

The Political Structure of the Ngamiland Mbukushu under the Rule of the Tawana

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Introduction

The Ngamiland Mbukushu¹ of Bechuanaland, who are subjects of the Tawana, enjoy considerable political independence because of the weak rule of their overlords. The Mbukushu political structure functioned well for them in the past when they were ruled by their own chiefs. While their system of rule under the rainmaking chiefs helped preventing them from being conquered and taken as serfs by stronger tribes, the struggle over the rain-medicine caused considerable dissension in the tribe. However, the dispersion of the Mbukushu into the remote areas of the Okavango Delta was one factor for their relative independence today². This migration to Ngamiland started

¹ The Mbukushu are a Middle Zambezi Bantu tribe who were at one time subjects of the Lozi in the Barotse Empire. The main remnants of the tribe left the Mid-Kwando River (Mashe) area about 1810 (A. S. H. GIBBONS, *Africa from South to North through Marotseland*, Vol. I [London and New York 1904], p. 218), and settled along the Okavango River in present day Angola and the Caprivi Strip. Since the migration of many Mbukushu into Ngamiland, this segment of the tribe has been subject to the Tawana, who are of the Tswana subgroup of the western Sotho branch of southern Bantu. — T. J. LARSON, *The Mbukushu. Some Notes on a Southern Bantu Tribe*. (Unpublished Ethnographic Notes in two Volumes. 1953; 430 pp. With maps, photogr., and drawings.)

² Most of the Ngamiland Mbukushu live along the Okavango River from Mohembo, at the northern border of Bechuanaland Protectorate, southward to Sepopa and Seronga, where the river splits into the Okavango Delta, and eastward along the Selinda Spillway to the Linyanti River. Small villages of Mbukushu are located along the Taokhe River