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Tasting the lost flute music of Sesfontein:

histories, memories, possibilities

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Future Pasts draws on Arts and Humanities research methodologies to document and analyse culturally-inflected perceptions and practices of sustainability. The project has a particular geographical focus on west Namibia, where three of our core research team have long-term field research experience.

The project seeks to:

- enhance understanding of sociocultural, economic and environmental changes in historical and post-independence contexts;
- document and support cultural heritage and indigenous knowledge regarding present and historical cultural landscapes of west Namibia;
- extend analysis and understanding of the historical ecologies of the Namib;
- interrogate interpretations of 'sustainability', particularly those contributing to the promotion of a growth-oriented 'green economy';
- foster cross-cultural public discussion of concerns relating to environmental change and sustainability;
- critically engage with the power dimensions shaping whose pasts become transferred forwards to the future in contemporary approaches to environmental conservation and sustainability.

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Tasting the lost flute music of Sesfontein: histories, memories, possibilities

Sian Sullivan¹, Welhemina Suro Ganuses², Emmanuelle Olivier³ and Fredrick !Hawaxab⁴

Abstract.

Polyphonic music played by ensembles of male flautists and accompanied by song-stories sung primarily by women has been recorded over the last 500 years for Khoekhoegowab-speaking peoples in southern Africa. Fragmented and disrupted through dramatic changes wrought by the expanding frontier of the Cape Colony, and later in Namibia through colonialism and apartheid, it appears likely that the last place this flute music was played was Sesfontein / !Nani|aus in north-west Namibia. It is also likely that the last time the flute music – †ā – was recorded in Sesfontein was in 1999 by ethnomusicologists Emmanuelle Olivier from France and the late Minette Mans from the University of Namibia. Twelve digitised recordings of Nama-Damara flautists and accompanying vocal performances are now catalogued in Olivier's Namibia collection in the British Library Sound Archive. Initial engagement with this audio material suggests continuity with several dimensions of the Khoe / Nama flute music known from around forty reviewed historical and ethnographic observations. These records stretch back to Vasco da Gama's 1497 encounter with a Khoe flute orchestra of around 200 men near Mossel Bay, South Africa. Some identified continuities include the playing of single-note and named flutes made carefully to sound at specific pitches, the form and structure of the ensemble music, and the type of events and themes commemorated by a flute-music performance. Starting in 2017, some of the Olivier / Mans recordings and accompanying images have been returned to contemporary inhabitants of Sesfontein, demonstrating that although the flute music is no longer played, people remain today who remember the songs, the flautists, the contexts in which the music was played, and the meanings of the music and accompanying performances. Our title reflects listeners' observation that when the songs start to flow easily the women get the 'taste' (*!hoaba*) of the music, the experience of which enables them to improvise more easily with their harmonies. This paper incorporates audio and images to share something of what we are learning through returning the music and images to the context in which they were made, as well as exploring connections between the recent Sesfontein flute music and Khoe / Nama flute music in time and space more broadly. We close by discussing possibilities and constraints regarding the restitution, recovery and possible recomposition of the Sesfontein flute music today.

Key words. Khoe / Nama flute music (†ā); southern Africa; Namibia; polyphony; memory; Khoekhoegowab; Sesfontein; restitution; racism; missionaries; colonialism; displacement

Dedicated to the late Hans Ganuseb of Sesfontein, who remembered how to play †ā, and passed away too young in 2020.

And to the late historian Jeremy Silvester, who was so enthusiastic about this work when it was first presented it at the *The Past, Present and Future of Namibian Heritage* conference in Windhoek in 2018.¹

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Suro – When they are singing, now they get the *taste* [!hoaba]. That’s why they are singing up and down like that.

Sian – they get the taste?

Suro – yes, of the song. That’s why they are singing up and down. Some women are singing up. One is up and one is down, like that.

Transcript from sound recording on 17 March 2017 at !Nao-dâis, north-west Namibia, on playing to Suro and her aunt Emma Ganuses recordings made on 6 June 1999 by ethnomusicologists Emmanuelle Olivier and Minette Mans, comprising possibly the last recording of flute music played in Sesfontein, Suro and Emma’s home village.²

Such is Zessfontein, with its memories of old tragedies and its dying race. Sometimes in the moonlight the Hottentots³ bring out their reed flutes and play the age-old music that Vasco da Gama and Simon van der Stel heard. Africa has nothing older in music than the reed flute. Each player blows upon a flute which gives one sound only; yet the flute orchestra produces a weird harmony as the musicians shuffle round in the sand. Only the old Hottentots possess this art, and only a handful of them survive. It cannot be long before they play their own requiem. Then the reed flutes will lie silent and forgotten in the sand as the full moon rises over the palms of Zessfontein oasis (Green 1953: 39).

The past is a great darkness, ... and filled with echoes (Atwood 1996[1985]: 320).

1. Beyond the Great River

In 1761-2, the surveyor and map-maker Carel Brink joined a pioneering journey from Cape Town towards the south-west corner of the territory known today as Namibia (Mossop 1947: 25-61; also Vedder 2016[1938]: 20; Du Pisani 1986: 14, 20; Wallace 2011: 51). With the support of the Cape Government and led by Hendrik Hop – Captain of the Cape Colonial Forces at Stellenbosch – the expedition was a large affair requiring fifteen ox-wagons. It involved sixteen Europeans – including the land surveyor Carel Brink, a botanist, a doctor and mineralogist, and an interpreter – as well as sixty-eight ‘Hottentots’: local people from the Cape who spoke a Khoë language characterised by click consonants⁴. In the previous year news had arrived in Cape Town of cattle-rich black-skinned pastoralists beyond the large flowing river that at that time was known as the !Gariep to the north of the consolidating Cape Colony. Having progressively exhausted the cattle of the various Khoë-herders present in the Cape when Van Riebeeck established a VOC (*Vereenigde Nederlandsche Oost Indische Compagnie* / Dutch East India Company) supply station at the foot of ‘Table Mountain’ (Stow 1905), the Cape government hoped to establish relations with these herders that would permit cattle to be brought back to Cape Town where they could be both consumed and lucratively traded.

Hop and Brink’s expedition left Cape Town on 16 July 1761, crossing the !Gariep at Ramansdrift to arrive on 5 October at Warmbad in present-day southern Namibia. Travelling northwards in the area of the Karas (!Kharas) mountain range on 22 October, the Hop/Brink expedition camped near a Nama(qua) settlement on the !Houm / Lion (Leeuwen) River. Here,

rhinos, giraffes, buffaloes, zebras, quaggas, kudus, elands, hartebeests and wildebeest (‘gnus’) ‘offered wonderful opportunities for hunting’, but the expedition discovered that the smallpox epidemic of 1755 ‘had been very bad in South West Africa’, and returned without the hoped for cattle riches, having reached almost as far as present-day Keetmanshoop (Vedder 2016[1938]: 20-1) (see Figure 2 for places mentioned in the text).

What the Hop/Brink expedition did bring back, however, are sketches by surveyor Brink that contributed to the first late 1700s map of ‘Namaqualand’. On this map a settlement is drawn, which the Nama linguist Theophilus Hahn (1881: 28) asserts is at the foot of the ǀKharas mountains in southern Namibia – see Figure 1. The settlement consists of several rounded reed-mat huts, known to be the portable dwellings distinctive to the Khoekhoegowab-speaking Nama(qua) pastoralists who at that time lived throughout the Cape and across the !Gariiep. The curved horns of a substantial herd of cattle poke up from behind the cluster of reed huts, while to the front of the huts a healthy flock of apparently fat-tailed sheep are depicted. To the right of the sketch are several men playing pipes or flutes of different lengths. They are clearly in motion – many have one foot raised as if poised to vigorously stamp this down in a rhythmic change of feet. To their left is a semi-circle of figures whose lengthier attire and headscarves signal they are women. Leaning slightly forwards towards each other, this semi-circle of figures is shown with their hands drawn together as if clapping.



Figure 1. Detail of ‘Groote Namaqua’ (Great Namaqua) from ‘Historical map, Orange River to Karas Mts., SWA’ in Carel Brink’s journal of 1761-2. Adapted from Mossop (1947: opp. p. 50 (also reproduced as Plate XV111, in Kirby 1933).

2. Khoe Flute Ensembles in History

The !Gariiep river received its currently more familiar colonial name less than twenty years after Brink’s map was drawn. On the evening of 17th August 1779 at the river’s mouth on the Atlantic Ocean, then Cape Governor Colonel Robert Jacob Gordon hoisted the Dutch colours in honour of the Prince of Orange (Vedder 2016[1938]: 30; Du Pisani 1986: 14). Today, the Orange River forms the border between South Africa and southern Namibia, and is an international boundary now easy to cross by road, with the appropriate papers. Not so long ago, however, the Orange River was beyond the reach of the frontier of the Cape colony. As this frontier edged ever-northwards, the Orange – and more precisely the tales of riches and exotica in the lands beyond its course – exerted a magnetic pull on European explorers, traders, entrepreneurs, settlers, missionaries and naturalists pursuing their various interests beyond the Cape.⁵

Brink’s 1761 sketch seems to be the first time that a Nama reed-flute ensemble is depicted *visually* in the historical literature for the northern Cape and southern Namibia. But Khoe flute music had been observed and heard by Europeans as far back as the late 1400s.⁶ In 1497 – at São Bras near Mossel Bay in today’s South Africa – the diarist of Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama recorded (with the prejudices of the time), a musical exchange between the inhabitants on the coast and the sailors on the ship:

On Saturday about 200 negroes⁷, large and small, arrived, and brought about 12 head of cattle, oxen and cows, and four or five sheep. When we saw them we went ashore at once. They at once began to play on four or five flutes, and some of them played high and others played low, harmonizing very well for negroes in whom music is not to be expected; and they danced like negroes. The Commander-in-Chief ordered trumpets to be played and we in the boat danced, and so did the Commander-in-Chief when he rejoined us. When this fiesta was finished we went ashore where we had been before, and there we traded a black ox for three bracelets. We dined off this on Sunday, and it was very fat; and the flesh of it was as savoury as meat of Portugal (as quoted in Axelson 1998: 28; also quoted with some variations in Kirby 1933: 314 and references therein; also Arom 2004[1991]: 46-7 after Morelet 1864: 9).

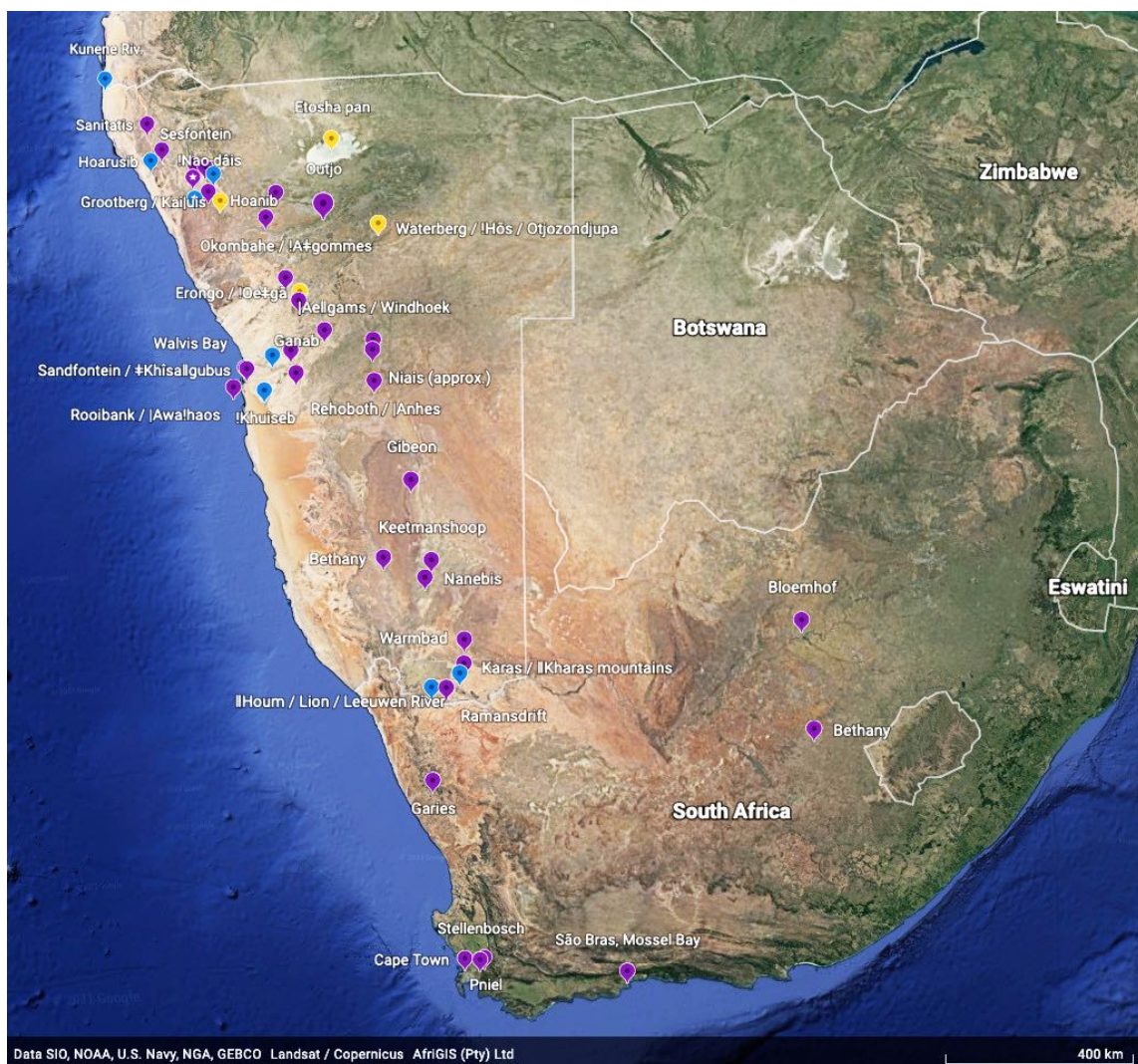


Figure 2. Locations of many of the named places mentioned in this paper report: purple markers are places; blue markers are rivers; yellow markers are topographic features.

Almost two centuries later in 1685, at the dawn of the Dutch Cape colony, the diarist of Cape Governor Simon van der Stel similarly recorded the Governor's birthday being honoured with the polyphonic melodies and complex rhythms of a reed-flute dance, performed by 'Amacquas' near Garies in the Kamiesberg (#3, Figure 3). The description arising from this encounter is worth quoting in full for its illumination of the socio-cultural and historical context of this early inland meeting of European men and Indigenous Nama in the northern Cape – particularly its characterisation of the musicians as 'wild people' and the exchange of productive for unproductive trade items, i.e. of cattle for spirits and tobacco, that ensued (cf. Stow 1905: 237; Kinahan 2001[1991]):

14th Oct. – [a]s it was the birthday of the Hon. Commander today, we fired in his honour 3 volleys, each followed by a cannon-shot. When the Amacquas became aware of this, they came to honour the Hon. Commander with some music, which consisted of long, hollow reeds, on which each one knows how to blow a special note, and it gives off a sound which cannot better be compared with anything than with the sound of an organ. They all stood in a circle, being a full 20 in number, and in the middle of them one who had a long, thin stick in his hand. He led the singing and beat the time to which they all played correctly. They all jumped around, holding one hand to the ear and with the other holding the reed to the mouth. Around these musicians were men and women who danced to this sound, enlarging it by clapping their hands, all of which took place very orderly considering that they are wild people. This playing lasted the whole day. The Hon. Commander meanwhile had an ox slaughtered to treat the captains, musicians and dancers, which indeed happened after this comedy ended. He gave them some arrack, with which they delighted themselves further and left again for their kraal. This day they had also bartered several animals, and towards the evening another kraal settled near us, who, like the ones already with us, came with their milk to request tobacco for it.

[15th Oct.] We remained lying here to see whether the kraal which joined us last wished to barter something more. In the mean time another kraal came here, who today also bartered some cattle with us. In the afternoon we started making preparations to depart the following day. Towards the evening the Amacquas' captains came again, followed by the aforementioned musicians to take leave of the Hon. Commander. It was also resolved that 2 captains would go with us to give information about everything, namely Oedesson and Habij. The Hon. Commander presented them with 3 sheep and some bottles of arrack with which they and the musicians as well as all the kraal's people made merry the whole night (Van der Stel/Claudius 1685-86 in Waterhouse 1979: 345-7).

Indicating continuity in this locality for almost one hundred years after this encounter, the botanist William Paterson in 1778 is similarly treated to a reed-flute performance in the foothills of the Kamiesberg (#7, Figure 3):

The Hottentots amused us part of the night with their dancing; (while, in return, we treated them with tobacco and dacka⁸) ... Their music is produced from flutes made from the bark of trees of different sizes. The men form themselves into a circle, with their flutes, and the women dance round them, making a noise with their hands. In this manner they continue to dance in parties during the whole night, and are relieved about every two hours (Paterson 1789: 57).

A key account remains that of the British army captain and explorer, James Edward Alexander. In 1837, having journeyed northwards from Cape Town, Alexander found himself

at Nanebis in ‘Great Namaqualand’, not far south-east of Bethany in today’s southern Namibia (#9 on Figure 3). At the time of his travels, Nanebis was the home of a ‘Chief Kuisip’, who treated Alexander to a ‘grand dance’ accompanied by differently pitched flutes made of reeds. Alexander writes:

... the chief, according to Namaqua usage, presented me with six sheep, and gave me a grand reed dance. ...A dozen men assembled, and with reeds, which, closed at one end, were from one foot long to seven ... One man then blew on his reed, holding it in the left hand, with the fingers opening and shutting to modulate the sound, whilst in his right hand, pressed close to his ear, he held a slight stick to clear the reed; the leader blew strongly, his head stooping forwards, and his feet stamping the ground to beat time; the others blew also, to accompany their leader; wild music arose, whilst the musicians circled round, looking inward, stooping and beating time. The music quickened, the women sang, then sprang forward, clapping their hands, and ran round the circle of reed players, giving their bodies various odd twists, and ending by dexterously throwing up the skirt of their skin half-petticoat behind, previous to falling into their places. Sometimes the women got into the middle, and the men stamped and blew their reeds round them; and thus they continued for two or three hours, with occasional pauses, to favour me with the reed dance, which I had never seen or heard of before (Alexander 2006[1838] vol. 1: 233-4).

The sounds and spectacle of this Nama reed-flute ensemble prompt Alexander to reminisce about the ‘Russian horn bands’ he ‘used to hear float like that of a grand piano, over the waters of the Neva’ that flows through St. Petersburg⁹. In keeping with the protocol of the time, Alexander rewarded the Nama performers with a present of tobacco.

The searchable table linked at <https://www.futurepasts.net/khoe-nama-flute-music> provides full documentation of records of Nama flute music, as reported in historical sources for just over five centuries of encounters since Vasco da Gama’s account, as well in the more recent ethnomusicology literature. Regarding the latter, Percival Kirby’s 1933 article in the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* on ‘The reed-flute ensembles of South Africa’, drawn on here in especially Section 3, deserves special mention for both detailed review of historical observations and musical analysis of the musics Kirby was able to document (which, notably, did not include the Sesfontein flute musics). Overall, the sources reviewed by Kirby and later by ourselves demonstrate both historical and geographical continuity of this particular cultural musical form in south-western Africa from the 1400s onwards, as outlined in Section 3. This history tells an incredible story of how the flute music form documented by Vasco da Gama in 1497 appears to have been sustained by Khoekhoegowab-speaking pastoralists through the tragic history of displacement and disruption leading eventually to their concentration north of the Orange River. These journeys take us ultimately to Sesfontein in north-west Namibia (Sections 4), believed to be the last place where \ddot{a} was recorded and remains remembered, as considered in Section 5.



Figure 3. Documented records of Khoe / Nama flute music, mapped in time and space. Map data ©2022 Imagery ©2022 NASA, TerraMetrics.

Key: The numbers are in chronological order of observation; the different shades of placemark also provide a rough indication of chronology: the palest yellow signal observations in the 15th century; the deepest orange signalling observations in the 20th century. Details of these encounters and full references can be found at the literature review table linked here: <https://www.futurepasts.net/khoe-nama-flute-music>.

1. 1487, Vasco da Gama and ‘Hottentots’, possibly ‘Gouriqua’, São Bras, Mossel Bay;
2. 1622, Portuguese crew of shipwrecked *João Baptista*, and ‘most likely Gonaqua Hottentots’, Keiskamer river mouth;
3. 1685, Expedition of Cape Governor Simon van der Stel and ‘Amacquas’, near Garies;
4. 1695, Gravenbroeck in ‘neighbourhood of Cape Town’;
5. 1711, Abraham Bogaert and ‘Cape Hottentots’ in Table Bay;
6. 1761-2, Hendrik Hop / Carel Brink expedition, ‘Namaqua’, specifically ‘Cabona’ – !Habobes at foot of !Kharas mountain;
7. 1778, William Paterson and ‘Hottentots’, foothills of Kamiesberg;
8. 1778-79, Hendrik Jacob Wikar and ‘Kouringais’ / ‘Little Karokkoa’, i.e. ‘Little Kora(na)’;
9. 1837, James Edward Alexander and ‘Great Namaqua’ under Chief Kuisip, at Nanebis;
10. 1837, James Edward Alexander and Nama and ‘Bergdama’ reed flute dance at Niais, near present-day Rehoboth;
11. 1855, Zerwick (missionary) and ‘Springbok’ and ‘Cat’ tribes of Korana Hottentots at Pniel;
12. 1858, Rev. C.F. Wuras and ‘Korana Hottentots’, Berlin Mission at Bethany;
13. ca. 1880, George William Stow and ‘Bush-people’ looking at drawings of rock art dances Stow identifies as a ‘reed dance’;
14. 1884, Hans Schinz and ‘Nama’ at Ganab;
15. 1894, Von François and ‘Nama’, !Aelgams / Windhoek;
16. 1911-3, 1922-3, anthropologist Winifred Hoernlé and ‘Little Namaqua’, ‘Bondelzwartz’, ‘Rooi Natie’, ‘Topnaar’, ‘Zwartboys’, in the Nama Reserve;
17. 1911-3, 1922-3, Hoernlé and ‘Zwartboys’ Nama from Franzfontein Reserve, recorded in Windhoek;
18. 1912-3, Richtersveld Nama, anthropologist Winifred Hoernlé;
19. 1928, L.F. Meinhof and ‘Korana’, at Pniel;
20. 1932, Carl Berger and ‘Hottentots’ / ‘Gowab’ and ‘!Awa gowab sãn’ or ‘Red-Dunes-Bushmen’ living between the ‘Hottentots’ along the Auob River;
21. 1932, ethnomusicologists Percival Kirby and L.F. Maingard and ‘remnants of the Links Tribe of the Korana Hottentots’, Bloemhof;
22. 1932, Percival Kirby records Nama flutists in Windhoek;
23. 1953, writer and traveller Lawrence Green and Sesfontein Nama [he labels them ‘Hottentots’];
24. ? ‘Gibeon Nama’, Sigrid Schmidt;
25. 1979, John and Jill Kinahan, and Antje Otto of the State Museum, record Sesfontein Nama-Damara flute music;
26. 1999, ethnomusicologists Emmanuelle Olivier and Minette Mans record Nama-Damara flute music in Sesfontein.

3. Continuities and Transformations

The historical records gestured towards above are illuminating in various ways. In this section we review what they tell us about the following themes: when and why flute music was played; the content, repertoire and musical form of the music; the instruments used and how they were made; notation and specific terms regarding this musical form; the methods of playing; and the shifting complexity of European historical responses to African musical performances of the flute music.

When and why flute music was played

The reviewed accounts clarify that one stimulus for the collective playing of Khoe flute music was to *mark key events experienced by a community*, including encounters with Europeans (from Vasco da Gama in 1497 onwards). From the perspective of Khoe pastoralists these encounters must have been noteworthy and, initially at least, unusual occurrences. From the reviewed descriptions, it is possible to imagine that the flute-dance-song performances were enacted as assertions of standing by their protagonists in relation to the localities and environs in which they were played.

This interpretation can be read into the account above by Claudius, Cape Governor Van der Stel's diarist for his 1685 expedition to a Namaqua source of copper¹⁰ in the vicinity of present-day Springbok. Almost a century later, in the proximity of the Orange River (#8, Figure 3), Wikar (in Mossop 1935: 167) describes the 'Kouringais' or 'Little Korokkoa' (i.e. Little !Korana) singing 'a song about me in their flute dance', which Olivier (2006: 17) later observes is 'as if the Korana had translated a news item into music'. In 1837, and as recounted above, hosting by Nama of British army captain James Edward Alexander (2006[1838], vol. 1: 233-4) is similarly marked by a 'grand reed dance' by 'Great Namaqua' under a chief Kuisip at Nanebis in present-day southern Namibia, and again at the 'great town' of Niais near present-day Rehoboth (Alexander 2006[1838] vol. 2: 138, 151-153, 156, 181; #9 and #10, Figure 3). Olivier (2006: 17) thus describes the flute ensemble events as *an Indigenous mode of chronicling or recording history*, such that '[b]y narrating through their music real events that happened to real people, the Korana [as well as other Khoe peoples] were manifesting a true "historian's intent"'.

Themes, motifs, repertoire, form

As well as being held to mark newsworthy occasions, the 'flute-songs' are observed *historically to have had different themes and motifs*. Wikar (in Mossop 1935: 169) in his 1778-9 account of his encounters with Khoekhoegowab-speaking peoples along the Orange / !Gariep River writes that,

[i]n the flute dance there is first a melody and the most important part is the song of lament by a woman, or a wife who has lost her husband in battle. The purport of it is

something like this: that as she is now a widow, alone with her children, the game that would otherwise have been hers now roams about free from the arrows; and she also intimates that she desires to live until her son whom she had by her late husband has grown up to shoot that game for her.

In the late 1880s, linguist of the Khoe language Theophilus Hahn (1881: 28-9) refers to ‘profane reed-dances or reed-songs’ that might tell of ‘the fate of a hero who fell in battle or lost his life on a hunting expedition’, or simply be of a comical and playful nature. Hahn (1881: 30, 103-4) also writes of *mythical motifs and their enactment* ‘in which dancers and pipe-blowers are the actors’, describing the ‘Songs of Sanaxab and Gei|aub,’ who were ‘men who distinguished themselves in the late Namaqua and Dam[a]ra [Herero] war’¹¹ (presumably in the mid- to late 1800s), enacted similarly to how the mythical ancestral beings ‘Heitsi-eibib and Tsūilgoab’ were previously honoured:

[o]ne sees the whole fight, in which dancers and pipe-blowers are actors. We see the cows and sheep driven off by the horsemen, and we see them retaken; at last the daring and plucky Gei|aub receives a mortal wound by a bullet of the enemy. They strip him naked, and leave him prey to the vultures, which soon approach and commence to devour the body. At last, the friends having slain the enemy, return and collect his bones in a grave, and sing a very doleful burial song.

This combining of mythical and historical events (cf. Levi-Strauss 1995[1978]) seems echoed later in |Aelgams/Windhoek in a reed-dance observed by German Schutztruppe leader Curt von François, amidst the dramatic historical changes accompanying the new post-1884 status of the territory as the German colony of Deutsch Südwestafrika (Esterhuyse 1968; Olusoga and Erichsen 2010). In 1894, von François observes a ‘reed-dance’ ‘in which the murder of [Oorlam Nama leader¹²] Jan Jonker [Afrikaner] by Hendrik Witbooi [on 10 August 1889: see Vedder 2016[1938]: ix; Lau 1995[1989]: xv-xvi], was enacted by the reed-flute players, who, while blowing their flutes, actually mimed the actions of the persons in the story’ (Kirby 1933: 341-2 after von François 1896: 229-30). Describing this enactment, complete with colonial observation of the heightened mimetic capacity of the indigenous ‘other’ (cf. Benjamin 1978[1933]; Taussig 1993), von François states:

[t]he men group themselves in two parties, one with white hatbands, the other with red. The latter, representing Jonker’s people, dance first, as if believing themselves safe, and the women dance round them. Then to the same melody and time the Witboois dance up out of the darkness towards the camp of the Jonkers. Suddenly they are noticed by the latter, the women spring aside and begin, standing still and clapping their hands, to take up the melody, while the men, forming into line range themselves against the Witboois and in a crouching posture continue blowing on their reed pipes. The Witboois also form into line, and send forward a messenger, who advances and then returns, always blowing on his pipe and hopping up and down. Next down of the red-hatted man, representing Jan Jonker, dances up to the Witboois, and, still blooming on his pipe, shakes several of them by the hand. Meanwhile a Witbooi in the same manner circles round the group of women, representing the cattle, and after inspecting them returns to his party. Now the murder of Jan Jonker is enacted, so too his men dancing up to his aid are massacred, and finally the Witboois dance away with the plundered cattle and women. The whole dance, with its

wealth of action and skilful performance, is a most interesting illustration of the imitative talent of the Hottentots and their fertile imagination (von Francois 1896: 229-30, quoted in Olivier 2006: 17).

Other narratives allude to ‘religious’ reasons for flute dances, describing them, for example, as performed to ‘show reverence towards the moon’ (in Kirby 1933: 320-1). The reed dance performed for the Hop/Brink 1761 expedition at the foot of the ǀKharas [Karas] mountains thus elicits the following description:

[t]heir religion chiefly consists of worshipping and praising the new moon. The men stand in a circle together, and blow on a hollow pipe or similar instrument, and the women, clapping hands, dance round the men. They continually sing in a praying manner, that the last moon had protected them and their cattle so well, and they hope the same from this new moon. The Cabonas [ǀHaboben]¹³, whom we met, praised the moon, particularly that he¹⁴ had brought them into contact with a native from whom they had received so much kindness. (Quoted in Kirby 1933: 323; also Hahn 1881: 28)

As evocative as such religious interpretations are, however, it is hard to separate these emerging narratives from either a European exoticisation of their other, or a desire to affirm an indigenous spirituality that could be co-opted by Christian missionary effort.

Although historical observations record some motifs and themes expressed in the music of flute ensembles, they tell us rather little about the repertoire of songs and song-motifs played by an ensemble or in a performance. Schultze (1907) in Kirby (1933: 344) is the first to note that a performance consisted of distinct songs, describing and notating the melodies of seven ‘reed-songs’. Anthropologist Winifred Hoernlé (in Kirby 1933: 345-6) later writes that

I have a large number of songs of which I have taken down the words, but I was unable to write down the tunes. I attempted to get them on a phonograph, but the results were not very good.

Indicating dynamic aspects of flute-song compositions and their use to commemorate events and experiences that mattered to their composers, Hoernlé describes ‘[o]ne of the most beautiful tunes I heard’ as invoking the loss of land experienced by Swartbooi Nama, more than 500 of whom were removed from Franzfontein and deported as forced labour to Windhoek, following their defeat in 1898 at the ‘battle of Grootberg’ (south-east of Sesfontein), by German colonial military troops led by Captain Ludwig von Estorff¹⁵ (Rudner and Rudner 1974: 199; Rizzo 2012: 66):

[t]hese people had been removed from their reserve at Franzfontein by the Germans and were intensely home-sick for their country. The song commemorates their country through one of the trees found in that reserve and not down south where they were more or less imprisoned.

“*Tsaora Naitchi*. Juicy tree (The stem is full of juice).

Ti Naitchi. My tree.

isa [fixa] Naitchi. Beautiful tree.”

The Dutch name for the tree is Saftboom¹⁶ (Hoernlé quoted in Kirby 1933: 346).

An elderly !Korana interlocutor of Kirby performed ‘four songs’ that ‘appeared closely connected with the reed-flutes, each of which emphasised different pitches assumed to represent ‘the sounds of the principal reed-flutes’, and appearing similar to the scale recorded by Schultze (see below), thus:

[a] close examination of the four songs yielded some very significant information. In the first tune *ta-ti-nã-tã*, the note which was heard most frequently was B flat, and it was also consistently emphasized; in the next, *|ui mare !harab !na tao*, the note C was similarly prominent; while in the third tune *ti-ra ti-ra ti-ra*, the outstanding note was D. Finally in the fourth tune, *Tuxana*, *|uib tse !nora sintskoko*, the most important note appeared to be G (Kirby 1933: 373).

Kirby (1933: 371-2) learned from elderly !Korana in Bloemhof (#21, Figure 3) that initiated boys ‘would be taught the steps of the reed-dance, and how to play upon the flute’, thereby ensuring continuity of skills and musical repertoire. Change and hybridisation is also apparent in the historical observations. Von François (1896: 229-30 in Kirby 1933: 341-2), referring to ‘the Hottentot reed-dance’ in |Aelgams / Windhoek in the 1890s, observed that ‘the people have already begun to use the Dutch text and the melodies of Church songs for these dances’. Schultze and Hoernlé both note the incorporation and mimicking of the imported concertina – invented in Europe in the 1820s (Kirby 1933: 346-7) – through the use of high-pitched sets of reed flutes introduced ‘to imitate the trills which can be played upon the concertina’; Schultze also mentions ‘the use of the accordion (a member of the concertina family) and the mouth-organ by the Nama Hottentot’ (both sources quoted in Kirby 1933: 344).

Method of playing and dancing

Early historical observations of flute ensembles – such as those reported by Vasco da Gama, Van der Stel, Wikar and Alexander above – describe large flute orchestras in which several different sized and pitched flutes were played by groups of men to produce a tremendous polyphonic music. We learn that there could be up to ‘fully one to two hundred strong men’ who played ‘in a circle’ (Meerhoff 1661 quoted in Kirby 1933: 316). Different sized flutes were played, ‘some high, some low, so that they sounded together marvelously well’, each player knowing ‘how to blow a special note’ (Vasco da Gama’s diarist in 1497, reproduced in Axelson 1998: 28; also see Kirby 1933: 314), such that the whole ‘cannot better be compared with anything than the sound of an organ’ (Van der Stel/Claudius 1685-86 in Waterhouse 1979: 345). Arom 2004[1991]: 216, *emphasis in original*) observes that this description is of ‘a hoquet polyphony’, i.e. ‘based on the interweaving, interlocking and overlapping of several rhythmic figures which are *tiered on different pitch heights* in a fully defined scalar system’, and generated from ‘several wind instruments (horns or whistles), each of which can only produce a single note’, the combination of which produces melody.

The flautists also ‘danced round, making very beautiful movements with their feet’ and were led by a ‘conductor’ ‘who stood in the middle with a long stick’ (Meerhoff 1661 in Kirby 1933: 316; Van der Stel/Claudius 1685-86 in Waterhouse 1979: 345). They were surrounded

‘by men and women who danced to this sound, enlarging it by clapping their hands’ (Van der Stel/Claudius 1685-86 in Waterhouse 1979: 345). Women played a critical role: as described above by Alexander, they ‘sang, then sprang forward, clapping their hands, and ran round the circle of reed players, giving their bodies various odd twists, and ending by dexterously throwing up the skirt of their skin half-petticoat behind, previous to falling into their places’ (Alexander 2006[1838] vol. 1.: 57-8). A ‘performance’ for European visitors could last around two hours, extending to several further hours after the audience had left (Meerhoff 1661 in Kirby 1933: 316), to a full day (Van der Stel/Claudius 1685-86 in Waterhouse 1979: 345) or ‘frequently a whole night with but little interruption’ (Shaw 1840: 25 in Kirby 1933: 329; Wuras 1927[1858]: 295).

Hoernlé also observed more than one player playing same-pitched flutes, although by the early 1900s the flutes were played by groups of only a few men. Schultze (1907) in Kirby (1933: 343-4) also describes the group’s general dance movements as consisting

of small jumps, close to the ground, both legs being bent weakly at the knees, and the feet placed one before the other. The dancer moves slowly forwards and backwards in this manner, bent forward, his head bowed over his chest, and his lips on the reed. The women ‘chassez’ forwards with small, and often most graceful, steps, swaying about ... and rocking their buttocks from the haunches, clapping their hands loudly before their faces, while they sing with an expression of the greatest excitement. There is no fixed number of dancers.

Hoernlé’s later description of how the flute-songs were played and performed in practice is illuminating. She writes:

I have always seen more than five men playing the reeds, so that some of the notes may be represented two or three times, these men standing together in the circle and coming in together when their note has to be sounded. Sometimes all the notes will be duplicated, if there [346] are players enough, and, in addition, there may be a man playing the *!naniti*, the six reeds representing the trills ... Each note is sounded separately by its player so that it takes some time to get the successive notes played smoothly and in the right order. Until the rhythm goes with a swing, the men often close one ear with the hand holding the tuning-rod and bend close to the ground, paying attention only to their own note and stamping the rhythm on the ground with their feet. Once the tune is going smoothly they take more liberties, making capers at intervals, or even join the outer circle of women for a while, only then to re-enter the inner circle of men which stamps out the rhythm constantly with the feet. The dancing is intensely dramatic, each song having its own particular action in addition to its own tune and words. The words are often reduced to a minimum, but by the actions and the rhythm the whole story is dramatically told (Hoernlé in Kirby 1933: 345-6).

Isaac Schapera (1930: 402-4) similarly relates that,

The music of each performer consists in a series of rhythmical blasts all on one note, which harmonize with those of others in the same rhythm. These notes provide the time for the dancers and singers, who lead the melody ... If any illustrious stranger visits a kraal, he also is often welcomed with a reed dance ... In these dances the men normally form a ring, all facing inwards, each with the upper part of his body bent forward, and his

lips on the pipe. Then, to the accompaniment of their music, they hop up and down on both legs simultaneously, the knees slightly bent and one foot in front of the other, and move about jerkily and slowly in this way. The women ... singing with loud voices and clapping their hands in front of the face to the rhythm of the music, dance around the men in a larger outer ring. ... There is no fixed number of dancers.

In late 1931, anthropologist J.F. Maingard obtains a description from memory of ‘the reed-flute dance’ from a ‘Kora’ (!Korana) man called Saul van Eck, the implication being that these were disrupted musics played in the past rather than the present. Saul describes to him how †*ati*,

were played by men moving in a circle (*ina †na:e †nammi*). In the middle of the circle was a man with a stick who beat the time. The minimum number of reed-flutes was three, which had the same names as the first three on my list ... [see Kirby and Maingard below]. But there were often as many as twelve, or even fourteen or more players. The whole kraal would join in the dance, even if they were not playing. The women stamped round in an outer circle, clapping their hands (*ina||am*) and shaking their buttocks (*!hare khwedi*). Four o’clock in the afternoon (*haka kororo: p*) was the right time to begin the dance which lasted until morning (*!kwa : ba*). Oxen were killed for the dancers. (Maingard quoted in Kirby 1933: 372).

There are few descriptions of the actual playing of the flutes (see Figure 4). The playing technique itself involved ‘holding one hand to the ear and with the other holding the reed to the mouth’ (Van der Stel/Claudius 1685-86 in Waterhouse 1979: 345; also Alexander 2006[1838] vol. 1.: 57-8). Hoernlé (in Kirby 1933: 346) observes that,

[t]he method of playing the reed is peculiar. The tongue grips the undersurface of the pipe by suction and is curled up to make a sort of trough down which the air is blown into the pipe. I have seen several times, when the playing ceased, the pipes quite literally lifted from the tongue which grips on fast.

Kirby (1933: 371; also 1932), working in 1932 with elderly !Korana whose people had retreated to Bloemhof (now in South Africa’s North-west Province), similarly observed the technique of playing a reed flute (Figure 5a):

[t]he reed-flute was held in the left hand, the orifice being laid above the hollowed tongue, and not against the lips as is the case with the tube of a panpipe. No ‘ictus’ [‘rhythmical or metrical stress’] could be obtained. The fingers steadied the tube against the chin. ...

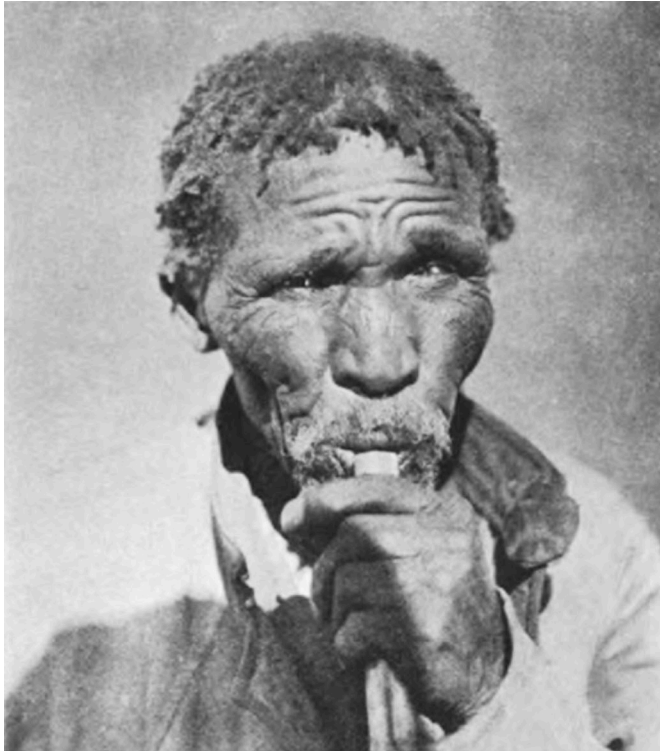


Figure 4. Playing a ‘reed-flute’. Left: ‘Matiti playing a reed flute’ (scan from Kirby 1933, Plate XXII; also see Kirby 1932). Right: the late Manasse |Nuab plays a *ǀz̥b* flute made from a paw-paw stem, Sesfontein 1999 (slide 109, Emmanuelle Olivier collection, British Library, scanned by Sian Sullivan, March 2018).

The instruments played and how they were made

The manufacture and playing of the flutes was gendered as an activity for men (Kirby 1933: 371), although Stow (1905: 109) makes an apparently erroneous observation (see below) that amongst ‘the Korana’ they ‘were made by one or two of the men who were skilled in their manufacture, but their use was reserved exclusively for women’. Whilst mostly made from the common wetland reed (*Phragmites* sp.) – so much so that Wikar in 1778-9 (in Mossop 1835: 131) refers to this species as the ‘*fluitjesriet*’ (‘whistle/flute reed’) – a variety of other materials are documented as used in order to make flutes. William Paterson in 1778 observes ‘Hottentots’ of the foothills of the Kamiesberg making ‘flutes from the bark of trees of different sizes’ (Paterson 1789: 57). At Ganab in the Namib desert in 1884, Schinz (1891: 31-2 in Kirby 1933: 339-40) describes ‘[t]he musical instruments which were willingly given up to me by the people in exchange for two bits of tobacco, [as] consist[ing] of a piece of acacia bark which is bound round with a strip of bark, and closed at the end with a cylinder of wood’ (used for tuning). In 1907, Schultze states more fully that,

where the country is dry, and there are few reeds, they are made from the roots of *Acacia horrida* Wield [presumably *Acacia karroo*]. The root of this plant is either peeled as a whole, or slit lengthwise and the bark peeled from the wood, after which it is bound spirally with another strip of bark [also in Hoernlé notes, in Kirby 1933: 345]. The tube thus formed is plugged at one end by a stopper of grass, by moving which up and down the tube the pitch can be varied and the ‘flute’ tuned. To prevent the tube drying up, it is filled with milk when not in use ... Then there is the tuning-stick *ǀkxaehaib* [*ǀlai haip* in

Hoernlé notes, Kirby 1933: 345], with which the grass or bark stopper is pushed into the inside of the reed, or, as it were, ‘chased back’ (*!kxaē*), thus establishing the pitch (Schulze 1907 quoted in Kirby 1933: 343).

Anthropologist Winifred Hoernlé (1985: 344) confirms for ‘South West Africa’ that ‘the root of a tree’ is used by ‘Topnaars, Zwartboys and Rooi Natie Hottentots’ because reeds are not found where they were located at the time of her research (1911-13, 1922-23), while the Little Namaqua and Bondelzwarts Nama on the Orange River used reeds. ‘Zwartboy’ (Swartbooi), who had been displaced from Franzfontein to Windhoek at the time of Hoernlé’s research (on which more below) used ‘[r]oots of the *!khus* (Giraffe acacia) [i.e. *Acacia / Vachellia erioloba*], the roots ‘said to be far the best for the deep notes, while the reeds, if they can be obtained, are liked for the high notes, especially for the trill notes which the Hottentots say are a recent introduction, imitating the concertina’ (Hoernlé notes in Kirby 1933: 345) (as noted above). The tuning stick was constantly used by each man ‘to tune his reed or pipe, while in the dance he uses it to flourish in the air to express his emotion, or to lay on the shoulders of a girl whom he wishes specially to single out in the dance’ (Hoernlé notes in Kirby 1933: 346).

What this variety of materials indicates is that the impetus to make flute music was so strong for Khoe peoples that they would use whatever appropriate material was available in a locality at any given moment in order to manufacture flutes from which ensemble music could be made. For more on the making of flutes in contemporary times, see Section 5.

Notating Nama flute music

It is not until 1858 that the historical records first provide an indigenous Khoe name for the flute music and for the flutes themselves. In this year missionary Wuras (1927[1858]: 287) notes that the ‘Korana’ (!Korana) at Bethany in South Africa call the ‘reed-play’ ‘*Āas*’. In 1881 Khoe-language linguist Theophilus Hahn records the name *!āb*, but it is only in 1907 that it is documented that the individually pitched flutes each have their own name (see Table 1) and were tuned to sound at specific intervals in relation to each other (Schultze 1907: 375-81 in Kirby 1933: 342).

Through a colonial expedition to Deutsch Südwestafrika in 1903-5, ‘German zoologist, geographer, anthropologist and linguist’¹⁷ Leonhard S. Schultze encounters Nama flute music, providing both a first list of names of individual flutes, and notation of the pitch to which they were each tuned. Figure 5 shows Schultze’s notation for the pitch of the flutes, with the five main flutes – as listed in Table 1 – labelled in bold. He also observed the use of three higher-pitched groups of flutes—called *!kxari!āti*, *!nonagu* and *!nanigu* (respectively *!nona!ati* and *!naniti* or *!ari!ati*, recorded by Hoernlé, in Kirby 1933: 345).

Schultze appears to be the first observer to notate an array of distinct ‘reed-songs’, one of which is considered by Kirby (1933: 344) to reflect the notes and melody played on the flutes (see Figure 6).

Table 1. Commonalities and differences in names of Khoe flutes, as recorded in historical and ethnographic sources.

Source, location, group	Schultze 1907 'Nama'	Hoernlé 1911-13, 1922-23 'Nama', various 'groups'	Berger 1932		Percival Kirby and L.F. Maingard 1932 'Korana'	Haacke and Eiseb n.d. Sesfontein Nama-Damara		Olivier, Mans and Hawaxab 1999 Sesfontein Nama-Damara	Sullivan with Ganuses 2017 Sesfontein Nama-Damara	
Generic name		‡ati (set)	‡a		‡adi (set)	<i>haka ‡adi</i> (set of four)	(set of six)	‡ab (sing.) ‡adi / ‡agu (pl.)	‡āb (sing.)	
Single-pitch flutes, tuned in relation to each other	1.	<i>aiās</i> 'the 's' before [?] 'ai' 'weeps' (<i>aā</i> means in this connection mournful tones). Only one man in the orchestra has this pipe, ... This reed gives the pitch to all the other pipes'. From it <i>ā!gās</i> is tuned first.	<i>Ai.as</i> High and shrill, this pipe always begins, and is used for tuning the others.	<i>Eias</i>	<i>eias</i>	‡ko : ‡ko : s	<i> khirib</i>	goma- ‡gātsoab	<i>!aias</i> (‘potatoes’) The flute that intonates each piece; without it, the others cannot begin, i.e. <i>xain tsoatsoa</i> = lit. start to play the flute (specific term). <i>!aias</i> is played by the leader of the group (<i>tanab</i>)	<i>!aia</i>
	2.	<i>ā!gās</i> “weeping afterwards” (<i>!gas</i> meaning ‘back’), also played singly. Tuning of the other pipes follows <i>ā!gās</i> .	<i>a. !kas</i> comes in next, a little deeper than <i>ai.as</i>	<i>a!gās</i>	<i>a!gās</i>	<i>!namis</i>	<i>ā!gaās</i>	<i>aib</i>	<i>a!ans / a!as / ā!gās</i> the second flute, the one that goes well with <i>!aias</i>	<i>a!gās</i>
	3.	<i>gomas</i> 'the cow', can have multiple players.	<i>Gomas</i> comes next.	<i>huis</i>	<i>huis</i>	<i>geiŋ‡a : s</i> 'the meaning of which is “the big reed,” which particular flute seems to act as a kind of “tonic,” since from it others are tuned’.	<i>Aias</i> (<i>ai</i> means front = front or lead player)	<i>aiefals</i> or <i>khirib</i>	<i>gāmās / gamab</i> the third flute, that goes well with <i>a!ans / a!as</i>	<i>gamas / kamas</i>
	4.	<i>!arob</i> can have multiple players	<i>kuis</i> A big reed with a deep note.	<i>Gomas</i>	<i>kharinas</i>	<i>tuxana</i>	‡ās	<i>ā!gaās</i> (‘face’) or <i>airos</i> (‘small’)	<i>!arob</i> = the fourth flute	<i>!arob</i>
	5.	<i>hūib</i> the lowest pitched flute	<i>!a.rop</i> Very deep / <i>Kaise a!gam</i> [seems to be deeper than <i>kuis</i> ?].		<i>!kho!ga</i> ‡ <i>karis</i>			<i>aias</i> (front or lead player)	<i>uib</i> the fifth flute / the main flute	<i>khūib</i> / <i>hūib</i>
	6.		<i>ai.a</i> Sister to <i>ai.as</i> but higher (by an octave?)		<i>eis!gas</i>			‡ <i>kharibes</i>	optional = reproduction of <i>!aias</i> in the lower octave	
+	x3 groups of flutes for trilling (‡ <i>kxari‡āti</i> , <i>!nonagu</i> , <i>!nanigu</i> – see text) and the higher pitched <i>hūirob</i> / <i>hūirokxa</i>)	<i>!naniti</i> or ‡ <i>ari‡ati</i> , and <i>!nona‡ati</i>								

European historical responses to these African musical performances

The recorded historical testimonies also convey something of the complexity of European historical responses to the African musical performances constituted by Khoe / Nama flute ensemble performances, as well as the shifts over time in these responses. Early encounters seem to have been marked by respect for the spectacle, indicated by its descriptions as sounding together ‘marvellously well’ (Vasco da Gama’s diarist of 1497 in Kirby 1933: 314; also in Axelson 1998: 28), ‘beautiful’ (Meerhoff 1661 in Kirby 1933: 316), and ‘orderly’ (Van der Stel/Claudius 1685-86 in Waterhouse 1979: 345). They were reciprocated with arrack (spirits), tobacco and ‘dacka’ (marijuana), and were part of efforts to barter for livestock in a trade in which Khoe pastoralists had the upper hand in the early years of the Cape colony (Van der Stel/Claudius 1685-86 in Waterhouse 1979: 345; the ‘treat’ of dacka is mentioned in Paterson 1789: 57). Some of these early records of cross-cultural encounter are notable for their descriptions of how different musical and dance forms were shared and participated in across these exchanges (cf. Clendinnen 2006).

Wikar’s description of a reed-flute dance remains perhaps the fullest and most appreciative, reflecting his ability to contextualise the dances with relative depth due to the two-years he spent living amongst the diverse peoples of the Orange River (having retreated from the Cape Colony as a deserter from the VOC, being pardoned in 1779, see Mossop 1935: 3-4). He writes that,

[t]he men stand linked in a circle and each one has a flute, a few of which have bass notes, others high notes; one man stands in the centre of the circle with a flute; he first starts the dance and the song with words, whereupon those forming the circle all begin to dance round simultaneously, at the same time playing on their flutes. The sound of the bass flutes does not come in, except at the proper time when the bass note should be sounded; and chiefly at the end of the song the bass flutes are the last to be heard. ... So they dance very fantastically, marking time with their feet as the rhythm demands. The womenfolk now all dance one behind the other round the circle, clapping their hands; at this stage something occurs which is like a caress, for, as they dance round in this way, one or two of the men slip out of the ring; but the others still link up to keep the circle while those who have left it, each dancing next to a woman, gently tug at the bands of her apron-like garb, for which she in her turn feints to threaten him. The music is the most attractive part of the dance; if in the evening you happen to be four or five hundred yards away from it you hear as many kinds of voices as you can think of, for then the clapping of the hands does not prevent you from hearing the music properly (Wikar 1778-9 in Mossop 1835: 169).

A growing exoticisation and racism seems to seep into European observations through time, perhaps aligned with justificatory narratives for the appropriation of Khoe and San lands and labour as the Cape colonial frontier crept northwards. The German missionary Peter Kolb[e], charged with responsibility for making astronomical and physical observations in Africa, for example, rarely misses an opportunity to denigrate Khoe flute ensemble practices. He writes that ‘they have no melodies, or, at any rate I have never heard any’; and that Van der Stel’s narrative of his 1685 Namaqua encounter is ‘a mere fabrication ... that out of a gnat ... has

made an elephant' (Kolbe 1741[1719] quoted in Kirby 1933: 322). Missionary Zerwick, stationed at Pniel to the east of Cape Town, amongst the 'Springbok' and 'Cat' 'tribes of the Korana Hottentots', writes of 'young men with faces horribly painted and grimacing', who on his approach by horseback 'excited each to a madder frenzy of playing and dancing', with this 'mad and repulsive mass of humanity' seeming to 'goad' itself 'into raising their devilish play to the highest pitch'; responding by lecturing 'Hear, you people! Now the time is past for you to go on with your devilish play', and threatening especially the 'chief men' with severe punishment by God (Berliner Missions Bericht 11, November 1855: 180-1, quoted in Kirby 1933: 332-3). Missionary C.F. Wuras (1927[1858]: 287) of the Berlin Mission at Bethany near Bloemfontein, South Africa, similarly 'animalises' the Korana *Āas* or reed-play:

[t]he greatest immorality prevails during these plays, of which there are several. In some of them they imitate the howls and cries of different animals, and at sunrise the men rush to the kraal and catch the sheep and goats for the day's feast, howling like many wolves.

Kirby acknowledges too that the reed-dance 'was completely stamped out by the missionaries, some of whom have recorded their pleasure at succeeding in eradicating it' (Kirby 1933: 370, also 372), an epistemic violence that is crying out for recognition and recompense. As Simha Arom (2004[1991]: 46) describes in his *magnum opus* on *African Polyphony & Polyrhythm*, although some European observers are 'quite open-minded ... and listen with sympathetic curiosity, and sometimes even with genuine interest', others 'are very adversely disposed towards this music, or even reject it totally'.

* * *

To summarise, whilst these records of Khoe flute music since the late 1400s provide keyholes through which to peer at and imagine past encounters, it is also clear from the accounts above that there is an enormous gap in the authorship and agency with which they are informed. From the earliest records, and reflecting the unequal structures of power and literacy shaping their production, the written accounts of this musical form are contributed primarily by European men, and are shaped by the cultural and gendered perceptions of their authors, as well as the social mores of the changing times of their observations.

In the time since many of the historical records were made, the northern Cape and the southern area of Namibia, as well as the Orange River basin that connected them, have been subjected to relentless disruptions arising especially through the expansion of the Cape colonial frontier northwards and inland from the Atlantic coast, and deepened by both British and German colonial territorial annexations north of the Orange. As these resisted disruptions intensified north of the Orange River into a full-scale colonial-indigenous war in the early 1900s in what was then German Südwestafrika, Indigenous cultural fragmentation was echoed by the fragmentation and loss of Khoe flute musics. Perhaps paradoxically, however, these same disruptive processes led to the sustenance of this musical practice until recent decades in Sesfontein / !Nani|aus, north-west Namibia (southern Kunene Region), where it inspired the whimsical quote by popular author Lawrence Green at the opening of this paper.

In Section 4 we consider in some detail the historical contexts leading to the establishment and sustenance of \ddot{a} in the north-west of Namibia, only to succumb recently to its almost complete demise.

4. Disruption and Fragmentation: Movements of Khoe / Nama Flute Music from the South to North-west Namibia

Located north of the ‘Red Line’ that separated the settled colonial ‘Police Zone’ from Namibia’s northern communally-managed ‘native areas’ (Miescher 2012), the settlement of Sesfontein has a complex history of association with Nama inhabitants of various lineages who concentrated in the area from the 1860s onwards. They were escaping persecution and settler expansion in the northern Cape and southern Namibia, as well as opportunistically extending a livestock raiding economy that reached northwards as far as Angola. The nexus of events behind the concentration and sustenance of the flute music in Sesfontein / !Nani|aus entangle the musicians there in fascinating ways with the peoples and histories shared above for the northern Cape and the expanding colonial frontier.

Sesfontein historically was shaped by various lineages and mobilities, with recent (since around the 1860s) historical in-migrations and possible returns by two Nama and Oorlam Nama pastoralist groupings in particular: !Gomen ‘Topnaar’ from Walvis Bay area (including #Khîsa|gubus / Sandfontein); and Swartbooi / ||Khou|gôan from southern Namibia and beyond the Orange.¹⁸ One dimension differentiating these groupings is that !Gomen (!Gomen|gôan, under the |Uixamab lineage leadership, see below) were reportedly ‘more traditional leaders’, whilst ||Khou|gôan had become closely entangled with the incoming church,¹⁹ especially the Rhenish Mission linked with missionary Kleinschmidt at Rehoboth, south of Windhoek (cf. letters by Emma Sarah Hahn *née* Hone, in Guerdes and Reiner 1992: 89-91), and from 1890 with missionary Reichmann in Franzfontein (Rizzo 2012: 68).

Some early documented oral history testimonies also speak of ‘Topnaar’ ‘Red Nation’ (Roonasie / Kailkhauan) / Nama pastoralists becoming reunited in the north with northern ‘Red Nation’ peoples from whom they had become separated (see, for example, testimonies in Alexander 2006[1838], vol. 2; Galton 1890[1853]; Hoernlé 1985[1925]). In the archives of the Rhenish Mission, missionary Baumann (RMS, Rooibank 1878-83) thus writes that,

[a]ccording to the ancients [i.e. his eldest informants], the Topnaars [of the !Khuseb River area] came from the north towards the end of the eighteenth century [and] [a]t the beginning of the 19th century the Topnaar are said to have reached the mouth of the Swakop (tsoa-xou-b) [their migration perhaps] related to the advance of the Herero into the Kaokoveld (Köhler 1969: 106).

The implication here is that Red Nation / Roonasie / Kailkhauan Nama pastoralists became split off the larger Red Nation Nama grouping in central Namibia, in part due to in-migration of Bantu-language-speaking ovaHerero pastoralists who, in around the late 1700s, moved south-eastwards from northern Kaoko (from north of the Kunene River), eventually expanding into the pastures of the central parts of the country, south of Etosha Pan, *ca.* 1820-

1830 (||Garoës 2021). This account matches one explanation of the etymology of their name ‘Topnaar’ or †Aonin as people at the edges (†ao = ‘endpoint’ / ‘tip’) of the broader Nama-inhabited area. Moritz (1992: 5) confirms, through working with the Topnaar especially at Rooibank (|Awa!haos) on the !Khuseb between 1965-72, that

[t]he Topnaar are a Nama tribe that lived in the far north in the area of Hoarusib River. In 1800 they moved from there to the Swakop. Under their captain |Kaxab [also †Khaxab] they settled down in 1820 at Kuiseb – since the Topnaar lived in the area where the Nara grows, they also became known as ‘!Naranin’.

Vigne (1994: 6) similarly writes that,

[o]ral sources tell of their [i.e. Sesfontein Topnaars] forebears moving south from the Kaokoveld, leaving a part of their people behind at Sesfontein, and of part of the community moving away, some never to return.

In the south, Swartbooi / ||Khaulgôan, amongst other Nama lineages, were affected by raiding by Oorlam Afrikaner commandos in southern and central Namibia from 1810 onwards (du Pisani 1986: 14-5), contributing to the former’s northwards mobilities over the next few decades. In January 1864, Swartbooi Nama, whose territory in Gibeon the Herero had to move through in order to prevent Nama advancing from the south, were sent ‘a strong contingent [2,500 strong] to Rehoboth’ by [Ka]Maherero [of Okahandja], led by the commercial hunter Frederick Green who at the time was employed by the Anglo-Swede trader Charles John Andersson: the intention being to support Swartbooi allegiance to Maharero against attack by ‘an alliance of Nama-Oorlam leaders’, specifically Jan Jonker of |Aelgams [Windhoek] who was planning to wage war on the Herero (Wallace 2011: 69). The Swartbooi were reportedly the only powerful group in central SWA/Namibia who allied with Kamaherero instead of the Oorlam Afrikaners in these years (Lau [Andersson] 1987b: 104).

In the 1860s Andersson’s trading activities were ‘bring[ing] him into direct conflict with the Namaland chiefs and especially the sovereign, Jonker Afrikaner’ and his sons Christian and Jan Jonker, the Afrikaner family claiming a monopoly on the cattle trade in central Namibia (Lau [Andersson] 1987b: 104). The Swartbooi constructed embankments around Rehoboth to protect against Afrikaner attack, but were defeated in the struggles that followed, and forced to leave |Anhes / Rehoboth due to this attack (Lau [Andersson] 1987b: 104). Accompanied by Rhenish missionary Kleinschmidt, they trekked westwards ‘along the Kuiseb River, and thence to the Swakop River in order to find new dwelling places in Hereroland’ (Wallace 2011: 61). They were pursued by Jan Jonker who overtook them and set fire to their wagons (recorded in Palgrave 1876), speeding up their retreat along the Kuiseb, from where they settled at Salem on the Swakop River, then moving via Ameib in the Erongo mountains, towards Fransfontein and Sesfontein where they settled. The chronicle of Otjimbingwe for 1864 documents that,

Topnaar living in the Kuiseb valley joined forces with the Zwartbooi, headed northward under the leadership of the missionary Bohme, and settled in !Am-eib on the Erongo mountains. When the water in !Am-eib became scarce, the Zwartbooi and the Topnaar moved northwards to reach Okombahe, Otjitambi or Franzfontein. From there, many

Topnaar moved to Zesfontein (aka Sesfontein), where at that time lived Bushman and Bergdama, who were under the influence of the Herero²⁰. The Topnaar were later followed by a smaller group of Zwartbooï and also settled in Zesfontein (in Köhler 1969: 111).

In 1866, Salem ‘on the southern bank of the Swakop River’ is described by Swedish hunter and trader Thure Gustav Een as,

now an abandoned mission station inhabited by a Namaqua or Hottentot tribe under a chief with the name Svartberg [Swartbooï], the only Hottentot tribe living in peace with the Damara [Herero] people. (Rudner and Rudner / Een 2004[1872]: 37)

In 1880 Nama and Herero conflict over grazing between the Kuiseb and Swakop reportedly resulted in terrible slaughter, with Abraham Zwartbooï documented in the RMS Chronicle of this year calling to the Topnaar to draw with the Zwartbooï in the war against the Herero (Köhler 1969: 111).

Furnished with firearms, and fuelled by layers of displacement and disruption heightened by the expanding colonial Cape frontier, the northwards movement and return of Nama pastoralists encountered other Khoekhoegowab-speaking peoples already living in the north-west:

there were also people living here ... in the vicinity of Sesfontein like Sixori, Purros, and Sanitatis – and some were living in Hoanib River. The ones who were living that side of Sixori were called !Khao-a Dama. And the ones that were living in Hoanib were called !Narenin [because they harvest *!nara*, the fruits of the melon plant *Acanthosicyos horridus*]. Yes because that side it was !Ukun and !Narenin who were making a living in Hoanib River. And the others, the Purros Dama were those ones who were living that side of Purros...²¹.

Their arrival in Sesfontein attracted ‘people from the surrounding areas, as the emerging settlement offered new economic opportunities’, causing a centralisation of inhabitants in Sesfontein, including ‘people who had been living as hunters, herders and fishermen along the riverbeds towards the coast or shifting between the various nearby waterholes’ (Rizzo 2012: 32). ‘Intensification of agricultural production’ generated employment in herding and in newly established gardens’ and ‘[y]oung men were enrolled into commandos, with which they engaged in raids and hunting trips and supervised herds’ (Rizzo 2012: 32-3).

Incoming Oorlam Nama with firearms are often portrayed in the literature in extremely negative terms on account of their predations on the livestock of ovaHerero remaining north of Sesfontein and beyond the Kunene River, framed in otjiHerero as the ‘Kuena wars’, thus: ‘mounted and well armed’ ‘Swartboois of Franzfontein and the Topnaar of Sesfontein’ begin ‘their devastating raids into cattle-rich Kaokoland’, ‘to capture cattle’ – much of which was ‘sold in central Namibia in order to purchase guns, ammunition, horses and other commodities (such as clothes, shoes, salt and sugar)’ (Bollig 1997: 15; also see Owen-Smith 1972: 32-33; Bollig and Olwage 2016; Bollig 2020). A series of relevant contexts are pertinent here, however, including: a situation of endemic plundering of the livestock of

others amongst all expansionary cattle pastoralists jostling for space and control in the 1800s; a putatively significant southwards migration into the north-west, central and southern parts of the territory of ovaHerero pastoralists during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Rudner and Rudner [Möller] 1974[1899]: 163-4), whose claiming of pastures displaced indigenous Nama, Damara / #Nūkhoen and Sān in these areas (lGaroes 2021); and northwards movements of Oorlam Nama with firearms from the Cape Colony from the late 1700s, combined with consolidating European traders, missionaries and settlers from these years (as noted above). In addition, otjiHerero-speakers were not only passive victims of Nama raiding: Mureti [of southern Kaokoveld] and others outwitted the raiders in various ways; others formed alliances with the Nama, such as Kakurukouje / Kasupi ‘a rich herder’ in the south-west of the Herero-settled area and thus geographically closer to the !Gomen (‘Topnaar’) leadership of Sesfontein, who ‘took part in their raids and shared the loot’ (Bollig 1997: 15-6, 26). Complexifying the picture further still, raiding of the ‘Kaoko Herero’ cannot be attributed to Topnaar and Swartbooi alone. Een, mentioned above, for example, writes that for some years in the mid-1860s a ‘bander of robbers’ led by ‘Sammel’ (Samuel), once a subject of Jonker Afrikaner (Rudner and Rudner 2004, p. 207 f61, after Andersson 1875, pp. 150ff, 158ff), was raiding the ‘Kaoko Damara’ (Herero) from a high mountain stronghold north-east of Otjimbingwe, also attacking multiple European hunters and traders (Een recounts attacks on named hunters Smuts, Lewis, Todd and William Coates Palgrave in these years) (Rudner and Rudner / Een 2004[1872]: 61-63).

Nonetheless, in around the 1870s-80s, !Gomen (Topnaar) leader Jan |Uixamab ‘is said to have controlled cattle posts up to the Kunene River’, contributing to a retreat of otjiHerero-speaking people northwards across the Kunene (Rizzo 2012: 33, 50-1) as well as to increasing clashes with Anglo-Boer settlers and the German colonial administration seeking to control and contain Nama power (Rudner and Rudner [Möller] 1974[1899]: 179; Rizzo 2012: 41, 43). Indeed, Boer and Portuguese traders and hunters in Kaoko and southern Angola with firearms and ox-wagons also crowded out African / Oorlam presence (Bollig 1997: 40; Rizzo 2012: 40, 42). In a ‘final clash ... between Boers and Hottentots’ in southern Angola the latter were ‘soundly defeated and did not venture to cross the Kunene again’: thirty-seven Nama and three Trekboers were reportedly killed in this clash (Rudner and Rudner [Möller] 1974[1899]: 179).

In the last years of the nineteenth century, the consolidating power and influence of Nama lineages in this north-west area was crushed by a combination of disease and colonial military action. In 1897 rinderpest precipitated the collapse of the Herero and Oorlam-Nama pastoral economies, combined with attempts by the nascent German colonial administration led from Windhoek to control the spread of the disease from the northern areas to the emerging German commercial livestock economy in the settled areas of the south (Miescher 2012). Jan |Uixamab, then Nama ‘captein’ of Sesfontein, refused to support the livestock cordon’s construction and rejected ‘the suggestion that he, his followers, and their livestock should temporarily leave Sesfontein and move south near Fransfontein’, or to move their livestock out of the ‘neutral zone’ south of Sesfontein (Miescher 2012: 25; Rizzo 2012: 59). This combination of pressures led in 1898 to indigenous resistance to the colonial authorities in

this north-west area which, as noted above, met with devastating defeat in Grootberg (Kai|uis) by three German colonial divisions under Captain Ludwig von Estorff as head of Outjo District, Major Mueller, Victor Franke and Captain Kaiser, and reportedly resulting in the torturing, rape, disease and malnutrition of Topnaar, Damara, Herero and Swartbooi women and children in military camps, e.g. at Kai|uis (Grootberg) and Tsunamis (!Haroës 2010). David Swartbooi, the captain of Fransfontein, was deported to Windhoek, and in August 1898 Jan |Uixamab, captain of Sesfontein, surrendered in Outjo and handed over most of his weapons (Miescher 2012: 33). More drastic punishment was avoided due to limited military resources, but |Uixamab was reportedly forced into a protection treaty (*Schutsvertrag*) with the German colonial government (Leutwein in association with Hartmann of the Kaoko Land and Mining Company), as well as charged 1,000 head of small stock and requested to hand in all arms and ammunition owned by himself and followers (Rizzo 2012: 64, 67). Subsequently, the Kaoko Land and Mining Company began selling farms to German and Boer settlers with Jan |Uixamab of Sesfontein selling 4,000ha constituting the farm Warmbad (Warmquelle) on 3rd October of this year that was later taken over by Carl Schlettwein (Rizzo 2012: 65; Sullivan 2021: 32).

This complex 1800s in-migration and concentration of !Gomen and Swartbooi Nama also involved the movement and/or re-establishing of various Nama cultural traditions from south to north: including the polyphonic flute music and songs associated with Khoe / Nama peoples throughout the south-western parts of southern Africa. In becoming established in Sesfontein, †ã music became meshed with a larger repertoire of Damara / †Nūkhoe and !Ubu²² musics in the area, including |gais praise songs and arus healing songs (as documented in *The Music Returns to Kai-as* <https://vimeo.com/486865709>). The flute music or †ã thereby became performed by a diversity of increasingly and dynamically entangled peoples concentrated in the area of Sesfontein, to apparently become the last Khoe / Nama flute ensemble of southern Africa.

5. Sesfontein, North-west Namibia, and the Last Recorded Khoe / Nama Flute Ensemble in southern Africa?

As illuminating as the historical accounts in Section 3 are, they can only tantalise with regard to how Nama flute music and its accompanying songs and rhythms may have sounded. Although they tell us that flute ensembles were played at times of celebration and to mark significant occasions, with much enjoyment for all concerned, they tell us almost nothing about the content of the songs, the affects they engendered, and the collective values and aesthetics they affirmed. In this section we reflect on an ongoing process of engaging with, returning and perhaps revitalising what we believe to be the last recordings made of the Nama flute music sustained in Sesfontein. Here, and as an outcome of the histories of displacement, mobilities, and interconnections outlined in Section 4, †ã musics were played and participated in by a diversity of Nama, Damara / †Nūkhoe and !Ubu men and women. In 1999, ethnomusicologists Emmanuelle Olivier and the late Minette Mans were able to record four

flute songs performed by a reduced orchestra of four flutes/flautist and women singers (see Figures 7 and 8). Their DAT tape recordings consist of recordings made on 6 June and 2 November 1999, now archived in the British Library Sound Collection (C1709/140 C1-C8, 6 June 1999, C1709/145 C1-C4, 2 November 1999). Olivier and Mans' field research and translations in Sesfontein were supported by Fredrick !Hawaxab, now a senior councillor in the Nami-Daman Traditional Authority registered in 2014, with Lauta Daubes[?] assisting an initial 'survey' in Sesfontein on 27-28 October 1999.²³ As Mans and Olivier (2005: 14-5) write,

[i]t was exciting to discover that the Nama flute (pipe) ensemble, thought to be extinct, was still in existence in this town [Sesfontein], although it had shrunk to just 4 flutes (from paw-paw stems) instead of the original eleven [?] reed flutes.



Figure 7. Nama-Damara men in Sesfontein / !Nani-|aus, north-west Namibia, playing flutes (*†āti*) of four different pitches in 1999. From L-R the flautists are Petersen, Manasse |Nuab, Isaac !Hawaxab, Fanuel !Hawaxab – all now deceased. Photo: Emmanuelle Olivier 1999, digitised by Sian Sullivan February 2018, identification of flautists made by W.S. Ganuses and S. Sullivan May 2018 with members of the Sesfontein community.



Figure 8. Nama-Damara flute music performance in Sesfontein 1999. In the centre the three visible male flautists are (L-R) Isaac |Hawaxab, Fanuel |Hawaxab and Manasse |Nuab. The women singers-dancers circling them are (L-R) the late Julia Ganuses, Evangeline |Nuas (= sister of Manasse |Nuab), unknown, Albertina Tjitena (wearing purple headscarf). Photo: Emmanuelle Olivier 1999, digitised by Sian Sullivan February 2018, identification of participants made by W.S. Ganuses and S. Sullivan May 2018.

The research and recordings by Olivier and Mans – both Olivier’s 1999 fieldnotes and a fuller unpublished research report on musical instruments in Namibia (Mans and Olivier 2005) – provide the fullest documentation of repertoire, contexts of performances, instrumentation and techniques of playing for Khoe / Nama flute music, as described by players and participants themselves. It appears from Olivier and Mans that by 1999 it was already unusual for flute music to be played in Sesfontein, their research itself prompting the performances they were able to record: thus, ‘[d]ue to rarity of instruments and individual memory lapses of informants, different terms were found’ (Mans and Olivier 2005: 57). As Olivier (2006: 18) later writes:

[a]t the end of the 1990s, as I myself was reviewing those instruments [flutes], only a few Nama musicians from Sesfontein (Namibia) still played them, mainly when asked to by tourists. For other occasions, like the accordion and the harmonica, the flutes have been replaced by the guitar (electric), synthesizer and battery, instruments considered more ‘modern’. On them, the musicians play Reggae and American pop music they hear on the radio, much more often than any ‘traditional’ tunes. [See Figure 9]



Figure 9. Namastap in Sesfontein, 4 November 1999. Photo: Emmanuelle Olivier 1999, digitised by Sian Sullivan February 2018.

In recent years, Sullivan initiated a process of playing the first set of digitised 1999 recordings to Sesfontein residents²⁴ and, with Ganuses, worked with the photographs scanned in 2018 at the British Library from the Olivier Collection as memory prompts to generate contextual information regarding the flautists and singers, and the content of the songs:

We sat in my hut at Emma and Suro's farm !Nao-dâis, south-east of Sesfontein, tormented by the prolific flies that signal the coming of milk in the rain season. I began by saying I would like to play them something, that I thought they would recognise it but I would just like to see what they think and if it brings back any memories. On which, I pressed play, recording our conversation simultaneously on my voice recorder. This recording overlain on Olivier's original 1999 recording starts with the men playing the flutes which have different sizes which provide the different pitches of the notes. Each size of flute has its name. Emma then says 'when they play the *†āb* they sing the songs..', at which point, and as if called by Emma herself, women's voices start to become audible on the recording. A song comes into focus, and Emma starts singing along. She remembers! She describes how the women sing and clap, and dance in circles around the men, and the men play in a semi-circle. Then a second song comes in... Suro says, 'I didn't think we hear the songs again...' I felt profoundly moved by this tender moment of recognition and memory. (Sian Sullivan field-notes, 17 March 2017)

What has become clear from these tentative steps to return the Olivier / Mans music collection from Sesfontein is how amazed and pleased people are to hear the recordings. A latent desire to reclaim and rejuvenate this musical knowledge and heritage also seems apparent, as well as an intention to flesh out the repertoire with other known songs: thus, 'I

will ask my in-laws all the songs. Because these people are only singing three songs. So I will ask her about all the songs' (W.S. Ganuses, !Nao-dâis, 17 March 2017).

Although most of the flautists and singers photographed above by Olivier and Mans have now passed on, collective memory present in the broader Sesfontein community means that it remains possible to learn something of the nature and meaning of the music as it was played here in the past: perhaps even to inspire a remaking of the music in the future. The tentative steps we have taken in this process demonstrate that although the flute music is no longer played, people remain today who remember the songs, the flautists, the contexts in which the music was played, and the meanings of the music and accompanying performances. Indeed, sharing the recordings and images seems to have brought both delight as memories and people of the past are brought back into the present, and a sad nostalgia for meaningful practices now lost to the passage of historical time. These occasions have also demonstrated the resilience of embodied memory and perhaps the potential for material recorded from the past to be more fully understood, re-membered and returned in the present. Continuing with the theme of disruption shaping the Khoe / Nama flute music, the COVID-19 pandemic (Lendelvo et al. 2020), amongst other events, conspired against pursuing this line of enquiry beyond 2019, but we hope to re-open this exploration in the coming years. The 1999 documentation of †ā in Sesfontein by Olivier / Mans and assistants, combined with its later uptake in Sesfontein by Sullivan and Ganuses, clarifies the following dimensions.

The making and pitch of the flutes

In keeping with both the continuity and variations described in Sections 2 and 3 above, Sesfontein 'reed-flutes' were made from the hollow stems of paw-paw planted around peoples' houses and in their gardens (Figure 10). These hollow stems were cut to different lengths to produce four differently pitched notes (cf. Table 1). In this Sesfontein demonstration there were only four flautists, although as Olivier (2006: 18) notes,

[t]he flute ensemble of Sesfontein includes five instruments tuned according to the same tetratonic scale as the one noted by Kirby in 1933. The two little reed pipes are no longer there; the musicians only remember them as traces of bygone days.

The highest pitched flute in the Olivier / Mans 1999 recordings is called *!aia* ('the potato'); the next is *a!gâs*; the third is *kamas*; and the lowest is *lhûib*. These different pitches can be heard at: <https://soundcloud.com/futurepasts/sesfontein-flute-pitches-1999-north-west-namibia>.

In August 2018, the late Hans Ganuseb explained to us that in fact in each flute there are two notes whose pitch is created by the players' voice: 1. *!aias* and 2. *a!gâs* play together; and 5. *lhûib* and 3. *kamas* play together (flute 4 – *!arob* – is missing in this illustration).



Figure 10. The late Manasse |Nuab (wearing hat) and the late Isaac |Hawaxab (wearing cap) demonstrate how flutes are made from paw-paw stems in Sesfontein, 1999. Top row: cutting paw-paw stems (left), cutting the stems to the right size (centre), the four differently sized and pitched flutes (right). Bottom row: cutting mouth-piece end of flute (left), soaking flutes in water (centre), trying out the flutes (right). Slides by Emmanuelle Olivier 1999, digitised by Sian Sullivan in February 2018.

Repertoire of Sesfontein †āb

At the time of Olivier and Mans's field research, 'Samuel |Gabeb' (?|Nabeb, of the |Uixamab !Gomen Nama lineage?) was named as the Nama man who taught the †ā to Damara / †Nūkhoen in Sesfontein (Olivier field-notes 1999). †ā were played on the following occasions: the designation of a new chief; weddings; anniversary of a funeral; on the occasion of a hunt; for entertainment; and at the time of a girl's first menstruation. Four distinct †ā songs, some with more than one version or variation, were recorded by Olivier and Mans, with the following themes and motifs (listed here in the order of their recording on 6 June 1999), some of which have been further clarified and confirmed through Sullivan and Ganuses's later fieldwork:

|Ai piriros

Three sequences recorded 6 June 1999 are described as 'about the goat that doesn't have a horn', saying 'Give me my goat without horns' and named '!garullhāb -biri-us'[?] about the goat that doesn't have a horn²⁵:

- i. |ai g!ai piriuru (lit. '? - ? - goat'), flutes alone, version 1 (C1709/140 C1);
- ii. |ai g!ai piriuru flutes alone, version 2 (C1709/140 C2);
- [iii. is recorded in error as |ai g!ai piriuru flutes, voice and dance, version 1, with women singing and clapping (C1709/140 C3), but is in fact the song *Janro / Yani rova*];
- iv. |ai g!ai piriuru flutes, voice and dance, version 2 (C1709/140 C4): 'the song means, give me the goat with the horns' (W.S. Ganuses, !Nao-dāis, 17 March 2017).

Keli

This song – *Keli rotse* – is about a woman’s shawl, which refers to the shawl a girl would start to wear in the past as part of societal recognition that she has become a woman²⁶, and is performed for the first menstruation of a young girl. Ganuses recalled the song being played for her as she emerged from the *khae-oms* – the dark hut – in which she had been secluded to honour her first menstruation and receive the ritualised teachings for becoming a woman, *ca.* mid-1970s. *Keli* was sung for her by the Sesfontein Nama-Dama community as she was led by a scarf from the *khae-oms*. On hearing the song again in 2017, Suro started singing along to the song, commenting

we forget also the words that they are singing – if they are singing like the other one [‘!garullhâb -biri-us’]then we can remember but it was in that time. *Keli rotse autere* [give to me]. *Keli* was maybe somebody’s name because they say “*Keli* will take me back”.

The Olivier / Mans recording of 6 June 1999 includes a sequence of the flutes alone (C1709/140 C5) going into the song with both flutes and women singing (C1709/140 C6), and the song was also recorded on 2 November 1999 (C1709/145 C3).²⁷ The recording shared at the link below includes the rather magical moment in which Suro and Emma recognised the song *Keli rotse*, and their recall of the melody, words and clapped rhythm of the song as it was played to them in March 2017:

<https://vimeo.com/295452930>.

Yani rova

Recorded on 6 June 1999 (C1709/140 C3, C7 ‘Yan rova’) and apparently again on 2 November 1999 (C1709/145 C2), but labelled as ‘Janni’ – being the ‘name of a gentle guy’ (Olivier field-notes 1999), when a version with flutes alone, and a version with flutes, voice and dance, were recorded. In 2017, Suro and Emma referred to this song as ‘Janro’.

‡*Nasemab* / N*asemab*

This flute song tells of a man arrested by the local police, and of his neck being surrounded by a scarf as if to hang him, because he stole goats belonging to a leader/chief living around Sesfontein who was called ‡*Nasemab*, apparently enacted by a flautist and the leader of the quartet (C1709/145 C4, 2 November 1999).

Particular individuals in Sesfontein were also recalled in 2017 by Ganuses and her aunt Emma for their roles as flautists and singers in ‡*ā* performances. Named women vocalists were Emma’s mother the late Susana Ganuses *née* ‡Gaubes (a !Gomen Topnaar lineage), Joanna, Esther, ‡Naiharo and Engeline. Emma Ganuses and Prescilla ‡Hoës are women who are still alive who remember the songs. The flautists were Eliasa, Daniel, Manasse ‡Nuab, Isaac and Kaleb. Eliasa and Kaleb were the sons of Simon ‡Hawaxab’s sister and Isaac was Simon ‡Hawaxab’s son, illustrating inter-generational transmission of the ‡*ā* musics to descendents of the !Gomen Nama families who appear to have been amongst those who played the flute music in Sesfontein (see Figure 11). On 25 August 2021 the late Hans Ganuseb also related to us that Prescilla ‡Hoës’ sister’s son, who stays at Okaukeujo, knows how to play the ‡*ā*, whilst Fredrick ‡Hawaxab affirms that Jacobus ‡Hoëb and perhaps Michael ‡Nuab, Manasse’s son, know how to play.

key:
 Red shading = self-identification as Himba
 Yellow shading = self-identification as !Gomen, i.e. 'Topnaar Nama' from !Gomes, south of Walvis bay
 Green shading = identified and mapped places

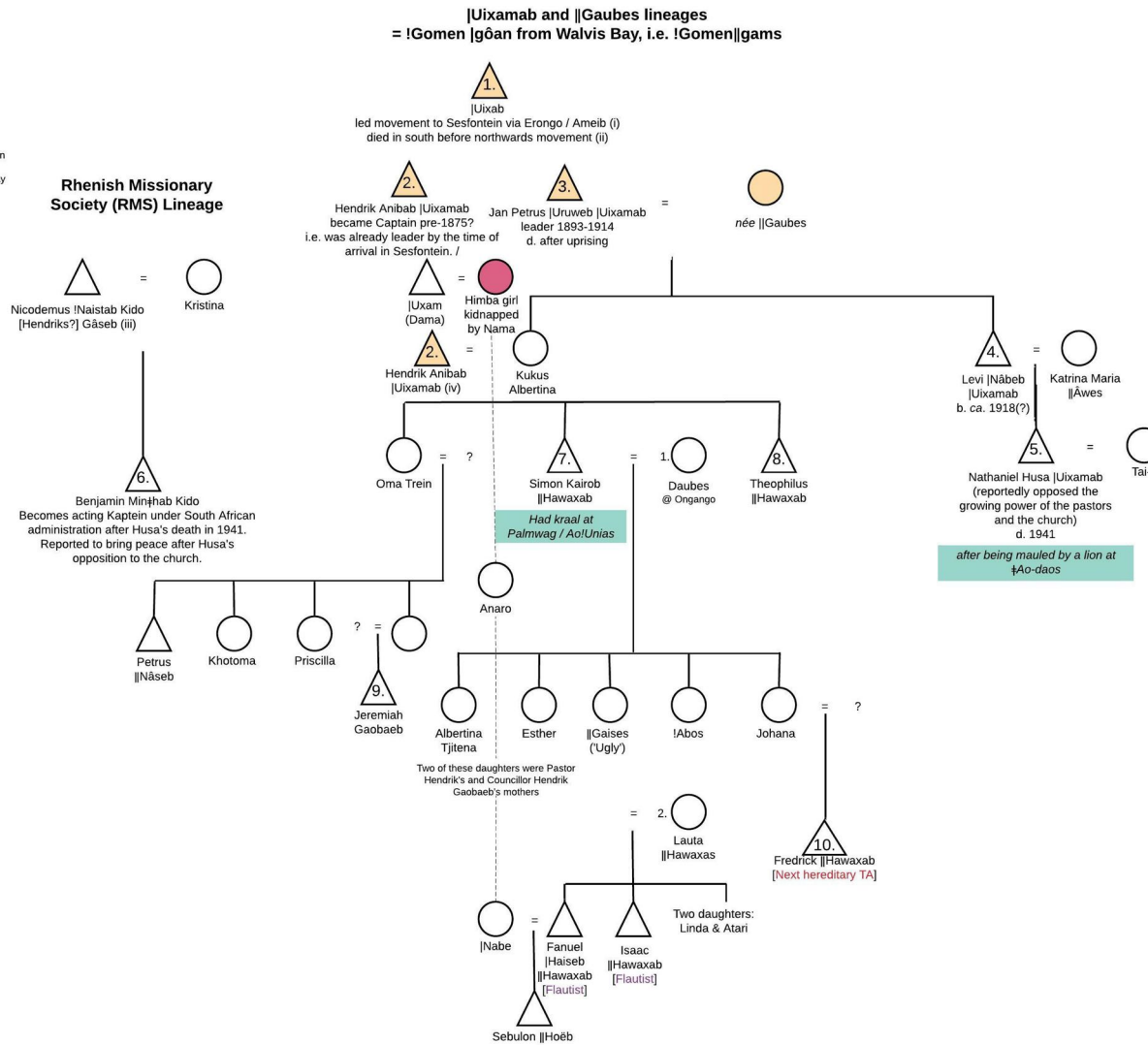


Figure 11. Leadership genealogy for Sesfontein / !Nani!aus, identifying some of the flautists in Olivier's recordings as well as other participants depicted in her images.

Drawing especially on interview by Sian Sullivan with Fredrick !Hawaxab, Sesfontein, 15 May 2018, and sources:

- i. Vigne 1994: 8 quoting Dreschler 1980: 25;
- ii. Van Warmelo 1962[1951]: 41;
- iii. Sesfontein gained Nicodemus Kido in 1897 after a visit by Rhenish missionary Reichmann, who also opened a 'far north-west' Rhenish mission in Franzfontein in 1890 (Rizzo 2012: 68-69). Kido is associated with consolidating the gardens in Sesfontein;
- iv. as recorded in Van Warmelo 1962[1951]: 43.

Terminology

To close this section, we also share a list of terms derived from Olivier’s field-notes of 1999, Mans and Olivier (2005: 57-8) and field-notes from 2017-9 by Sullivan and Ganuses (also see Table 1).

Table 2. Khoekhoegowab terminology for Nama-Damara flute music and performances in Sesfontein, north-west Namibia, collated from Olivier field-notes (1999), Mans and Olivier (2005: 57-8) and Sullivan and Ganuses field-notes (2017-9).

Khoekhoegowab	English
Generic terms:	
‡āb (denotes male and larger) ‡ās (denotes female and smaller) ‡āgu (pl).	flutes
‡āb hurub	flute dance
Naman gais	Nama dance or Nama-stap
Specific flute terms and terms for playing:	
!koam	set of flutes which follow <i>!aias</i> (leader) (see Table 1) to bring the sound of the group of four flutes together that follow the first (<i>!aias</i>)
!nanidi	<i>!nani</i> = six; set of six reed flutes played by a single man in hocket with the other players
paupau nāub	paw-paw stems are cut to make flutes
‡nawo.b / ‡nawogu / ‡napogu / ‡nareb.n	lower extremity of the stem which must be blocked (if it is open there is no sound), using a fine compound of leaves such as from acacia
ab	wooden cork to close the lower end of the flute
xāi-ams	the open end of the stem, where the mouth is placed. The tongue serves to orient the breath so that it strikes the pipe at the right angle (see Figure 4) <i>xāi</i> = ‘to blow’, <i>ams</i> = ‘mouth / song’
nuib	butter fat to make the wooden cork slide inside the flute
tanab	leader of the group who plays flute no. 1, i.e. <i>!aias</i>
Playing technique:	
‡nani <i>xāi</i> , ‡ādidixāis	to play the flute (transitive verb) playing the flute / the sound of flutes blowing (<i>xāi</i> = ‘to blow’)
!nai	to place the tongue on the flute so as to direct the breath into the pipe in order to produce a sound
soas ta ‡nūo	to play in hocket; each flute must play when there is space for it (lit. ‘space – you – appear / seat)
nūgu / ‡noagu / ‡gangu	Playing with ‘hiccups’ – a sort of competition between players in which the winner is the one who has the most breath and who, therefore, can play the longest (<i>nūgu</i> = compete; ‡noagu = to argue)
haogo / !ubugo	playing with ‘hiccups’ together
<i>xāi</i> nae hō-am nae-am	to regularly alternate the flute and voice, by the same person (<i>xāi</i> nae = ‘to play – to sing’; hō-am nae-am = ‘to encourage – mouth – to sing – mouth)
!gui	to play well
am	to beat the hands (conducting?)
ams / amde (pl.)	to chant, referring to mouth / song
disá	to make a mistake / play a wrong note; play when it is not one’s turn; hesitate to play when it is one’s turn. When a flautist makes a false note, he stops playing. The other instrumentalists pretend to strangle him and the women have to give money so that they will be freed

6. The Taste of Remembering

I didn't believe that we would hear the $\ddot{a}b$ again, because all the people are dying out and there are only young people who doesn't know. (Welhemina Suro Ganuses, !Nao-dâis, 17 March 2017)

... why bother remembering a past that cannot be made into a present? (Kierkegaard 1985[1843]: 60)

The existence of these recordings and accompanying notes and images only became apparent in the last few years, precipitating some effort to return them to the context of their making, and perhaps to rejuvenate interest in this unique music heritage. As Paul Ricoeur (2004: 56) writes, 'remembering is not only welcoming, receiving an image of the past, it is also searching for it, "doing" something'. In contexts of extreme disruption and displacement, not to mention genocide, this work of re-remembering is a delicate, as well as potent, undertaking (cf. Hirsch 2012). A focus on heritage practices whose serious decline perhaps signals their contemporary irrelevance may seem anachronistic at best, indulgent at worst, especially given the increasingly vulnerable circumstances of the people of Sesfontein and elsewhere in Namibia as COVID-19 wreaks havoc in the country (Lendelvo *et al.* 2020). The excitement of outside researchers on learning that people remember a centuries-old musical form thought to be completely extinct needs to be tempered with, and be relevant to, local concerns and priorities.

At the same time, it is striking in this context to observe that the Khoe / Nama \ddot{a} musics remained alive and enjoyed by the Khoekhoegowab-speaking community in Sesfontein until the decades leading up to independence in 1990, only to more-or-less disappear in the years since. One reading of this situation is that a neoliberal emphasis on creating economic value from the 'wildlife' and 'wilderness landscapes' of north-west Namibia may have acted to shift attention away from indigenous cultural practices performed for emic reasons alone, and towards value-frames set increasingly by visitors and outside investors.

And yet, initial playing of the recordings of \ddot{a} to those with a memory of this musical form, as well as sharing images of musicians and dancers, suggests that these 'points of memory' to past events, practices and experiences also bring pleasure. Marcel Proust (2002[1913]: 48-9) in the first volume of *In Search of Lost Time* famously writes of how a material object encountered by chance might – through unanchoring the glimmering feeling of a past experience – trigger the sudden appearance of a memory seen again in the form of visual image and embodied affect. For Proust it was *taste* that released this glimmer of the past to prompt the effort to restore experience to memory in the present (Taussig 2010[1980]: 236). Here, it is sound that permits both a taste of a past music, and that allows a small window into the *tastiness* of becoming affectively and knowledgably entrained with the movement of this

music: ‘when they are singing, now they get the *taste* [!hoaba]. That’s why they are singing up and down like that...’.

But becoming so entrained is only possible if the music is played and participated in. A lot would need to happen in order for this kind of tastiness to be rekindled for Khoe / Nama flute music such that it is remembered not only as a relic of the past, but as a reality of the future too. This paper is shared as a gesture that might contribute to this possibility. It is offered in recognition of those past peoples who kept †ā musics alive for the 500 years for which fragments of its presence are known, and of the harsh history that led to its refuged sustenance in Sesfontein.

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Notes

¹ Sian Sullivan and Welhemina Suro Ganuses gave a presentation on ‘Tasting the lost flute music of Sesfontein: histories, continuities, possibilities’ at the international conference on *The Past, Present and Future of Namibian Heritage* held in August 2018 at the University of Namibia in Windhoek, as summarised in the third section of the blog article here: <https://www.futurepasts.net/post/2018/10/16/crossing-continents-with-future-pasts-a-tale-of-three-conferences>.

² These recordings were brought from Olivier in France for archiving at the British Library by ethnomusicologist Angela Impey in 2015 (see British Library Sound Archive <http://cadensa.bl.uk/> C1709/140 C1-C8, 6 June 1999, C1709/145 C1-C4, 2 November 1999). In a survey of Namibian musics carried out with the late Minette Mans of the University of Namibia, Olivier recorded musical performances in Sesfontein on 6-8 June and 28 October-4 November 1999. Their work was facilitated and translated by Sesfontein resident Fredrick IHawaxab, now Senior Councillor and Secretary of the Nami-Daman Traditional Authority.

³ This term is today considered derogatory (Elphick 1977: xv). No offence is meant by its occasional inclusion here when quoting directly from historical texts, in which the term denotes the specific ethnic and cultural identity for Khoekhoegowab-speaking pastoralists known today as Nama or Khoe / Khoikhoi. It is included here *only* when quoting directly from such texts. I hope the positive dimension of using the term to draw into focus the past presence of Nama at localities mentioned in these texts outweighs otherwise negative aspects of its use.

There are various explanations for the term, which remained the common name for Khoekhoegowab-speaking peoples from the 1600s until at least the mid-1900s, as illustrated by this quote from Green, included verbatim because it is one of the only records of direct observation of Nama flute music in Sesfontein, the place that ultimately forms the focus of this article. Colonial philologist Theophilus Hahn (1881: 4-6) observed already in the late 1800s the confusion generated by the term. He reaches back to eyewitness accounts reported in the work of the Dutch physician and scholar Olfert Dapper (in the late 1660s) asserting that the name ‘Hottentot’ was given by the colonial Dutch ‘to the natives they found at the Cape of Good Hope, on account of the curious clicks and harsh sounds in that language’ which the Dutch perceived as similar ‘to one who stammers and stutters too much with the tongue’, and which was also described with the derogatory Dutch word ‘Hottentot’. Thus as John Cope (1967: 25) writes, it ‘derived from Hütentüt, meaning stammerer, because of the incomprehensible, staccato click-language the indigenous brown men spoke’. Hahn (1881: 33), however, also quotes a John Sutherland (1846: 2) who claims the term

is either an original native appellation, belonging to some tribe farther north or north-east (which tribe is apparently lost), and applied to the inhabitants of the neighbourhood of the Cape by the early Portuguese settlers on the coast; but the meaning of the term it would seem almost impossible to trace, as hitherto its roots have not been found either in the Portuguese, the Dutch, the Hottentot, the Arabic, or the Sichuana languages ... Yet the Arabic word oote, to strike with a club, and again the word toote, a missile or projectile of any kind, referring to the well-known weapon of the Hottentot as well as of the Kaffer, may favour the idea of its Arabic origin, to which the Dutch might have added the Holland, for it is sometimes found Hollandootes. ... Hence, perhaps, the corruption Hottentootes. Hollandootes would thus mean, of course, a people struck down conquered by Holland.

Overall, ‘Hottentot’ was the name used widely by Europeans to describe pastoralist peoples encountered in southern Africa who spoke a ‘click’ language, which was perceived as sounding like stuttering. The term is considered derogatory. It is only used here in direct quotes from texts cited, or when drawing on historical texts, in which case the term is placed in inverted commas to indicate its problematic lineage.

⁴ Shortly after Namibia’s independence in 1990, and as stated by linguist Wilfrid Haacke (2018: 133-4), the glossonym (language name) and former endonym Khoekhoegowab was ‘officially reintroduced for the language that had become known as Nama or Nama/Damara’. Many of the Khoekhoegowab words in this paper include the symbols ǀ, ǁ, ! and ǃ, denoting consonants that sound like clicks and which characterise the languages of Khoe and San peoples who live(d) throughout southern Africa. The sounds these symbols indicate are as follows: ǀ = the ‘tutting’ sound made by bringing the tip of the tongue softly down from behind front teeth (dental click); ǁ = the clucking sound familiar in urging on a horse (lateral click); ! = a popping sound like mimicking the pulling of a cork from a wine bottle (alveolar click); ǃ = a sharp, explosive click made as the tongue is flattened and then pulled back from the palate (palatal click).

⁵ Early encounters between European travellers and indigenous Khoe and San peoples are mapped online at <https://www.futurepasts.net/kunene-from-cape>, and documented more fully in a series of timelines of historical references to south-western Africa at <https://www.futurepasts.net/timeline-to-kunene-from-the-cape>.

⁶ For full chronology of recorded observations see <https://www.futurepasts.net/khoe-nama-flute-music>.

⁷ Context indicates the people encountered in Mossel Bay were Khoe pastoralists, for which there appears to have been no differentiating term amongst European observers at this time historically.

⁸ i.e. marijuana. Kirby (1933: 323) omits this detail in his quote from Paterson!

⁹ Arom (2004[1991]: 57-8 and references therein) explains that the 19th century ‘moment of glory’ of Russian ensembles of hunting horns remembered by Alexander arose in particular circumstances when ‘a musician of the chamber’ (G.A. Maresch) was requested to teach the serfs of Prince Narichkin, master of the hunt to the Empress

Elizabeth, to play French horns within a year. So as to overcome the difficulty of ‘turning simple serfs into accomplished horn players in the space of a few months’, Maresch hit on the idea of getting different serfs to play one note only, on hunting horns of different lengths and thus of different pitch, i.e. very alike to how the Nama flute ensemble generates harmonies.

¹⁰ Decorative beads were made of copper. Meerhoff (1661, in Kirby 1933: 316) records in the northern parts of the emerging Dutch Cape colony that the ‘king’ of the Little Namaqua sat on a stool, ‘being a round piece of wood, three or four fingers thick, beautifully decorated with copper beads, which he commonly carried about with him wherever he went’.

¹¹ The term ‘Damara’, as well as the central part of Namibia that in the 1800s was known as ‘Damaraland’, tended to refer to dark-skinned cattle pastoralists known as Herero, an outcome of a situation whereby ‘Dama’ – an exonym, i.e. an external name for a group of people, – was the name given by Nama for darker-skinned people generally, a term that included peoples known today as Khoekhoegowab-speaking Damara / #Nūkhoe as well as otjiHerero-speaking Herero. Since Nama(qua) pastoralists were often those whom early European colonial travellers first encountered in the western part of southern Africa, the latter took on this application of the term ‘Dama’, giving rise to a confusing situation in the historical literature whereby both groups of people are referred to by the same name, with the terms ‘Hill Damaras’ (‘Berg-Dama’ / ‘!hom Dama’ / and the derogatory ‘klip kaffir’) and ‘Plains Damaras’ (or ‘Cattle Damara’ / *Gomadama*) were used to distinguish contemporary Damara or #Nūkhoe (i.e. “Khoekhoegowab-speaking black-skinned people”) from speakers of the Bantu language oshiHerero.

¹² Oorlam / !Gû-!gôun (du Pisani 1986: 10) were acculturated Khoekhoe who had acquired horses, firearms, wagons, the Dutch language and Christianity (Dederling 1997; Wallace 2011).

¹³ The !Habobe(n) / !Hawoben / Chabobe / Veldskoendraers were a Nama lineage established north of the Karas (IKharas) Mountains (Mossop 1935: 13), whose names refer to their distinctive leather shoes of *veldskoens* (‘veld skins’) (Olusoga and Erichsen 2010: 23). In the 1840s they formed a polity at Schans Vlakte (east of the Karas Mountains and close to the fortifications of !Khauxa!nas) (Wallace 2011: 62).

¹⁴ In Khoekhoegowab the moon (*!khab*) is gendered as masculine.

¹⁵ Von Estorff had previously learned something of the terrain of this north-west area as a member of geographer Georg Hartmann’s 1895-6 expedition to survey the area for economic opportunity (Rizzo 2012: 66; Sullivan 2021).

¹⁶ Perhaps a reference to the fig trees that grow at the springs forming the focus for settlement in Fransfontein.

¹⁷ See https://www.s2a3.org.za/bio/Biograph_final.php?serial=2508

¹⁸ London Missionary Society (LMS) missionaries the Albrecht brothers (Abraham and Christian) and Johann Seidenfaden settled at Stille Hoop and Blyde Uitkomst in southern Namibia (Dederling 1997: 9; Lau 1987a: 4), becoming ‘the first Europeans to acquire ... knowledge of the Nama groupings’, and encountering Swartboois around Warmbad and the Orange River (du Pisani 1986: 14). The Swartboois / !Khaugôan are said to have descended from the youngest of five brothers founding the Nama groups of Great Namaqualand, putatively around 1800 (Hoernlé 1985[1925]).

¹⁹ Interview by Sian Sullivan with Fredrick !Hawaxab, Sesfontein, 15 May 2018.

²⁰ Matching this history, the short film online at <https://vimeo.com/160633314> tells the story of how the Damara (#Nūkhoe) warrior Tua-Kuri-#Nameb rescued several #Nūkhoe children who had been kidnapped by ovaHerero from a spring and dwelling place called #Naos, situated to the west of Sesfontein, whilst their parents were out collecting veld foods.

²¹ Interview by Sian Sullivan with Fredrick !Hawaxab, Sesfontein, 15 May 2018. Also see Sullivan and Ganuses (2020; 2021) and (Sullivan *et al.* forthcoming).

²² !Ukun are Khoekhoegowab-speaking peoples who moved between the coastal areas of the Northern Namib desert where *!nara* melons (*Acanthosicyos horridus*) could be harvested and areas to the east where alternative foods were found, interacting with especially different Nama and #Nūkhoe lineages (*!haoti*) of Namibia’s north-west (for more information see Sullivan 2021; Sullivan and Ganuses 2020; 2021).

²³ We have recently become aware of a set of recordings of the Sesfontein flute ensemble made in 1979 by anthropologist Antje Otto and archived at the National Museum of Namibia and are trying now to explore ways of accessing and digitising these recordings. Mans and Olivier (2005: 15) also mention that video recordings were ‘made of the construction of these flutes, as well as the playing and dance that accompanies it’, but we have yet to relocate these videos, which we believe to be held at the University of Namibia.

²⁴ This first digitised DAT cassette from the Sesfontein recordings by Olivier and Mans was shared with Sullivan by ethnomusicologist Angela Impey, who in January 2014 brought from France the archive of DAT cassette recordings, slides and notes from Emmanuelle Olivier’s research in Namibia for cataloguing and digitising in the British Library Sound Archive: <http://cadensa.bl.uk/C1709>.

²⁵ Welhemina Suro Ganuses and Emma Ganuses, !Nao-dâis, 17 March 2017.

²⁶ Olivier’s 1999 field-notes refers to ‘a Herero woman’s shawl’ and the notes accompanying the 2 November archived recording (C1709/145 C3) state that ‘[t]he title refers to a shawl worn by Herero women’.

²⁷ Filed as *Keli*, C1709/140 C5 and C6, British Library Sound Collection.