

10 *The Kavango Legislative Council*

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Introduction

The Bantustan policy, as implemented by the South African colonial government in South Africa and later in South West Africa (Namibia), served different social, political and economical purposes. After the victory of the National Party in 1948, the colonial government of South Africa embarked upon the strategy of separate development for the different 'native nations'. The Bantustan system fragmented the African majority population in South Africa and South West Africa into groupings along ethnic lines (the 'divide and rule' strategy). The strategy entailed the actual granting of home-rule and then self-determination and eventually independence to a few African ethnic states, the homelands. The introduction of homelands for the majority of the African people promoted controlled political and economic opportunities in the Bantustan peripheries, which would be sufficient to entice an emergent African beneficiary class into collaborating with South Africa in the control and suppression of the subordinated population, without simultaneously providing the class with sufficient muscle to become a significant competitor for power. It might be argued that the success of Namibia's liberation struggle was also dependent upon the failure of this alternative political framework. However, the existing historiography has largely ignored the internal political dynamics of the homelands, whilst the relevant literature that does exist has focused mainly on 'Ovamboland' (Töttemeyer, 1978; Kössler, 2005; Cooper, 2001)

This chapter is drawn from a more extensive thesis that was concerned with examining the Kavango Legislative Council, its constitution, its powers, the role of the traditional authorities within the body, and the legislation passed by the Council. It focuses on the period 1970 to 1979, covering the first and second Kavango Legislative Councils. It is concerned with answering two central questions: Firstly, who was recognised as the legitimate authority in the Kavango Region during this period? Secondly, what was the actual meaning and substance of the 'self-government' provided by the Legislative Council?

Initially, it is important to examine the composition of the Kavango Legislative Council and to provide a short overview of its history since such a history is lacking. Indeed, my research was motivated and driven by a desire to chart an unexplored political narrative and to seek answers to several unresolved questions. On the one hand, it is argued that the Kavango Legislative Council was simply a tool to facilitate colonial control and obtain the compliance of the population. On the other hand, South Africa claimed that it was a genuine initiative aimed at providing meaningful political development that would replace traditional authorities with a democratic system and self-governance for the Kavango. The chapter will consider these different arguments not only by providing

a descriptive account of the proceedings of the Kavango Legislative Council, but also by focusing on five key issues that were discussed by the Council: the notion of Kavango independence, the attempt to construct a 'Kavango' identity, the contract labour system, the Kavango Education Act and the Turnhalle Conference. By selecting specific debates and motions, the chapter helps to look at the extent to which the South African government imposed its colonial administration on the people of Kavango through the council and how the Council dealt with these issues.

In order to deliberate effectively on the role of the Council, a number of more specific questions need to be considered: Did any members of the Kavango Legislative Council use the chamber as a means to challenge the South African colonial administration of South West Africa at that time? What was the actual substance of the powers allocated to the Kavango Legislative Council by the Republic of South Africa? Was the chamber a forum for debate that reflected conflicting opinions, or was it merely a space used to applaud South African interventions? What was SWAPO's public position on the legitimacy of the Legislative Councils and is there any evidence that the Kavango Legislative Council could claim any popular support? Only a detailed analysis of the Kavango Legislative Council and its work can provide nuanced answers to such questions. One final important issue needs to be highlighted: in what ways did the establishment of the Kavango Legislative Council impact on the roles and rights of the existing traditional authorities? How did the Kavango Legislative Council modify and relate to the established structures of the traditional authority?

Various political, social and economic factors led to the establishment of 'Homelands' in South Africa after the National Party's election victory in 1948. Although not at the same level, time or pace, these factors were similar in Namibia and ensured that the African population in the two countries was divided and ruled along ethnic lines. The government in South Africa and Namibia sustained a system that, as Harold Wolpe (1972) argued in his classic article, provided cheap African migrant labourers to sustain the economy. In both South Africa and Namibia, the homeland system was viewed as providing a solution to the political question by providing a strategy for preserving white domination. Africans could claim political rights, but only 'outside' South Africa in the different 'native' homelands or 'outside' the 'Police Zone' which embraced the commercial farming and urban areas of Namibia. The contract labour system in Namibia served to ensure the control and regulation of migrant labour from the different homelands. It was a system that was justified by the colonial administration as a means to supplement South Africa's financial contribution to the various homelands, particularly following the expansive development projects contained within the Report of the Odendaal Commission (1964).

My research examined one of the ten homelands established in Namibia. By critically engaging with the politics of power, as reflected in the composition, legislation and authority of the Kavango Legislative Council, this chapter focuses on the issue of the distribution of power and the way power was diffused between the Council, the traditional authorities and the colonial government of South Africa between 1970 and 1979. The study ends in 1979 because after 1979, the Legislative Councils in Namibia were included in a three-tier national alliance government under the leadership of Dirk Mudge and the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (following their victory in a national