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Herero refugees and patronage politics in Ngamiland,
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**'I WAS AFRAID OF SAMUEL, THEREFORE I CAME TO
SEKGOMA': HERERO REFUGEES AND PATRONAGE
POLITICS IN NGAMILAND, BECHUANALAND
PROTECTORATE, 1890–1914***

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ABSTRACT: Writers dealing with the Herero of Botswana have tended mostly to deal with them as a single homogeneous whole. Concentrating on Ngamiland, this article outlines and discusses the arrival, at different times and for different reasons, of various groups of Herero into the territory. The article indicates that prior to the Herero–German war of 1904, the majority of Herero moved into Ngamiland on account of the activities of German colonizers and the Herero chief, Samuel Maharero. In Ngamiland, the Herero immigrants came to form a substantial source of support for the Batawana usurper, Sekgoma Letsholathebe. With the outbreak of the Herero–German war, Herero who had fled Namibia on earlier occasions now opposed the move of Samuel Maharero into Ngamiland, and found themselves supported by Sekgoma Letsholathebe. Following the deposition of Sekgoma in a coup, the position of Herero who had supported Sekgoma became increasingly tenuous and led to their move out of Ngamiland. Overall, the article presents a case study of the manner in which, in seeking to strengthen their positions within host communities, refugees of necessity come to be bound up in the internal politics of such communities.

KEY WORDS: Botswana, Namibia, Herero, refugees.

IN EARLY 1904, as Herero¹ refugees fled the carnage of war in German South-West Africa (GSWA), M. G. Williams, the resident magistrate in Tsau, Ngamiland, Bechuanaland protectorate, was 'amused' to note that their

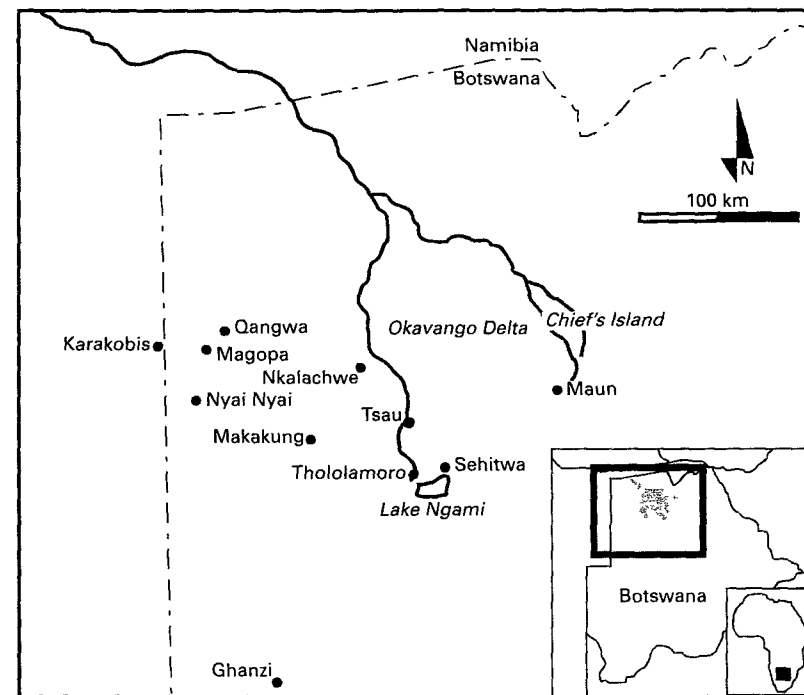
* This article is based on fieldwork and archival research conducted in Botswana and Namibia between 1991 and 1997. The author gratefully acknowledges the funding of the Netherlands Organization for Tropical Research (WOTRO W 24-521) and the German Research Foundation (SFB 389 C7). I am grateful to the Journal's anonymous readers, as well as to B. Morton, N. Parsons and R. Ross, who read and commented on earlier drafts of this article. K. Sadr kindly drew the map.

¹ In south-western Africa the people who speak dialects of the Bantu language Otjiherero have been glossed as Ovaherero, Ovambanderu, Ovahimba, Ovatjimba, Ovazemba and Vakwandu. During the colonial era, particularly in Botswana, Herero were also referred to as Damara. Not only do these people speak dialects of a common language, but they also shared a number of cultural elements that relate to social organization, preferred economy, cosmology, epistemology and spatio-political organization. Historically, there have been three broad divisions within Otjiherero-speaking society, the Ovaherero, the Ovambanderu and the Ovahimba. For convenience the article uses the term collective term Herero to refer to all Herero-speakers, and the specific term of Banderu when necessary.

arrival was opposed by Herero already living in the territory.² In so doing, Williams made the mistake of believing that individuals who happen to speak the same language form a single continuous whole, in which people are bound by harmonious ties of solidarity engendered by language. Similarly, in the present, popular media representations portray the Herero-speakers of Botswana as a single unit; and to a lesser extent, historians and social scientists have tended also to deal with the Herero of Botswana as a single unified whole.³

However, the Herero-speaking peoples of Botswana are not bound by a single unitary history. Far from it. Scattered across the length and breadth of Botswana, the Herero-speaking populations in the various districts have separate and distinct histories. The range includes the descendants of Nama serfs in Tsabong, migrant labourers in Gabane, Herero royals in Mahalapye and war refugees throughout the territory.⁴ It is only through taking account of these separate histories that one can come to an adequate understanding of the Herero-speaking peoples of Botswana.

This article concentrates on the history of Herero-speakers in Ngamiland during and immediately after the reign (1891–1906) of the Tawana *Kgosi* [Chief] Sekgoma Letsholathebe. Though it is well known that numerous Herero refugees fled to the Bechuanaland protectorate during the Herero–



Map 1. Sites of settlement by Herero refugees in Ngamiland, north-western Botswana.

German war, it has generally been overlooked that separate and distinct groups of Herero-speakers preceded these refugees in the years prior to the war. By outlining the distinct histories of three successive waves of Herero-speaking immigrants into Ngamiland, the article underscores the point that Herero-speakers in Ngamiland were not, and should not be treated as, a single homogeneous mass. In addition, it indicates that Sekgoma Letsholathebe was able to strengthen his position through acquiring the support, by means of patronage, of successive groups of Herero-speaking immigrants who moved into Ngamiland as the Herero chief, Samuel Maharero, and the German colonial administration sought to strengthen their respective positions in Hereroland. In concluding, the article discusses the fate of Herero refugees and immigrants in Botswana in the light of recent literature dealing with the position of immigrants and refugees in host communities in Africa.⁵ In this manner the article demonstrates, and provides a context for, the manner in which refugees and immigrants can in seeking to improve their position within host communities come to be integrated into the internal politics of a host community. It also examines the negative aspects of such integration.

² Botswana National Archives, Gaborone (BNA), RC 10/18, M. G. Williams in Tsau Ngamiland, 2/3/04, to resident commissioner (RC).

³ Granted, during the pre-independence of Namibia, it was often politically useful to present the Herero-speaking population of Botswana as a single whole. See, in this regard, Freda Troup, *In Face of Fear* (London, 1950); and Kirsten Alnaes, 'Oral tradition and identity: the Herero in Botswana', *The Societies of Southern Africa in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, 11 (1981), 15–23; and 'Living with the past: the songs of the Herero in Botswana', *Africa*, 59 (1989), 267–99. However, the work of Harpending and Pennington on the demography of Herero living in Botswana is sorely marred because it fails to take into account the differing histories and consequently the modern demographic differences that exist amongst Herero-speakers in Botswana. See Henry Harpending and Renee Pennington, 'Herero demographic history' (Unpublished paper prepared for the Galton Institute's symposium on *The Genetics, Demography and Health of Minority Populations*, 20–1 Sept. 1990); and 'Herero households' (Unpublished paper prepared for Johnson Fratkan session, *AAA meetings*, Fall 1990). Similarly the work of F. R. Vivelo, *The Herero of Western Botswana* (New York, 1977), treats Herero-speakers as a single whole.

⁴ Kaendee Kandapaera, 'War, flight, asylum: a brief history of the Ovambanderu of Ngamiland, Botswana, 1896–1961' (BA research essay, University of Botswana, 1992); Moses Ndiriva Kandjoui, 'The relations of cousins: the struggle of Ovambanderu against Ovaherero dominance' (BA research essay, University of Botswana, 2001); Kovihe K. Kaotozu, 'From subjugation to politics of collaboration: an introduction to the history of the Ovambanderu of Tsabong, 1830–1870' (BA research essay, University of Botswana, 1994); B. B. Kebonang, 'The socio-economic and political history of the Herero of Mahalapye, Central District, 1922–1984' (BA research essay, University of Botswana, 1988); George U. Manase 'The politics of separation: the case of the Ovaherero of Ngamiland' (BA research essay, University of Botswana, 1984); Baba H. Stanley, 'The Qjijherero-speaking people of Gantsi: from wanderers to settlers, 1890s–1960s' (BA research essay, University of Botswana, 1996). Findings of fieldwork trips conducted by the author with Kovihe K. Kaotozu and Kaendee Kandapaera in 1992 and 1993 in Botswana. These ran from Gaborone and Gabane in the south-east, via Mahalapje, Pahalapje and Serowe in the east to Rakops, Maun and Toteng in the north, to Sehitwa, Tsau, Makakung and Magopa in the north-west.

IMMIGRANTS AND TSWANA SOCIETIES

One of the outstanding features of Tswana societies was their ability to absorb immigrants and refugees into their own social structures. This occurred in such a manner that immigrants could become full members of the host community, yet retain their own identity. As the doyen of Tswana studies, Isaac Schapera, writing of 'Tswana tribes' noted: 'every tribe has a population of mixed origins', and it is not unusual for these people to 'speak their own languages and have many usages different from those of their rulers'.⁶ The fate of the bulk of the Herero refugees who fled to Tswana societies between 1890 and 1914 serves to underscore Schapera's words. Indeed, through the practice of *mafisa*, Herero refugees in Ngamiland were able to re-establish themselves as wealthy cattle owners within a generation.⁷ As one trader later noted:

I know that when the Damara [Herero] came over from south-west they were the poorest of the poor. They were in a shocking state... These people rapidly became rich, and I suppose they are the wealthiest people in the country today for cattle.⁸

The fact that the taking in of refugees and immigrants was not unusual and was not without its benefits for Tswana societies is well illustrated by the Kwena of Chief Sechele, who in 1852 defeated invading Boer forces with an army that consisted largely of immigrant subjects. News of the Kwena victory spread throughout southern Africa, and in the years that followed, thousands of refugees flocked to become subjects of Sechele, thereby increasing Sechele's power all the more.⁹ The Tawana kingdom that developed in north-eastern Botswana after 1840 had a history similar to that of the Kwena. As with the Kwena, the Tawana defeated and incorporated surrounding communities, encouraged external trade, acquired modern guns and actively encouraged the immigration of outsiders.¹⁰

⁵ Heike Behrend, 'Ethnicity and the militarization of refugees: the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF)' (Unpublished seminar paper presented at *Ethnic Soldiering and its Impact*, Leiden University, 13-15 Jan. 1995); Inge Brinkman, 'Violence, exile and ethnicity: Nyemba refugees in Kaisosi and Kehemu (Rundu, Namibia)', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 25 (1999), 417-39; 'Ways of death: accounts of terror from Angolan refugees in Namibia', *Africa*, 70 (2000), 1-24; Wim Van Damme, 'How Liberian and Sierra Leonean refugees settled in the forest region of Guinea (1990-96)', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 12 (1999), 36-53; Rachel van der Meer, 'Three decades in exile: Rwandan refugees 1960-1990', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 9 (1996), 252-67; and Lisa Malkki, *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory and National Cosmology among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania* (Chicago, 1995).

⁶ Isaac Schapera, 'The Tswana', in Daryll Forde (ed.), *Ethnographic Survey of Africa* (London, 1953), 34.

⁷ *Mafisa*, a practice which was universal across all Tswana societies. It entailed the loan of cattle to a borrower, who in exchange for herding was commonly entitled to the milk as well as some of the offspring of the herded cattle. Neil Parsons, 'The economic history of Khama's country in Southern Africa', *African Social Research*, 18 (1974), 643-75.

⁸ European Advisory Council, 25th Session, Aug. 1938, remarks of Glover, cited in Barry C. Morton, 'A social and economic history of a southern African native reserve: Ngamiland 1890-1966' (Ph.D. thesis, Indiana University, 1996), 119.

⁹ Frederick J. Ramsay, 'The rise and fall of the Bakwena dynasty of south central Botswana, 1820-1940' (Ph.D. thesis, Boston University, 1991).

¹⁰ Thomas Tlou, *A History of Ngamiland 1750 to 1906: The Formation of an African State* (Gaborone, 1985), 38-72; Morton, 'Ngamiland', 36-62.

SEKGOMA LETSHOLATHEBE

For fifteen years, between 1891 and 1906, *Kgosi* Sekgoma Letsholathebe ruled the Tawana kingdom in Ngamiland. Sekgoma was the strongest and richest *kgosi* ever to rule the Batawana. Although there were many who claimed that he was a usurper, he managed to stay in power through an extensive system of patronage extended to those who had hitherto been excluded from royal patronage until he was deposed in a coup supported by the British in 1906.¹¹

Sekgoma was the fourth son of *Kgosi* Letsholathebe, who, when he died in 1874, left three living sons, all of whom were from junior houses. Sekgoma had been born in 1873, and was therefore a mere infant when his brother, Moremi, assumed power. During the course of Moremi's reign, Sekgoma grew up beyond the reach of his brother at the cattleposts of his uncle, Dithapo. In 1890, while Moremi and his regiment were out hunting, Sekgoma and his followers occupied the royal capital at Nkalachwe, and held it for a few weeks before they were driven out. A short while later Moremi died. Dithapo, Sekgoma's uncle, became regent, and although Moremi had a son, named Mathiba (born c. 1888), Dithapo declared that Sekgoma was the new Tawana *kgosi*.¹²

On assuming power, Sekgoma sought to consolidate his political power through the redistribution of new wealth. To acquire this wealth, Sekgoma resorted to raiding neighbouring people for cattle, ivory and labour. In 1894, Sekgoma's forces successfully raided the Kwangali and Gciriku.¹³ Sekgoma used the proceeds of these raids to extend his patronage among the Tawana. Added to this, Sekgoma began providing royal cattle loans, not only to Tawana headmen, as had been the case in the past, but also to private individuals, be they the junior sons of lineage headmen, commoners or immigrants such as the Herero. In this manner Sekgoma established an extensive support base within the Tawana kingdom.¹⁴ The Herero-speaking refugees, particularly those who came into the kingdom in the years after 1896, came to play a major factor in Sekgoma's support base.¹⁵

EARLY MIGRANTS

Herero lived in parts of present-day Botswana prior to the delineation in 1885 of what would eventually become the international boundary between Namibia and Botswana. It has even been argued that when the Tawana moved into Ngamiland in the early nineteenth century, they expelled Herero already living there.¹⁶ In the 1850s, Herero settlements were reported 'east

¹¹ For the life and times of Sekgoma Letsholathebe, see Tlou, *Ngamiland*, 85-135; and Morton, 'Ngamiland', 81-96.

¹² Morton, 'Ngamiland', 83-6.

¹³ Morton, 'Ngamiland', 86; Tlou, *Ngamiland*, 90-1.

¹⁴ Morton, 'Ngamiland', 85-92.

¹⁵ For an excellent introduction on Herero-speaking refugees in Ngamiland based on extensive archival and oral material, see Kandapaera, 'War, flight, asylum'.

¹⁶ A. C. Campbell, 'Notes on the prehistoric background to 1840', in R. Renée Hitchcock and Mary R. Smith (eds.), *Settlement in Botswana: The Historical Development of a Human Landscape* (Gaborone, 1982), 13-22, 19; Edwin N. Wilmsen, 'Exchange, interaction, and settlement in north-western Botswana: past and present perspectives', in Hitchcock and Smith (eds.), *Settlement*, 98-109, 101.

nearly as far as Lake Ngami', and Herero traders and herders were to be found at a number of water sources along the trade route that led from Lake Ngami via Ghanzi to Gobabis.¹⁷ The area between Lake Ngami and Gobabis was heavily contested, with Banderu, Boers, Herero, Rolong and Tawana all claiming jurisdiction over the area.¹⁸ In the 1860s, a number of wars were fought for control of the trade to and from Lake Ngami.¹⁹

In 1868, Tswana traders travelled to Okahandja to trade and to conclude agreements with Maharero, who was the most powerful Herero chief in central Namibia at that stage.²⁰ These agreements came to form the basis for a treaty, concluded in 1877, guaranteeing asylum and mutual sanctuary in times of need.²¹ Banderu traditions mention that a similar agreement was concluded between the Tawana *kgosi*, Sekgoma Letsholathebe and the Banderu chief, Kahimemua.²²

In 1884, following the conclusion of a number of treaties with various chieftains in Namibia, Imperial Germany claimed jurisdiction over Namibia. One of the treaty signatories was the Herero chief, Maharero Tjamuaha of Okahandja.²³ This signing did not occur without protest on the part of his subjects. A number of Herero families voted with their feet and crossed over the newly created border into the Bechuanaland protectorate. The most important of these families was that of the Shepherds, who were employed as scribes and interpreters by the chiefs of Okahandja. The Shepherds were descended from a Herero herd-boy, who was given the name Saul Shepherd after he had been purchased in southern Namibia by James Edward Alexander for the price of 'two handkerchiefs, and two strings of glass beads'. Alexander had taken Shepherd to England and educated him at Woolwich College, after which he returned to Hereroland in 1844.²⁴ During the 1860s and 1870s Saul was employed as interpreter and secretary to the Herero chief, Maharero Tjamuaha. Saul's son Samuel, who had been

educated in the Cape Colony, was meant to inherit his father's position.²⁵ But, as his descendants later stated:

When they returned from schooling to their *onganda* [homestead] in their land, it so happened that there arose a question, should the chief [Maharero] get the throne from the Germans or the English? ... The Herero were gathered at a place where they were to decide on the issue, and Samuel Shepherd came late and found out that the Hereros had decided to take the German throne. He then decided to leave for Botswana and came in that direction.²⁶

Shepherd's family initially left Hereroland for the Transvaal.²⁷ Thereafter, through the intercession of the Ngwato *kgosi*, Khama III, they were permitted to settle in Ngamiland by the Tawana *kgosi*, Sekgoma Letsholathebe.²⁸ Accordingly, by the closing stages of the nineteenth century, small Herero and Banderu communities were settled in Ngamiland, and maintained close contact with the Tawana chieftaincy in Tsau.²⁹

THE BANDERU WAR

Samuel Shepherd's fears and his refusal to live under German colonial rule were well founded. In 1896, a short brutal war was fought in eastern Namibia in which German troops, assisted by auxiliaries, waged a war against combined Banderu and Herero forces opposed to Samuel Maharero, the newly installed Herero chief of Okahandja.³⁰ A direct result of the war was that large groups of Banderu and Herero sought refuge in the territories that were administered as districts of the Tawana kingdom.³¹

Following the death of Maharero Tjamuaha in 1890, his son, Samuel Maharero, became involved in a bitter succession dispute with a number of

¹⁷ C. J. Andersson, *Lake Ngami: Or Exploration and Discoveries during Four Years Wanderings in the Wilds of South Western Africa* (London, 1856; reprint Cape Town, 1967), 218. BNA, BNB 3541, *Eastern Province Monthly Magazine* (1857), 'Narrative of an expedition to the NW of Lake Ngami extending to the capital of Debabe's territory, via Souka River, hitherto an unexplored portion of Africa', by F. Green, communicated by Mr Hall. See also Josaphat Hahn, 'Das Land der Ovaherero', *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für Erdkunde zu Berlin* (1868), 194-243.

¹⁸ Wilmsen, 'Exchange interaction', 99.

¹⁹ Theophilus Hahn, 'Ein Racenkampf im nordwestlichen Theile der Cap-Region', *Globus*, 14 (1869), 270-1. Details Herero attacks on the settlement of Gobabis, and the capture of wagons loaded with ivory and ostrich feathers. These were then taken to Otjimbingwe and sold to the missionary trader Carl Hugo Hahn.

²⁰ Josephat Hahn, 'Die Ovaherero', *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für Erdkunde zu Berlin* (1869), 244.

²¹ E. P. Stals (ed.), *The Commissions of W. C. Palgrave, Special Emissary to South West Africa, 1876-1885* (Cape Town, 1991), 151-2.

²² Interviews and talks conducted with Uziel Kandapaera, Kovihende Kaotozu and others at Toloramuru, Botswana, Dec. 1992.

²³ Jan-Bart Gewald, *Herero Heroes: A Socio-Political History of the Herero of Namibia, 1890-1923* (Oxford, 1999), 30-2.

²⁴ Sir James Edward Alexander, *Expedition of Discovery into the Interior of Africa* (2 vols.) (London, 1838), 1, 221-5.

²⁵ Heinrich Vedder, *Das Alte Südwestafrika: Südwestafrikas Geschichte bis zum Tode Mahareros* (Berlin, 1934), 549; Archives of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia (ELCRN), Windhoek, 1 1, 17, v, Politisches Briefe etc. 1879-92; *Bericht über die Verhandlungen der Friedensconferenz gehalten zu Rehoboth vom 8-13 Juni 1882*. This source mentions that Samuel Shepherd served as an interpreter at the Rehoboth peace conference of 8-13 June 1882.

²⁶ Interview conducted with Kapukaa Rudolf Kasone, 23 Dec. 1892, at Samedupi bridge, Botswana. The descendants of Samuel and Saul Shepherd were interviewed in the 1970s by the American anthropologist Frank Vivel, who noted the following: 'The Germans had brought a big, comfortable chair for Samuel. My father said that Samuel and the Germans were getting too friendly. Eventually, he predicted, there would be trouble and ultimately war. He advised that we leave before the trouble began'. See Frank R. Vivel, *The Herero of Western Botswana* (New York, 1977), 168.

²⁷ Interview conducted with Kapukaa Rudolf Kasone, 23 Dec. 1892; Vivel, *The Herero*, 168.

²⁸ Tlou, *Ngamiland*, 94.

²⁹ In later years Samuel Shepherd supported Sekgoma's opponent, Mathiba, in a coup supported by the British in 1906. In return for this support, Shepherd was appointed as a *monna a kgosing*, a man of the chief, and granted a substantial piece of land along the Botletle River, where his descendants are to be found to this day. Interview conducted with Kapukaa Rudolf Kasone, 23 Dec. 1992.

³⁰ In the interests of clarity I have not referred to the Khauas-Khoi of Amraal Lambert who fought alongside the Herero and Banderu allied to Nicodemus Kavikunua. Interested readers are referred to Gewald, *Herero Heroes*, 102-9.

³¹ Gewald, *Herero Heroes*, 107-9.

rivals. Through allying himself with the incoming German colonizers, Samuel Maharero was able to intimidate his rivals into submission, one by one. By 1894, Samuel Maharero had established himself as the first paramount chief of the Herero, though not without alienating himself from major sectors of Herero society. One of his strongest rivals was Nicodemus Kavikunua, who, in terms of Herero inheritance rights, was the more legitimate heir to Maharero. Thwarted, and unable to acquire his rightful share of Maharero Tjamuaha's inheritance, Nicodemus Kavikunua withdrew to the eastern districts of central Namibia and found sanctuary among the Banderu led by Chief Kahimemua.³²

Following his installation as paramount chief in 1894, Samuel Maharero had agreed, in exchange for German aid, to the establishment of the first of many German garrisons, and also – more importantly – to the first of many boundary agreements that delineated the southern boundary of Hereroland.³³ Besides delineating territory to be handed over to German settler control, Samuel Maharero, by agreeing to these boundary treaties, also asserted his rights and claims to territories not previously controlled by the chiefs of Okahandja.³⁴ Anxious to retain German support and to attain wealth and power, Maharero actively assisted in the enforcement of the treaty conditions, even though this consisted primarily of the expulsion of Herero from their lands. He sent his troops, councillors and even his own sons to join the German boundary patrols that determined and enforced the newly established southern boundaries of Hereroland.³⁵ In addition, Samuel Maharero was at times not averse to becoming personally involved in the expulsions.³⁶ Apart from helping to expel Herero from their lands, he also extended his powers of patronage by ordering his favourite sub-chiefs and followers to occupy territories that had now officially become his.³⁷ From November 1895 onwards, all Herero cattle impounded for alleged boundary transgressions were publicly auctioned, and the proceeds split between the German authorities and Samuel Maharero.³⁸ These activities inflamed passions among all those who were not allied to him. Among the first to be affected by the boundary enforcement and cattle confiscation were the Herero and Banderu living to the east of Windhoek. The colonial authorities, assisted by their Herero auxiliaries, were far from subtle in such activities. As

³² Gewald, *Herero Heroes*, 41–60.

³³ Bundesarchiv Potsdam, Germany (BAP), RKA 2100, Von Lindequist in Windhoek, 11 July 1894, to RKA; and later RKA 2100, Leutwein in Windhoek, 13 Dec. 1894, to RKA.

³⁴ See boundary treaties in BAP, RKA 2100, 11 July 1894, southern boundary; 13 Dec. 1894, southern boundary adjustment; 26 Feb. 1895 and 3 July 1895, boundaries and 29 Aug. 1895, northern boundary.

³⁵ Theodor Leutwein, *Elf Jahre Gouverneur in Deutsch-Südwestafrika* (Berlin, 1906), 92.

³⁶ BAP, RKA 2100, Von Lindequist in Windhoek, 19 Jan. 1895, to RKA, refers to Herero councillors Assa Riarua, Julius, Paulus, Christian, Friedrich Maharero, Hugo and Wilhelm accompanying the boundary commission of 1895. See also Leutwein, *Elf Jahre*, 92. On Samuel Maharero's personal involvement in the expulsions, see Namibian National Archives Windhoek (NNAW), ZBU 2027, Samuel Maharero in Okahandja, 31 Aug. 1894, to Leutwein.

³⁷ *Berichte der Rheinischen Missionsgesellschaft* (Wuppertal, 1895), 71.

³⁸ BAP, RKA 2100, Hauptmann Müller in Windhoek, 19 Nov. 1895.

one senior officer laconically reported, 'Here the cattle fellows [*viehgasten* i.e. pastoralists] only withdrew when the Major dragged the cannon through the settlement and threatened to shoot them if they did not follow'.³⁹

Given that the soldiers and sons of Samuel Maharero accompanied German forces, it is hardly surprising that Herero living in the affected areas failed to see Samuel Maharero as a friend or ally.⁴⁰

Events came to a head in March 1896. In that month Lt Lampe, a particularly aggressive German district official serving in Gobabis, was shot and killed. German retaliation was swift and ruthless. In three battles, forces under German command defeated the forces allied to Nicodemus Kavikunua. As the hostilities wound down, Nicodemus Kavikunua and Kahimemua Nguvauva were captured.⁴¹ The two men were taken to Okahandja, the seat of Samuel Maharero's chieftaincy, charged with high treason, found guilty and sentenced to death. Samuel Maharero refused to pardon his rivals and spoke out openly in support of their execution. The two men were accordingly executed by firing squad in Okahandja.⁴² The surviving followers of Nicodemus Kavikunua and Kahimemua Nguvauva fled into the Bechuanaland protectorate, or came to be placed under chiefs loyal to Samuel Maharero in German South-West Africa.⁴³

SEKGOMA LETSHOLATHEBE AND REFUGEES

As the refugees of the Banderu war of 1896 moved into his territories, Sekgoma Letsholathebe sought to distribute them in a manner that would strengthen him and ensure the greatest possible benefit for his position. At the time of the Banderu war, the Tswana kingdom's jurisdiction over the Ghanzi district was being threatened by the activities of the British South Africa Company of Cecil John Rhodes. A Boer named Bosman, sent by Rhodes, sought by fraudulent means to acquire title to the territory on behalf of the British South Africa Company.⁴⁴ In the long term, Rhodes wanted to claim all of Ngamiland, and he had already arranged for the settlement of Boer trekkers in the Ghanzi district in the south of Ngamiland.⁴⁵ Sekgoma

³⁹ BAP, RKA 2100, Von Lindequist in Windhoek, 19 Jan. 1895, to RKA.

⁴⁰ Gewald, *Herero Heroes*, 83–4.

⁴¹ NNAW, ZBU 436, D.IV.c.1 Band 1, *Feldzug gegen die Hereros und die Khauas-Hottentotten 1896, Band 1*.

⁴² NNAW, ZBU 436, Samuel Maharero in Okahandja, 24 Apr. 1896, to Leutwein; and ZBU 437, D.IV.c.3, *Kriegsgerichte über die Kapitanen Nikodemus und Kahimemua*.

⁴³ The Khauas-Khoi who had fought along with the Banderu ceased to exist as a political entity. In a policy of genocide all Khauas-Khoi survivors were captured and taken to Windhoek where they were placed in a concentration camp and used as forced labour by the German colonial state. NNAW, ZBU 436 and ZBU 2030, W II d 23 *Nama: Stamm der Khauas-Hottentotten (Kapitan Manasse Lambert), Alte Akten Band 1–3*, which contains lists of captured Khauas-Khoi.

⁴⁴ BNA, HC 144, correspondence on Ngamiland affairs and the proceedings of the Lake Ngami police detachment, 1894–6.

⁴⁵ For the activities of Rhodes in Bechuanaland, see Paul Maylam, *Rhodes, the Tswana and the British: Colonialism, Collaboration and Conflict in the Bechuanaland Protectorate, 1885–1899* (Westport, 1980). Rhodes's schemes for the Bechuanaland protectorate came to an end following his involvement in the Jameson Raid of 1895.

wrote that the Ghanzi district fell under the authority of his kingdom as 'The district in question forms part of my territory and has always been subject to the jurisdiction of the Batavana tribe of Bechuanas of whom I am the Chief'.⁴⁶

It was during the course of this correspondence with the British that the first refugees of the Banderu war in GSWA began moving into the Ghanzi district.⁴⁷ Anxious to gain control over the district before the incoming refugees occupied the land, the secretary of state for the colonies in London sent the following telegram to the high commissioner in Cape Town:

Tell the trekkers to start moving. That farms will be granted by the Bechuanaland Protectorate. Tell Sekhomo of trek and that it will be confined to Ghanzi. Tell him that I am willing to give him the reserve which he wants. Instruct escort to keep trek well away from frontier, both of Sekhomo and of German Protectorate, and not to enter at present any lands occupied by cattle.⁴⁸

As regards the incoming Herero and Banderu refugees, it was later noted:

The introduction of this new element into Ngamiland ... increases the desirability of arranging for the colonisation of the Ghanzi District and of sending as soon as possible a competent commissioner with precise instructions to settle the various outstanding questions in the NW protectorate.⁴⁹

The arrival of the refugees was not immediately perceived as a problem by the British authorities. For, as Bechuanaland's resident commissioner, with incredible faith in the power of colonial bureaucracy, noted, 'they cannot acquire any territorial rights in the land on which they may settle in the absence of any express consent of Your Excellency [the high commissioner]'.⁵⁰

A substantial number of the incoming refugees elected to remain in the Ghanzi district as, 'they [did] not wish to live under Sekgoma as by doing so they would be servants of the Batawana'.⁵¹ It is probable that they were still in possession of livestock of their own, which, in the short term, would have ensured that they remained independent of Tawana loans and gifts. Moreover, they knew the land that they were moving on to was being withdrawn from Tawana control. In late 1897, British colonial officials reported that at least 200 'Demaras' (Herero) were squatting on land that had been earmarked for the incoming Boer settlers, and it was suggested that, 'It

⁴⁶ BNA, HC 145/1, correspondence on Ngamiland affairs and on the Ghanzi district and the Lake Ngami police detachment, 1897-8. Chief Sekgomo Letsholathebe in Nkalachwe, 27 Oct. 1896, to H.E. high commissioner (HC). After describing how his predecessor Moremi had expelled Boers from the Ghanzi district in the past, Sekgoma concluded his letter by noting that he would be prepared to allow Boer settlement on condition that the rest of his territory remained inviolable and that he would be permitted to herd his cattle in the district safe from the rinderpest.

⁴⁷ BNA, HC 140/6, correspondence relating to tribal migrations to and from British Bechuanaland and into the protectorate.

⁴⁸ BNA, HC 145/1, secretary of state in London, 6 Apr. 1897, to HC in Cape Town.

⁴⁹ BNA, HC 140/6, HC in Cape Town, 25 Aug. 1897, to J. Chamberlain.

⁵⁰ BNA, HC 140/6, RC in Mafeking, 20 Aug. 1897, to HC in Cape Town.

⁵¹ BNA, RC 140/6, Scholefield in Machabin, 10 July 1897, to RC.

might be possible to settle these Demaras as cotters or bijwooners with such boers as may require them'.⁵²

RINDERPEST AND REFUGEES

An unexpected benefit of the rinderpest epizootic, which raged throughout southern Africa in 1896 and 1897, was that the tsetse-fly infestation of the Okavango swamps retreated. As the ungulate wildlife, on which the fly preyed, died out, so the tsetse-fly was eradicated in the Delta.⁵³ As a consequence, extensive tracts of land that had hitherto been closed to human settlement, became available. At the same time as the rinderpest, drought and desiccation struck the areas to the west of the Okavango Delta and Lake Ngami in particular. In 1896, Lake Ngami dried up for the first time in living memory and Nkalachwe, Sekgoma's capital on the shores of Lake Ngami, saw its wells dry up. As a consequence, Sekgoma withdrew his capital to Tsau on the edge of the Okavango delta, and resettled his herds on Chief's Island in the middle of the delta, which was now free of tsetse-fly infestation. Virgin lands, normally reserved solely for hunting, were taken over by the Tawana, who could now 'farm near river water and valleys without fear of sleeping sickness ... [and whose] cattle could have access to river water all year round'.⁵⁴

Having withdrawn into the well-watered regions of the Okavango delta, it was in the desiccated areas to the west of the delta that Sekgoma now resettled the Banderu refugees under the reciprocal asylum arrangements that had been made between them and Sekgoma Letsholathebe. In effect, though the Tawana had withdrawn, the lands remained firmly under the control of the Tawana. Loans of royal *mafisa* cattle were extended to the incoming refugees and a number of Banderu, under Kandu Matundu, Kuneho Henguva and Kakopere Hange, were settled in the areas to the west of Makakung.⁵⁵ Most of the remaining refugees were settled in the Sehitwa-Tholamoro area along the northern shores of Lake Ngami.⁵⁶

In the aftermath of the Banderu war, German and Herero commandos allied to Samuel Maharero mercilessly attacked those alleged to have been involved in the war in GSWA. The followers of Tjetjo Kandjii, one of the richest of the eastern Herero and the father of Kahaka Seu, one of the Herero leaders who had fled to Sekgoma Letsholathebe, were among those raided. In addition, in the aftermath of the rinderpest, raiding for cattle escalated as chiefs allied to Samuel Maharero attempted to re-establish their depleted cattle herds and authority.⁵⁷ At times this raiding extended over the boundary and into the Bechuanaland protectorate.⁵⁸ By the time the

⁵² BNA, HC 145/1, Scholefield, 8 Dec. 1897, to RC.

⁵³ Morton, 'Ngamiland', 78. ⁵⁴ Morton, 'Ngamiland', 79.

⁵⁵ Kandapaera, 'War, flight, asylum', 28.

⁵⁶ Interviews conducted 18-23 Dec. 1992 in Tholamoro, Sehitwa and Toteng.

⁵⁷ For raiding, see Gewalt, *Herero Heroes*, 125-8. For raiding resulting from rinderpest stock losses elsewhere in Africa, see H. Kjekshus, *Ecology Control and Economic Development in East African History: The Case of Tanganyika, 1850-1950* (London, 1977), 126-31.

⁵⁸ BNA, HC 143, Wilfrid Scholefield RM in Machabin Ngamiland, 7 Sept. 1898, to HC.

Herero-German war broke out in 1904, Samuel Maharero and his allies could count on very little sympathy from those who had preceded him in their flight to Ngamiland.

THE HERERO-GERMAN WAR

In January 1904, the Herero-German war broke out. The war resulted in the death of the majority of the Herero and the expulsion of thousands of survivors from German South-West Africa.⁵⁹ After hostilities had begun, German authorities informed the British high commissioner in Pretoria of the war, and expressed their fear that the Herero would seek refuge in the Bechuanaland protectorate.⁶⁰ In response, the British authorities prepared for the influx of Herero refugees, established a temporary police station just across the boundary at Olifantskloof and dispatched eight Basotho troopers of the Bechuanaland protectorate police to Ngamiland.⁶¹

Shortly after the war had broken out, Herero began streaming into Ngamiland. Broadly speaking, the incoming refugees could be divided into two categories: those with cattle and those without. The first refugees to cross the border were generally still in possession of their cattle, and were thus, as long as they could find sufficient grazing and water, self-sufficient.⁶² The majority of these refugees crossed the border between Rietfontein in GSWA and Olifantskloof in the Bechuanaland protectorate. Once across the boundary they were disarmed by Bechuanaland protectorate troopers and resettled on government land in the Ghanzi district.⁶³ Not that this meant that they were safe. In May 1904, German forces launched attacks on the refugees across the border, and Herero were shot and killed in the Bechuanaland protectorate.⁶⁴ Sekgoma Letsholathebe showed every desire to help in the resettlement of refugees in the Ghanzi district, an area which, though officially no longer under his jurisdiction, he still claimed as his own.⁶⁵ Added to this, these people would form a buffer against the Ghanzi Boers and the Germans, pay tax and provide a support base for his position *vis-à-vis* Mathiba (the man who in terms of Tawana custom ought to have become *kgosi*).

Refugees without cattle were less fortunate and generally entered the Bechuanaland protectorate at a later stage in the war. As the war had raged in Namibia, the Herero, in attempting to take their cattle with them, had withdrawn north-eastwards until they had reached the Waterberg. Here, they had been surrounded on all but one side by German forces. On their eastern flank the Herero faced the waterless wastes of the *Omaheke* (coarse

⁵⁹ For an overview of the war and its consequences, see Gewalt, *Herero Heroes*, 141–230. Also, Helmut Bley, *South-West Africa under German Rule, 1894–1914* (London, 1971); J. M. Bridgman, *The Revolt of the Hereros* (Berkeley, 1981); Horst Drechsler, *Let Us Die Fighting* (London, 1980); and Gerhardus Pool, *Die Herero-Opstand 1904–1907* (Cape Town, 1979). ⁶⁰ BNA, RC 10/16, telegram from HC, 12 Feb. 1904, to RC.

⁶¹ BNA, RC 10/16, telegram RC, 13 Dec. 1904, to HC and RC, 15 Feb. 1904, to police. ⁶² BNA, RC 11/1, Merry in Tsau, 27 Apr. 1905, to RC.

⁶³ BNA, RC 10/18, Williams in Tsau, 12 Mar. 1904, to RC.

⁶⁴ BNA, RC 10/18, Williams in Tsau, 2 May 1904, to RC.

⁶⁵ BNA, RC 10/18, Williams in Tsau, 12 Mar. 1904, to RC.

sand) veld. With the battle of *Hamakari*, and the skirmishes that followed, the Herero were driven into the *Omaheke*. This, as the official German war history put it, 'completed the work of destruction'.⁶⁶

By September 1904, some Herero refugees from the Waterberg, bereft of their material goods and stock, began reaching the Tawana cattleposts in the western desert.⁶⁷ Completely destitute and frequently starving, the Herero were at the mercy of whomever they chanced upon. They exchanged their weapons for food, or were simply robbed. Refugees also sought to trap and hunt game, or took to eating veld foods, some of which were unfamiliar and poisonous. Tormented by thirst, Herero drank any water that they chanced upon and sometimes died of poisoning. Diseases easily afflicted weakened refugees, and smallpox raged among them.⁶⁸ In some instances, Bushmen, whose hospitality the Herero appear to have abused, led German patrols in their attacks on the refugees.⁶⁹

As the refugees streamed into his territory, the Tawana *Kgosi* Sekgoma Letsholathebe sought to make use of the pastoral skills for which some of the Herero were renowned. As the resident magistrate in Tsau noted, 'Sekgoma has agreed to locate them in this reserve, these people are being sent to the various Tawana cattle posts where they will be able to obtain food, they will now be looked upon as forming part of this tribe'.⁷⁰ Apart from being employed in Ngamiland proper, Herero refugees came to be employed on the newly established Boer farms in the Ghanzi block,⁷¹ or as herders for Bakgalagadi in the areas south of Ghanzi, around Hukunsi and Lehututu.⁷²

The British colonial administration for its part felt that it would be better if the refugees were to be put to work in the labour-hungry mines of South Africa.⁷³ Shortly after the arrival of the first Herero refugees in Ngamiland, the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WNLA) applied to the British authorities to lift their ban on the export of labour from this area of the protectorate.⁷⁴ Not surprisingly, the colonial authorities, faced with an

⁶⁶ Kriegsgeschichtlichen Abteilung 1 des Großen Generalstabes, *Die Kämpfe der deutschen Truppen in Südwestafrika: III: Der Entscheidungskampf am Waterberg, Der Untergang des Hererovolkes* (Berlin, 1906), 218. Author's translation.

⁶⁷ BNA, RC 10/18, Williams in Tsau, 6 Sept. 1904, to RC. Refers to Herero refugees arriving at 'Tsangwa', Xangwa, Qangwa, is a small settlement along the Kama River. Herero pastoralist settlements surround it and the area is referred to as Magopa. In the 1960s anthropological research on the Dobe Kung was conducted at Magopa, Xangwa and Dobe. On Tawana ownership of these posts, see BNA, RC 11/1, Merry in Tsau, 25 Apr. 1905, to RC. 'Until the boundary [BP/GSWA] is defined it is quite impossible to say on which side of the line Nyainyai and Guduwa are situated, natives on both sides look upon their places as being in Sekgoma's country, and until recent years the Batawana had cattle posts at both places ...'.

⁶⁸ For disease and thirst, see BNA, RC 11/1, report by Surmon in Tsau, 3 Apr. 1905, to RC; and Merry in Tsau, 25 Apr. 1905, to RC. On the searching of veld foods and hunting, see BNA, RC 10/18, report by M. G. Williams in Tsau, 28 Sept. 1904, to RC. On the trading of weapons, see BNA, RC 12/12, Hodson in Kaken, 16 May 1905, to RC.

⁶⁹ BNA, RC 11/1, Merry in Tsau, 25 Apr. 1905, to RC.

⁷⁰ BNA, RC 11/1, Merry in Tsau, 5 July 1905, to RC.

⁷¹ Manasse, 'Politics of separation', 7; Stanley, 'Otjiherero-speaking Gantsi'; and BNA, DCGH1/5, letter J. Hardbattle in Buitswango, 24 Nov. 1903, to district commissioner (DC). ⁷² BNA, RC 12/12, Hodson in 'Gukunsi', 5 June 1905, to RC.

⁷³ BNA, RC 11/1, M. G. Williams in Tsau, 31 Oct. 1904, to RC.

⁷⁴ BNA, RC 11/1, HC in Johannesburg, 25 Jan. 1905, to RC.

stock and property of any kind brought from Damaraland into the Protectorate and registered as the property of any person shall be regarded as for the present the property of the person in whose name it is registered'.⁸⁸

Shortly after his arrival in Ngamiland, Samuel Maharero ceased to live at the quarters of Sekgoma Letsholathebe as a guest of the *kgosi*. Instead he moved to the police camp in Tsau, where he was dependent on handouts from the British authorities. As long as he stayed in Ngamiland he was evidently unable to maintain his position as paramount chief of the Herero.⁸⁹ He had become, in the words of a British official, 'an ordinary refugee ... [with] no rights whatever to any chieftainship even over his own people in the protectorate'.⁹⁰ In response to German claims that Samuel Maharero's presence in Ngamiland posed a threat to German interests in GSWA, the resident commissioner noted:

Any idea ... that he and his people are contemplating a renewal of hostilities is preposterous. The man is a poor, weak creature, without much brain, utterly without resource of any kind, and thankful to be where he can exist without dread of reprisal for anything that may have happened during the war.⁹¹

The Tawana *kgosi*, Sekgoma Letsholathebe, shared the British position *vis-à-vis* Samuel Maharero.

In April 1905, less than six months after Samuel Maharero had arrived in his territory, Sekgoma Letsholathebe firmly rejected Maharero's authority by coming down openly in support of the Banderu refugees and their applications for asylum. Maharero's earlier attacks and old scores with the Banderu had finally come back to haunt him. Thus in April, Sekgoma and his councillors were signatory to the following letter:

To our R.C.

Sir we are glad to write to you about one of the Damara's refugee that has come to our country, with great humility we ask you to let him stay here with us, as he likes to stay. He is your man with his people though he stays here with us, therefore we ask you to let him stop here with us. He says he wants to stop here. We do not talk of Samuel; but Nicodemus, he is afraid of chief Samuel. He says he ran away from Damaraland as far as here because he was afraid of the chief Samuel. Therefore he is afraid to stay with Samuel he asked to stay with us in our Reserve we hope you will listen to our sayings.

Chief Sekgoma Letsholathebe; Dithapo Meno; Lekgopho Mogalakwe; Katimpa Mogalakwe; Ketsuhile; Koolebtse; Gabosegwe; Keatatse; Moikwathai; Nkuttwan; Shwanka.⁹²

The letter clearly indicated the fear that Nicodemus Kavarure (alias Hijatuvao or Nikodemus Kahimemua) had of Samuel Maharero. Nicodemus was the son of the younger brother of Kahimemua, the Banderu chief who

⁸⁸ BNA, RC 11/1, RC in Mafeking, 8 Sept. 1905, to acting magistrate Ngamiland.

⁸⁹ BNA, RC 11/1, RC in Tsau, 7 Aug. 1905, to HC.

⁹⁰ BNA, RC 11/1, Merry in Tsau, 31 Jan. 1905, to acting RC Mafeking.

⁹¹ BNA, RC 11/2, RC, Ralph Williams in Tsau, 24 June 1906, to HC.

⁹² BNA, RC 11/1, Batawana council in Tsau, 27 Apr. 1905, to resident magistrate (RM).

had been executed in Okahandja with Samuel Maharero's consent in 1896.⁹³ Sekgoma, in compliance with the earlier reciprocal asylum agreements, had accepted Nicodemus in 1896, and had settled him at one of his cattleposts in the western desert near Magopa.⁹⁴ It was precisely this cattlepost that was raided by the forces of Samuel Maharero in 1904 as they struggled towards Ngamiland.⁹⁵ Not surprisingly, Nicodemus feared Samuel Maharero, and his own letter to the British authorities brings this across very clearly:

I Nicodemus Kahimemua want to stay at Sekgoma's Reserve. As Sekgoma is your man I am also your man. I did not run away from Damaraland because I was afraid of the war. *I was afraid of Samuel*, therefore I came to Sekgoma.⁹⁶

With uncharacteristic understatement, the resident magistrate in Tsau, Lt Merry, noted that there appeared to be 'great enmity' between the Banderu and the Herero: 'The Banderu are particularly bitter against Samuel Maharero, whom they look upon as being responsible for the death of their late chief Kahimemua'.⁹⁷

In a meeting held in 1906, the resident commissioner, Ralph Williams, noted the following:

It is necessary to explain that although we call these people Damaras they are two separate peoples, viz: Hereros and Banderus, though I gather they have no marked boundary line.

He [Samuel Maharero] appears to have lived in towns, to have drunk heavily, and to have neglected and perhaps oppressed the people in some degree. Nicodemus expressly told me in Samuel's presence that he and the Banderus were oppressed by Samuel, and Samuel's reply was: 'Are you sure that it was not the German Government and not I who did this?'... Anyway whether Samuel was a catspaw of the Germans or not, it is now quite certain that the Banderus in this protectorate desire not to recognise him and to have nothing to do with him.⁹⁸

Referring to Kahaka Seu and his followers, one of the Herero leaders who had fled from Samuel Maharero during the war of 1896, Williams noted that they had become 'more or less part of the Batawana'. Be that as it may, it was clear that the Herero and Banderu, who had entered the territory before 1904, wanted absolutely nothing to do with Samuel Maharero. In fact, these earlier arrivals urged the government to treat them separately from Samuel Maharero: 'They pray that they may not be regarded as refugees and that they may be regarded as entirely distinct from Samuel'.⁹⁹

⁹³ Banderu oral histories emphasize that prior to the battle of *Otjunda*, in which the Banderu were defeated and Kahimemua was captured, Kahimemua had performed magical acts to ensure the survival of Nicodemus. After watching from the safety of a hollow tree trunk, Nicodemus survived the battle of *Otjunda*, in which Kahimemua was captured, and fled to Sekgoma Letsholathebe in Ngamiland. *The Mbanderu: Their History until 1914 as Told to Theo Sundermeier in 1966 by Heinrich Tjituka, Heinrich Hengari, Albert Kajovi, Heinrich Kavari, Paul Katjivikua, Ernst Ketjipotu*, trans. Annemarie Heywood, annotated by Brigitte Lau (Windhoek, 1986), 42-5; and Kandapaera, 'War, flight, asylum', 23. ⁹⁴ Kandapaera, 'War, flight, asylum', 34.

⁹⁵ BNA, RC 11/1, Williams in Tsau, 31 Oct. 1904, to RC.

⁹⁶ BNA, RC 11/1, Nicodemus Kahimemua, Kahumunu and Ezekiel in Tsau, 27 Apr. 1905, to RM. Emphasis added.

⁹⁷ BNA, RC 11/1, Merry in Tsau, 27 Apr. 1905, to RC.

⁹⁸ BNA, RC 11/2, Williams in Tsau, 28 June 1906, to RC.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

Opposed by a number of people whom he claimed as his subjects, opposed by his erstwhile host, Sekgoma Letsholathebe, and given to understand by the British that he would not be entitled to any preferential treatment, Samuel Maharero sought to capitalize on his waning prestige as a chief by attempting to revive his role as a labour recruiter for the mines of South Africa. In this way he hoped to begin reacquiring material wealth, as well as a modicum of status in the eyes of the British authorities.

Samuel Maharero had old connections with the Rand and believed that the Herero-German war had been caused by his willingness to supply the British with labourers for the South African mines. It was an aspect of shared responsibility that he sought to emphasize in all his dealings with the British authorities after the war.¹⁰⁰ In effect, his ability to gather together labour was his trump card. Sources indicate that the British authorities as well as the mining companies truly believed that Samuel Maharero would be able to supply substantial amounts of labour for the mines.¹⁰¹ Accordingly, as Samuel himself reported in later years:

After I had fought the Germans in my own country, I sought refuge under the [British] Government, and the latter received me and prevented my enemies from pursuing me. And after the Government had received me, a white man named Jund [Hewitt] came to me at Tsau, Lake N'gami, and said to me 'I have been sent by the Government to you, the Government has given you ground on which you and your people will build'. But, Chief, this was an untruth, he was only getting me into trouble, he was referring to ground owned by Companies. And after I had left with him he took me to the Transvaal and told me that it was a country of contracts and that I must send my people to work on contract at the Mines. Thereupon I began to send men to work on contract, and they died in large numbers.¹⁰²

MATHIBA'S COUP

Unfortunately for the Banderu and Herero refugees, the patronage and support which they had received from Sekgoma Letsholathebe was cut short when he was deposed in a coup supported by the British authorities in 1906.¹⁰³ In late 1905, Sekgoma Letsholathebe travelled down to Mafeking for medical treatment. During his absence, Sekgoma's opponents called for the installation of his brother's son, Mathiba, as the rightful *kgosi* of the Tawana. As Sekgoma sought to return to Ngamiland, he was arrested and incarcerated in the fort at Gaborone. Here he was to languish in captivity for

the next five years. Meanwhile, in a series of hearings, Mathiba was 'chosen' by majority vote and installed as the rightful *kgosi* of the Tawana.¹⁰⁴ In describing the event Thomas Tlou has written the following:

Sekgoma's support came largely from the common people, the bulk of whom were subject communities – the Baherero, the BaYei, and the HaMbukushu. Most of these were, however, excluded from the proceedings on the basis that they were 'strangers'. This allegation was incorrect since these people belonged to the Tawana state, and were directly affected by its politics ... Mathiba cannot, therefore, be said to have been elected by popular vote. He was arbitrarily made king by the administration with the cooperation of the royals, who did not, in any case, constitute the majority of the population.¹⁰⁵

The deposition of Sekgoma Letsholathebe had major implications for Herero-speaking society in Ngamiland. Through being allied to Sekgoma Letsholathebe, the Banderu, as with other groups in Ngamiland, had been able to oppose established structures and the order that had existed before. During the reign of Sekgoma Letsholathebe, the subservience that some of the Herero chiefs had sought to enforce on the Banderu did not exist in Ngamiland. Instead, Banderu were assured of the full support of Sekgoma Letsholathebe in their dealings with the Herero. The alliance which had developed between the Banderu and Sekgoma was cut short by the coup. As a consequence of the coup, Banderu, Herero and Tawana relations changed immediately.¹⁰⁶

Within two weeks of the episode, the British administration began inquiring into the position of the Herero and Banderu who had found sanctuary in Ngamiland.¹⁰⁷ Though Samuel Maharero had only found a temporary safe haven in Ngamiland, other Herero and Banderu had been more fortunate. Among those were the Banderu associated with Nicodemus Kavarure. In early 1907, the acting resident magistrate in Tsau began reviewing the grounds on which Nicodemus and his followers had been permitted to stay in Ngamiland.¹⁰⁸ Initially, Sekgoma could still count on substantial support in Ngamiland. There, his followers, known to the British as the Sekgomaites, were secure in their numbers *vis-à-vis* the new *kgosi* Mathiba. However, the longer that Sekgoma was forced to stay away from Ngamiland, the more his power base became eroded. As a consequence, the position of his allies, including the Banderu and Herero, became ever more tenuous.

¹⁰⁰ BNA, RC 11/1, translated letter from Samuel Maharero at Nyainyai, 28 Sept. 1904, to Williams; RC 4/18, memorandum by Ngamiland magistrate on the native inhabitants of the German South-West Africa Protectorate with special reference to the conditions affecting Ngamiland, 20 Jan. 1905; and RC 11/2, RC, Ralph Williams in Tsau, 24 June 1906, to HC.

¹⁰¹ For an overview of Herero labour to the Rand, see J. B. Gewald, 'The road of the man called Love and the sack of Sero: the Herero-German war and the export of Herero labour to the South African mines', *Journal of African History*, 40 (1999), 21–40.

¹⁰² NNAW, SWAA 2085, copy of letter from Samuel Maharero, 25 Feb. 1920, to RC.

¹⁰³ For a detailed discussion of the coup, see Morton, 'Ngamiland', 89–96; Tlou, *Ngamiland*, 130–5.

¹⁰⁴ BNA, S 32/7, Ralph Williams RC to HC, writing from Tsau Lake Ngami, 10 July 1906.

¹⁰⁵ Tlou, *Ngamiland*, 134.

¹⁰⁶ For similar developments at a later stage in history one could refer to Nyemba refugees in Namibia following the changed political climate of Namibian independence. 'Many [Nyemba] refugees did not refer to any cultural traditions, but expressed jealousy at the Kwangali's possession of official documents. It is remembered with regret that, during South African rule, IDs were liberally distributed among Angolan immigrants. The immigrants have the impression that the Namibian government has now given Kwangali meanness and xenophobia a chance to be converted into policy and any Nyemba can expect to be deported from the country at any time'. Brinkman, 'Violence and ethnicity', 435.

¹⁰⁷ BNA, RC 11/2, Williams in Tsau, 28 June 1906, to RC.

¹⁰⁸ BNA, S 30/4/1, actg magistrate in Tsau, 2 Jan. 1907, to gov. sec. in Mafeking.

BRITISH ADMINISTRATION VIEWS OF HERERO/BANDERU

The British authorities were most impressed with the Herero refugees. To a large extent this was due to the belief that the Herero were of mythical Hamitic ancestry. In the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Africanists believed that they had found evidence for a major migration of peoples from the Near East to all parts of Africa. These Hamites were alleged to have brought with them particular ideas about monotheism, political hierarchies and livestock husbandry and, in their migration southwards, to have established the kingdoms of Bunyoro, Ankole and Rwanda, as well as the impressive stone structures of Great Zimbabwe.¹⁰⁹ The Herero appeared to fit the bill as Hamites. Their imposing physiques, shaped by their reliance on dairy products, coupled with their pastoral lifestyle, high levels of literacy and adoption of western-style clothing, all served to differentiate them from other Africans and to emphasize their allegedly superior ancestry. Indeed, German missionary and amateur ethnologist, Heinrich Vedder, went so far as to describe the Herero as 'ein echtes Herrenvolk', a true master race.¹¹⁰ Afrikaner writer and mystic Eugene Marais, who later met Samuel Maharero in the Transvaal, described the Herero as black Afrikaners. 'Most of them could read and write - High-Dutch was the normal "School language" and a form of Afrikaans the "learned" language of speech. All wore European clothes; many lived in built houses and farmed as Afrikaners did'.¹¹¹ The ideas of the Herero as a superior class of people also found particular resonance with A. G. Stigand, resident magistrate, Ngamiland (1911-14), whose intellectual brother, also in the colonial service, had written on 'Hamitic' pastoralists in east Africa.¹¹²

In the past, Samuel Shepherd had been employed from time to time as an interpreter or clerk by the British authorities, and they too came increasingly to employ Herero for administrative purposes in Ngamiland. In the eyes of many of the colonial officials, the Herero, in distinction to the Banderu, were seen and thought of as being of a 'superior class'. In 1911, when Basotho police troopers working for the protectorate government were to be replaced as clerks and interpreters, Stigand had them replaced by men he had selected from among the Herero resident in Ngamiland. In justifying his choice, Stigand resorted to endorsements that bordered on the sensuous:

With regard to the 8 Hereros, I have measured them all for their tunics, trousers, headgear and boots and attach their measurements ... I feel confident that the Hereros will make better Policemen than any Basutos we have had. They are very wiry and strong, can walk long distances without fatigue; can ride pack oxen or horses. They understand cattle better than any other natives in this territory. They are dignified and of fine tall physique, though not too heavy and fleshy for riding.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ Carl Meinhof, *Afrikanische Religionen, Hamburgische Vorträge* (Berlin, 1912); Erich Brauer, *Züge aus der Religion der Herero: Ein Beitrag zur Hamitenfrage* (Leipzig, 1925).

¹¹⁰ Heinrich Vedder, *Das Alte Südwest: Südwestafrikas Geschichte bis zum Tode Mahareros 1890* (Berlin, 1934; reprint Windhoek, 1997), 44.

¹¹¹ Eugene N. Marais, *Sketse uit die Lewe van Mens en Dier* (Kapaastad, 1928), 3. Author's translation.

¹¹² Chauncy Hugh Stigand, *Land of Zinj, Being an Account of British East Africa, Its Ancient History and Present Inhabitants, by Captain C. H. Stigand* (London, 1913).

¹¹³ BNA, S 43/4, RM in Tsau, 27 Apr. 1911, to acting RC Mafeking.

It would be safe to say that Stigand idolized the Herero. In a later letter he stated, 'the Damara is head and shoulders above all others, and the Batawana about the most indifferent'. For Stigand, the Herero were the ideal native:

When the rains fall and there is water in pans away on the sandbelt, the Damaras go off with their herds ... like the Masai of B.E. Africa ... The Masai, however, are still savages, whereas the average Damara is (thanks probably to the German Missionary Schools of G.S.W.A.) very civilized.¹¹⁴

But, unfortunately for the Banderu, these favourable statements were confined solely to the Herero. In Stigand's own words, 'the Banderos are the inferior natives of Damaraland and stand in the same relation to Hereros as the Makoba [Yei] do to the Batawana'.¹¹⁵ Clearly, for Stigand, the Banderu were not what he considered to be the best sort of native. It is probable that Stigand's rejection of the Banderu of Ngamiland was related to their continued allegiance to Sekgoma Letsholathebe. A further possible cause and symptom of Stigand's admiration for Herero bodies was his having taken two Herero women as concubines.¹¹⁶

FROM SUBJECTS TO ALIENS

In terms of royal genealogy and aristocratic support, Sekgoma Letsholathebe had been a usurper. His power was derived from a base not normally used, which included the Herero-speaking refugees and immigrants in his kingdom. Under Sekgoma's rule these immigrants had been accorded the right to speak at *kgotla*, where they helped to determine political developments and enjoyed the same rights as Tawana.¹¹⁷ When Sekgoma was deposed and incarcerated in the military fort in Gaborone, a substantial number of his supporters lost their power. Tawana subjects who were now deemed to be 'strangers' were no longer allowed to take part in *kgotla* proceedings.¹¹⁸

Cut off from political power, archival and oral sources suggest that the immigrant supporters of Sekgoma turned to other more esoteric forms of power. In colonial parlance, the supporters of Sekgoma were referred to generally as the 'Sekgomaites'.¹¹⁹ In 1913, the Tawana capital and the resident magistrate's camp were moved from Tsau to Maun at the request of the supporters of Mathiba on the grounds that 'the Sekgomaites have poisoned and bewitched the ground here'.¹²⁰ Eighty-five years later, Tsau is

¹¹⁴ BNA, S 292/5, Stigand in Tsau, 18 July 1913, to RC.

¹¹⁵ BNA, S 43/4, Stigand in Tsau, 27 Apr. 1911, to acting RC Mafeking.

¹¹⁶ Rhodes House, Oxford, MSS Brit Empire S 22. G8, Anti-slavery Papers. British South Africa Bechuanaland, S 22 G150 Native Case in Bechuanaland, Butler to Sec, Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Prot. Soc. 4 May 1916. With thanks to Barry Morton for access to his notes.

¹¹⁷ The *kgotla* is the court or council place at the centre of Tswana society in which public affairs are discussed and decided upon by the generally male members of society.

¹¹⁸ Tlou, *Ngamiland*, 130-5; Morton, 'Ngamiland', 93-4.

¹¹⁹ Morton mentions that the Setswana term *Maitapiso*, with the approximate meaning, 'those who fight for a lost cause', was used to refer to the 'Sekgomaites' in Setswana. Morton, 'Ngamiland', 99. ¹²⁰ BNA, S 35/6, RM in Tsau, 29 Jan. 1913, to RC.

a small desolate settlement. In front of its trading store lie the remains of what was once an enormous camel thorn tree. Informants state that prior to 1913 this tree provided shelter and shade for the *kgotla*, and that following the deposition of Sekgoma Letsholathebe, the tree died. Oral histories support the witchcraft claims voiced by Stigand, and claim that Banderu, in response to the deposition of their patron Sekgoma, had cursed the tree that provided the *kgotla* with shade.¹²¹ With its death, oral historians argue, Mathiba and his followers saw the power of the Banderu and began to agitate against their remaining in Ngamiland.

In 1916, Banderu under Nicodemus Kavarure petitioned the Bechuanaland protectorate government for permission to trek away from Ngamiland. The petitioners requested that they be permitted to move to and settle at 'Nyae Nyae in the South West African Protectorate', as 'Chief Mathibe, under whom they have been for several years is inclined to exact too much from the Damaras in his reserve. Making them weed lands, build houses, bury dead Batawana, make roads and hunt buffaloes etc'.¹²² In commenting on the Banderu complaints, *Kgosi* Mathiba did not dispute that there were major difficulties between himself and the followers of Nicodemus Kavarure. However, in contrast to his predecessor, Sekgoma, who had accorded the immigrants full rights within the Batawana kingdom, Mathiba sought to emphasize anew the alien status of the immigrants. Thus, Mathiba stated, 'The customs of the Batawana are totally different to the Banderu and the Damara, and the former refuse to adapt themselves to the new conditions and defy the Batawana laws'.¹²³

In the eyes of all concerned the situation had become untenable and, in the interests of peace, permission was granted to Nicodemus Kavarure and his followers to trek to Kavimba, on the southern banks of the Chobe River, where the remaining followers of Sekgoma Letsholathebe had settled.¹²⁴

IMMIGRANTS AND ALLEGIANCES

In a perceptive paper, Inge Brinkman has recently noted that 'the relationship between war, exile and ethnicity has only recently garnered some attention'.¹²⁵ Brinkman could also have included 'the political allegiance of refugees in host communities' as another element of this relationship. Apart from contemporary UNHCR and NGO reports on refugees seeking to establish themselves in host communities, there has been little systematic historical research in Africa on the manner in which refugees come to be assimilated within host communities, their political allegiances *vis-à-vis* the host community or the differentiated socio-economic nature of these immigrants.¹²⁶

¹²¹ Interviews conducted Dec. 1992 in Tsau, Sehitwa and Maun, with the assistance of Kaendee Kandapaera and Kovihele Kov Kaotozu.

¹²² BNA, S 126/1, acting government secretary in Mafeking, 1 July 1916, to RM.

¹²³ BNA, S 126/1, RM. Maun Ngamiland, 3 Aug. 1916, to acting gov. sec.

¹²⁴ BNA, S 126/1, RM Maun, 20 Mar. 1917, to RC.

¹²⁵ Brinkman, 'Violence, ethnicity', 421.

¹²⁶ A notable exception, detailing a series of refugee waves, has been Van Damme, 'Liberian and Sierra Leonean'.

In her work with contemporary Hutu refugee communities in Tanzania, Malkki has clearly detailed how history and identity were being continually refashioned in Mishamo refugee camp to strengthen and maintain the Hutu identity of camp residents. By contrast, in Kigoma, Hutu refugees sought to lose their Hutu identity and to disappear into the heterogeneous mix of the town. Thus, Malkki argues, in the case of Burundian refugees, the past was of little significance to those living in towns, whereas to those living in camps it was of the utmost importance as a mythical charter by which daily life could be lived.¹²⁷ Generally speaking, there would appear to be two choices open to refugees: becoming assimilated or maintaining a distinct identity from the host community as refugees.¹²⁸ Brinkman, in work that has highlighted the plight of Angolan refugees seeking to live in north-eastern Namibia, has indicated that there is a third alternative.¹²⁹ In dealing with strategies adopted by Angolan refugees, Brinkman notes that, in contrast to the Burundian refugees studied by Malkki, Nyemba immigrants in Kaisosi and Kehemu seek to 'stress the multiplicity of ethnic as well as national identity'.¹³⁰ That is, the refugees studied by Brinkman continually seek to keep open as many options as possible.

This does not appear initially to have been the case with the Herero refugees and immigrants who entered into Ngamiland. For as long as Sekgoma Letsholathebe was in power, Herero immigrants who were prepared to express allegiance to the *kgosi* were granted the same rights as Tawana. In doing this, Sekgoma was able to broaden his support base and to strengthen his position in the Tawana kingdom. To some extent, the historic role of these immigrants also mirrored the experience and role of Tutsi immigrants in Uganda in the bringing to power of Museveni, as described by van der Meeren. Of particular relevance here is her description of the manner in which refugee communities can come to be involved in a symbiotic relationship to further the aims of specific sectors within the host community.¹³¹ In the short term, in contrast to the Nyemba immigrants discussed by Brinkman, the willingness of the Herero immigrants in Ngamiland to express their allegiance and loyalty to Sekgoma Letsholathebe was not without its benefits. However, in the long term, following the ascendancy of Mathiba, these initial expressions of loyalty and allegiance, which had led to rights on a par with the Tawana, led to the marginalization of Herero immigrants in Ngamiland.

CONCLUSION

There has been a broad tendency to treat the Herero-speaking people living in Botswana and Ngamiland in particular as a single delineated whole. Yet, such a view fails to take into account the historical and political developments

¹²⁷ Malkki, *Purity and Exile*, 193-4.

¹²⁸ What Brinkman refers to as the 'thesis of strategy' and the 'thesis of marginality'. Brinkman, 'Violence, ethnicity', 422.

¹²⁹ Brinkman, 'Violence, ethnicity', and to a lesser extent, 'Angolan refugees'.

¹³⁰ Brinkman, 'Violence, ethnicity', 438.

¹³¹ Van der Meeren, 'Three decades'; and Behrend, 'Ethnicity militarization'. In the present, the role of *Interhamwe* in the current Congo civil war emphasizes once again the symbiotic relationship that can develop between host and immigrant communities.

that have taken place in Ngamiland. Herero-speaking migrants arrived in Ngamiland at different times and for different reasons. Herero speakers in Ngamiland were also strongly divided among themselves. Residual resentments from events in Namibia continued to inform Herero relations within Ngamiland. More often than not the Herero immigrants already resident in Ngamiland were in conflict with new Herero migrants who sought to settle in the territory. During the reign of *Kgosi* Sekgoma Letsholathebe, Herero-speaking immigrants, in seeking to strengthen their position in the host community, became actively involved in the internal politics of the Tawana kingdom. *Different Herero migrants allied themselves to a variety of power brokers, be they the incipient British colonial administration, Tawana royals allied to Mathiba or Tawana commoners allied to Sekgoma.* As long as Sekgoma was in power and dependent upon his unusual support base of commoners and immigrants, the power and prestige of a number of Herero immigrants was assured. As soon as Sekgoma was deposed, in a coup which reinstated the centrality of Tawana royalty in politics, the power and prestige of the majority of Herero immigrants diminished. While in the years following Sekgoma's demise, Herero would become among the richest of Ngamiland's inhabitants, their political influence in Tawana politics ceased to exist.¹³²

¹³² This is in total contrast to the Herero allied to Samuel Maharero, who were settled by Khama in Mahalapye and are currently still well represented politically in contemporary Botswana: Deborah Durham, 'Images of culture: being Herero in a liberal democracy (Botswana)' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Chicago, 1993).