Africa was at that time highly focused on unity, accompanied by a heightened sensitivity for ethnic and racially based rights. Segregation based on cultural and ethnic distinctiveness, as proposed by the !Xun and Khwe, would have been highly controversial in the post-Apartheid area. For the new government, this would have come too close to the idea of ethnic-based rights and separate development. The pragmatic reasons put forward against separation, such as the required township structure and the additional costs of constructing two separate townships, no doubt also played a role. However, in my opinion, this might have been avoided if, initially, two smaller tracts of land had been purchased instead of three very extensive farms. Although this might have been financially feasible, it might not have been politically feasible for the reasons outlined above.

**Concluding remarks**

The dynamics of the community boundary delineation of the !Xun and Khwe suggest that there were several interrelated events and identity politics that led to a delineation that combined the !Xun and Khwe in a single space. First, their forced togetherness from their time in Angola and Namibia and their collective identities as ‘Bushmen’ (soldiers), San, and indigenous peoples, ascribed by others and taken up by the !Xun and Khwe, made it difficult to position themselves as two different communities. Second, the indigenous identity played out at the political level and recognized in policy documents and political statements reinforced their collective identity. Third, the socio-political context at the time of resettlement negotiations was such that recognition of ethnic or cultural diversity and segregation in land-related issues was highly sensitive. This left little opportunity for the !Xun and Khwe to go their separate ways during resettlement.
The land redistribution arrangement of the !Xun and Khwe illustrate old ways of delineating community boundaries in the supposedly new era of South Africa. The pursuit of unity seems to stand in the way of recognition of diversity and stepping away from predefined categories of people in land reform, whether it concerns categories such as ‘Black people’, ‘Indian’, ‘Coloured’ or ‘San/Bushman’. In a similar manner as Apartheid categories, great diversity is hidden in the ‘San/Bushman’ category which has been forgotten or ignored during the decision-making process. These circumstances led to a situation of forced integration that may be just as harmful as forced segregation. Even though each land reform arrangement has its own unique characteristics, the insights from this case study may be informative for understanding the stagnant development in other communities.

**Acknowledgements**

For their comments and helpful suggestions on earlier drafts and intriguing questions the author wishes to thank the anonymous JCAS reviewers, Julie Grant, Lungisile Ntsebeza, Stasja Koot, Saskia Welschen, Harry Wels, Keyan Tomaselli and Sarah Cummings.

---

23 Cousins and Claassens (2005: 35) mention, for example, the dysfunctional nature of many CPAs and community land trusts and the idea that ‘(m)embers have often retained ties to their original communities, rather than seeing themselves as belonging to the new social entity.’
CHAPTER 2

References


Hanekom, Derek. 1999. “Speech by Derek Hanekom, Minister for Agriculture & Land Affairs, on the Occasion of the Signing of Land Claim Agreements with the ‘Khomani San and Mier Communities’”. The speech was given at the signing ceremony organized by the Department for Agriculture and Land Affairs, Askham.


CHAPTER 2


