

UCLA

Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies

Title

Namibia: A Nation in the Making

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/75z272w9>

Journal

Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies, 14(3)

ISSN

0041-5715

Author

Melber, Dr. Henning

Publication Date

1985

DOI

10.5070/F7143017027

Copyright Information

Copyright 1985 by the author(s). All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author(s) for any necessary permissions. Learn more at <https://escholarship.org/terms>

Peer reviewed

NAMIBIA: A NATION IN THE MAKING
Early Colonialism, Resistance and Subjugation.

by

Dr. Henning Melber*

INTRODUCTION

Namibian reality prior to the process of colonisation demonstrates that the Namibian people had a history of their own. Far from being barbaric savages slaughtering each other the local communities were in a process of constant internal change, with social dynamics related to their specific environment. Among the aims of this paper is to focus attention on this period of internal relations in Namibia before colonial activities emerged, the subsequent stages of (pre-) colonial interaction and the final establishment of foreign rule, which, in the end, paved the way for present-day colonial relations in illegally occupied Namibia. The response of the Namibian people to the encroaching colonial system in the course of this process further demonstrates their overwhelming rejection of foreign domination and their preparedness to fight colonial rule. This resistance--culminating in the 'German-Namibian-War' of 1940 to 1907 which resulted in the final subjugation--created a new tendency of unification in the common rejection of colonial domination and gave birth to the Namibian nation in struggle.

Finally, it is argued that the system forcefully imposed upon the people shaped the foundations and pillars of colonial relations under illegal South African occupation, as it continues to exist today. The national liberation movement of Namibia (the South West African People's Organizations) by unconditionally opposing this system, represents the tradition of anticolonial resistance. This resistance, which emerged centuries ago, has been alive as long as colonialism has existed.

*This paper was originally presented to the Symposium on a Century of Heroic Struggle of the Namibian People against Colonial Occupation and was held at the United Nations Headquarters, New York, 31 October to 2 November 1984. The Symposium was organized by the United Nations Council for Namibia.

This version of Dr. Melber's paper was edited by Anita Pfouts, a former member of the Ufahamu editorial board.

Local Interaction

Around 1800, the present territory of Namibia seemed to already represent a certain entity. The territory is bordered by perennial rivers in the South (Orange) and North (Kunene and Kavango), by the Atlantic in the West and by the dry Kalahari sandveld in the East. People within those natural boundaries already had knowledge of and contacts among each other, as well as a perception of the surrounding regions and their inhabitants. Exchange patterns existed not only among people within this area, but also with neighbouring people to the South across the Orange river and, even more so, in the North, where communities of the various Ambo-societies settled on both sides of the Kunene.

The northern region, a park landscape with more fertile soil and higher rainfall compared to the other regions, offered suitable natural conditions for a relatively sophisticated agrarian reproduction system. On the basis of a mixed economy (with mainly agricultural cultivation and limited livestock) several different and rather independently organized Ambo-groups gained a fairly secure existence. These Ovambo-communities, settled on a permanent basis, counted a considerable number of people. In the central and southern regions of the territory, the Herero and Nama societies followed a cattle-herding mode of production. The German colonialists realized that there would be more resistance from the more populous and settled Ovambo groups than there would, at least initially, from the pastoral societies. In addition, the central plateau area of Namibia was more climatically suitable for Europeans to establish large farms for extensive cattle ranching. Therefore, the Europeans concentrated on the Central Plateau region. The northern parts of Namibia were less directly touched by the emerging colonial system. The Ovambo areas were only integrated completely into the system during the early 20th century (though still on a basis of 'indirect' rule). Major parts of this paper, therefore, concentrate on the southern and central region of Namibia, with a social dynamic different from the one in the northern areas and of more direct relevance to the process of colonisation and capitalist penetration.

The Herero, nomadic cattle-breeders who share with the Ambo-groups the linguistic background of being part of the Bantu language family, occupied large parts of the central Namibian region with Herero-clans operating far East and Northwest. The Nama groups, (later on denounced as Hottentotts in colonial terminology) with a similar mode of production, were generally less successful in cattle-breeding but supplemented their economic base with small-stock (goats and sheep) as they operated in the climatically less

favourable western and southern parts of Namibia. They are part of the Khoisan language family, as are the Damara and San peoples referred to by the colonial masters as Klippkaffer and Bushmen). The latter two, smaller in numbers, were often ignored or neglected in literature, as only located to the margins of local power during those days, with little influence on the social dynamics and to a certain degree dependent upon the relations with Nama and Herero, who often integrated them into their own structures.

Differing ecological factors must thus be emphasized as the determining characteristics of the varying forms of household production. A clear correspondence between environmental features, local identity, and the specific economic form of reproduction is found among the various societies. The development of class-structures, while still in an embryonic stage throughout the territory, had progressed further among the Ovambo in the North than among the Nama and Herero in the South. However, among the Herero, differences in cattle wealth had already produced a rich elite, which operated on the periphery of the traditional tribal institutions. Further development of class differentiation however, was hampered, as land was still used collectively and no private property in natural resources existed. Within the Nama societies, class division and separation between production and possession was hardly discernable, although some indications point to unequal power structures above the unit of family and kinship. The level of internal trade in the North also showed a more progressive division of labour including specialised artisans and traders. By the beginning of the 19th century the Namibian people already possessed clear knowledge and consciousness of the natural territorial boundaries of Namibia and had continuous contact. The Ambo traders exchanged goods for cattle mainly with the Herero and the Namibian communities were connected via the Ambo with trade-network to the North.

Relationships between Nama and Herero groups to a large extent were influenced, if not even determined, by the existing ecological constraints in combination with the mode and means of production common to both of them. Large dependent on their cattle (and in the case of the Nama the small-stock), these nomadic pastoralists needed land, water and grazing opportunities as the essential basis for the individual and collective reproduction. Meeting these needs tended to be expansionist in character. A clash of interests resulting in ambitions for control of more territory therefore was a logical consequence. In times of favourable natural conditions, the regulations to prevent an increased and notorious conflict, seemed to function. But in times of natural constraints (e.g. droughts and other limitations) competition for control of the necessary means of production

(land and water) increased. Accumulation of wealth was largely limited to this expansionism, necessarily conflicting not only with neighbouring societies with similar modes of production, but even leading to competition among units sharing the same "tribal" identity. As a consequence, ecological constraints and imperatives often resulted in military competition among different segments of the local population, including rivalry among members or units of the same ethnic group, for control of the natural resources necessary to maintain the production and reproduction basis.

It can therefore be concluded, that at the turn of the 18th to the 19th century, in southern and central Namibia, internal forces were in a dynamic process of competition and of expansionism and competitive with regard to control of the natural resources necessary to their modes of production. Although highly sensitive to the natural factors of local environment and easily interfered with, this competition happened on a basis still controlled by those involved in the process and led to a balance of powers concerning economic relations and social interactions, with the Herero groups being (the most influential, factor and generally in control of the situation. More recent research seems to suggest rather convincingly) that, in the southern and central parts of Namibia, this interaction of the local population prior to the phase of colonial conquest was only in part influenced (or dominated in the sense of being determined) by tribal background and identity. The social formation encompassed, at least to a certain extent, a variety of factors based, not only on ethnic identity but on access to land and water use in exchange for military support. Simplistic reductions along the lines of ethnic identity, a point of view common to the colonial-apologetic position fail to grasp the complexity of the situation.

An additional factor in the internal development of the country was represented by the immigration of the Orlam-clans, factions of the Khoi-khoi>Nama communities until this time living in Cape Province. These Orlam communities crossed the Orange River early in the 19th century. Refugee of the encroaching colonial system in neighbouring South Africa, they were already affected by the colonial virus. Robbed of their land by European colonizers, they tried to escape final bondage by moving further north. Many of them had already experienced dependent (wage) labour on European farms or had made their living around missionary stations in constant contact with Europeans. They generally spoke Cape Dutch and had converted to the Christian faith. Most important for their further development within the new environment of southern Namibia, they knew very well how to make use of guns and the mobility provided by horses. The Orlam-communities, organised in a quasi-military fashion, possessed a higher

degree of social and political centralisation than the resident Nama and were superior to them in terms of combat skills.

The immigration of the Orlam at the beginning of the 19th century escalated competition for the use and control of the natural means of production (land and water resources). This competition was intensified by the diminution of these resources, as the result of a severe drought in 1829-1830. Finally, this competition led to a more or less continuous military confrontation between the groups in the southern and central region of Namibia. The clash among and between Orlam-Nama and Herero communities, which concentrated finally on the achievement of dominance over this part of Namibia, can therefore be seen as a struggle for survival, in the face of increasingly scarce resources.

At least indirectly, this development also illustrates the effects of European colonization and settlement at the Cape. The migration of the Orlam communities demonstrates that the African population had already had to face external threats to their original way of life. By escaping these, the Orlams themselves became a threat to other people in neighbouring regions. Thus, the increasing conflict over limited resources can be seen as an indirect result of the colonial presence at the Cape. The following period of increased competition and struggle for survival, and for the maintenance, or reestablishment, of traditional ways of living, also witnessed the first attempts to transcend the local communal forms of organization and to establish larger regional power structures. In a very limited way, it is possible to discern early steps towards the creation of a state apparatus in the establishment of hegemonial rule over tribal factions which until then had been independent social entities. Such a process of "state formation" implied military rule, whose realization and stabilization necessarily provoked military conflict. While the establishment of a hegemonial structure, under leadership of the Orlam (in alliance with Nama-fractions and a few Herero chiefs) contributed on the one hand to the consolidation of new larger structures of power and a unifying tendency on a regional basis, it was at the same time decisively weakening the existing local structures.

Parallel to this process, missionaries, traders, and representatives of mining companies became active in the territory at the beginning of the 19th century and were early agents of an informal colonialism. Their ideological and economic influence remained rather sporadic and harmless until the mid-century. Although they had some catalyst effect from the very beginning of their activities, they never managed to

control or to direct the internal social process of transformation in this phase.

It should be noted, however, that effects and consequences varied, according to the general situation of specific communities. The Ambo settlements in the North had little direct contact with Europeans. Rooted within the land they cultivated, their social organisations were a challenge the Finnish missionary society only dared to accept late in the 19th century (and then at first with little success). The Hereror, able to reproduce themselves economically by their immense wealth of cattle independently of outside influence, showed a correlating immunity against foreign cultural and ideological impacts. The communal units of the Orlam, on the other hand, already undermined and deformed by the colonial influences experienced in South Africa, were in a process of disintegration. Thus foreign ideologies penetrated more quickly and had greater impact. Nevertheless, even in the south of Namibia, the mutual relations between missionaries and local leaders were never a one-dimensional or unilateral affair. The chiefs or captains always sought to make use of the position of the missionaries for the realisation of their own interests.

The Rhenish Mission, by the mid-19th century, embarked on a course which proved to be more successful than direct proselytizing activity would have been. Through extensive trading activities, the missionaries managed to influence the social and political developments in the territory south of Ovamboland according to their own interests. Here it is necessary to differentiate between the sphere of influence of Christian ideology and the effectiveness of political-economic factors. The latter sometimes existed without ideological penetration, i.e., Christianisation of the tribal communities, and turned out to be more effective. The degree of political influence of the mission, moreover, did not really depend upon the personal intentions of the missionaries. Instead, it was the existing local structures which influenced the political power of the mission.

As mentioned previously, Namibia in the mid-19th century had reached a stage of internal development, with the conflict between Nama and Herero for overlordship, which could well be considered a rudimentary process of state-formation. In this situation, the Rhenish Mission Society could profit from the fact that the Orlam factions were already Christianized and prepared to cooperate with the mission, thus supporting, albeit unintentionally, the extension of its zone of influence and power. When Jonker Afrikaner, undisputed leader not only of the Orlam but of an alliance representing hegemony in the central and southern parts of the territory, finally disputed the mission's claim and founded his own spiritual community,

he forced the Rhenish mission out of the centre of power. He thereby objectively became an enemy of the mission's far-reaching ambitions for control of the power-structures.

The Rhenish mission in the 1860's, therefore, started to concentrate increasingly on the Herero communities and lend the Hereros their support. The Herero mission stimulated challenge to the Orlam>Nama hegemony. This political objective also determined the participation of the mission in the conflict between Nama and Herero. The mission enjoyed near-monopoly over access to manufactured goods, including arms and ammunition, which it used to give selective support to specific communities. The policy of the Rhenish mission thus can be seen as tantamount to the fostering of particularistic forces in opposition to the established centralised power structures. The material assistance which it provided also made the mission more attractive to individual local leaders.

As the first European messengers of foreign interest (mainly traders and missionaries, both "explorers" at the same time) posed an additional threat to the ambitions of local groups to secure their means of production, attempts were made by those groups to protect their existence. Chiefs (captains) also made efforts to maintain trade routes under their control. All these efforts on the part of indigenous leaders were perceived, from the Eurocentric point of view, as "dishonesty" against missionaries, traders and travellers/explorers. Among the earliest documents, of both Namibian participation in newly emerging and European influenced exchange relations, as well as protection of Namibian efforts to maintain autonomy at least to a certain extent, is the Peace Treaty of Hoachanas in 1858. This agreement, signed by nearly all representatives of local power in the southern Namibian region, is an impressive attempt to maintain control over the changing situation (although the treaty did not last for a long time). At the same time, the participation of missionaries in the drafting of this document becomes evident by the strong emphasis on the still ongoing efforts for stronger centralisation of the existing power-structures by the hegemonial forces. The ambivalence of the document, therefore, represents the complexity of the ongoing process of social change. Among the more important passages were the following:

"In the name of the Holy Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, we the undersigned have resolved to unite in the following treaty:

Article 1: No chief with his people will have the right should a dispute arise between him and another chief c

standing, to pursue his own vindication, but shall pledge to bring the case before an impartial court.

Article 2: When the case has been examined by the impartial chiefs the guilty party shall be punished or a fine shall be imposed upon him. Should he be unwilling to comply with the judgement and should he attempt to dispute the issue by force of arms, then shall all the treaty chiefs be pledged jointly to take up arms and punish him. (...)

Article 5: No chief may permit copper being mined in his territory without the knowledge and agreement of all other chiefs, or to sell a farm or site within his territory to a white person from the Cape Colony. Whoever despite this makes such a sale shall be heavily fined, and the purchaser himself will have to bear the cost if he has been acquainted with this law beforehand.

Article 6: We resolve also to close our bond and treaty with all Griqua chiefs. Should they need us in any major war which may befall their country, then we are ready to come to their assistance. (...)

Article 8: No chief shall allow himself solely on account of rumours to become mistrustful and be prepared to take up arms without getting written proof thereof. Should this provision nevertheless be broken, the chief responsible will be heavily fined by the other chiefs. (...)

Article 10: It is also resolved that each year a day and date will be agreed to consult together for the welfare of the land and the people."

The peace treaty was signed by seventeen local leaders of the southern and central parts of the Namibian territory, in the presence of a delegate from the neighbouring Griqua of the Cape Provinces as well as the most powerful single Herero leader at this time, Maharero.

The death of the two leading personalities of the hegemony in existence during the early 1860s finally resulted in the decline of the Orlam--Nama dominance and created new tendencies among the local communities which were encouraged by foreign interests. The growing atomization benefitted the Rhenish mission's ambitions to expand its control over the territory. The mission's activities from then on shifted from an indirect military-strategic involvement to economic and ideological priorities. The Mission gained far-reaching influence over the economy, as well as over religion and education. Through its activities a host of new wants and a wide range of new skills marketable only in a capitalist

economy, were created. The values introduced by the missionaries represented their own Eurocentric perspective.

A rudimentary understanding of the capitalist economy gained ground. While all these facts indicate that the Mission played an influential role during the second half of the 19th century, its activities were far from completely systematic. In view of the uncertainty over what the future might hold (no colonial power had yet shown any readiness to annex the territory), the activities of the mission remained limited to what might be described as creating suitable preconditions for a colonial take-over.

EARLY COLONIALISM

Since the beginning of the 19th century, the British had established a station at Walvis Bay to buy cattle from the local Namibian population, mainly for the supply of St. Helena Island, especially during the time of Napoleon's involuntary stay there. Finally, in 1878, Walvis Bay was declared British territory, mainly for the protection of economic activities conducted there by British individuals. But these operations remained on a comparatively low sale, thereby offering the German empire the chance to acquire Namibia as a 'protectorate', which they did officially in 1884. "German South West Africa" as the colonial possession was labelled represented Germany's first colony and secured the much wanted 'place in the sun', demanded in colonial-enthusiast circles.

The initial phase of official German colonialism in the territory can be divided into two stages: the concessionary period and the period of treaties. The concessionary period, at the beginning of the 1880s, paved the way for the official annexation of the land by the German Empire. It created de facto colonial possessions as private property in German hands, even though ownership rights were mainly based on very dubious agreements --if not fraudulent deals-- with local headmen. The local leaders agreed to these pacts and treaties according to their own traditional understanding and interpretation of ownership rights. Private property, in the capitalist meaning, had until then been an unknown. Land had traditionally been the collective property of the local community. Only the grant of conditional rights for use of natural resources by individuals, during their lifespan, was familiar practice.

On September 5th, 1884, the German Empire formally declared the south-western coastal strip of Africa under her flag. The area henceforth under her "protection" stretched from Kunene river in the north to the Orange river in the south and to the sandy desert of the Kalahari in the east

This formal declaration of colonial responsibility was then followed by a period in which representatives of the German Empire tried to conclude 'protection treaties' with the local chiefs. These individual agreements and treaties, between the German Empire and the local communities were designed to prevent the re-establishment of any hegemonial structure in the southern and central parts of the territory. The aim of the new foreign authority was directed towards the establishment of a "balance of power" among the African social entities, which would allow further colonial penetration without coordinated resistance from the African side.

The German Empire at this time was mainly preoccupied with building up its internal capitalist system. It was not yet in a position to take a systematic advantage of her colonial prey. The official German administration was established in 1893. Only from that time on did a colonial power-structure and administrative apparatus come into being, which in its aims and effects was soon to threaten the essential interests of the Namibian population.

In the years following 1890, the German colonial power attempted to integrate the existing local power structures into the administrative system and tried to make use of them as part of its concept of rule. This policy aimed at the domestication of the African population by tying the local communities to German foreign rule through new agreements with their leaders. During this time, the ambivalent character of the traditional African chieftainship became visible in all its variations: passive bribery on the one hand, and active participation and leadership in anti-colonial struggles on the other, marked the wide range of reactions by local leaders to the emerging system of foreign domination. Cooperative chiefs, who were prepared to serve as instruments in the interest of the colonial administration, were rewarded with pensions up to 2000 German Marks annually. For the first time in Namibian history, reserves were established, which later, under the doctrine of apartheid, were labelled "traditional homelands."

The implementation of this policy, when necessary, included violent repression of non-cooperative leaders. Some of them were liquidated, others put under extreme pressure and finally forced into pacts with the administration. By the mid-1890s, the German authorities had managed to establish a sort of alliance, applying their military superiority directly only in situations where the chiefs would not "voluntarily" compromise. For the first time, the German colonial authority thus gained a loose supremacy and overlordship within the territory.

Decisive for the success of this policy was that the German administration managed to win control over the two most influential indigenous tribal leaders of the southern and central parts of Namibia: Hendrik Witbooi of the Nama alliance, and Samuel Maharero, the paramount chief of the Herero. While Maharero cooperated with the Germans in return for the support they offered him in the stabilization of his powerful position (which, in fact, was only created with assistance of the Germans, since nothing like a 'paramount chief' existed previously among the Herero communities) Hendrik Witbooi was, at this time, ambitious to reconstruct a new Nama-hegemony. For many years in he had been in conflict with forces opposed to his claims. Witbooi was forced into a treaty after being defeated militarily by German troops. Strongly rooted in the tradition of his authority, Witbooi became the most prominent representative of traditionally-based resistance to foreign rule.

With the "domestication" of the Witbooi-Nama, the deliberate, but only partly successful, attempts of their outstanding leader to restore a loose supremacy in the political sphere found a preliminary end. The local communities were scattered and already interacting in various degrees with new, and thus far not so powerful, colonial authority and its institutions. Because of Witbooi's position and efforts it seems worthwhile and justified to introduce his position in more detail. His personal diary (mainly correspondence in Cape Dutch of the years 1884 to 1894), which fell into the hands of the colonial conquerors, is one of the few, and by far the most impressive, documents of the phase of primary anti-colonial resistance. Witbooi's position, as articulated in his letters, exemplifies the position that he and other leaders took in trying to protect their spheres of influence against the early colonial invaders.

On June 27th, 1892, Hendrik Witbooi expressed a grave warning to Chief Joseph Fredericks of Bethanie, who was the first of the local chiefs to sell land to Europeans and who later on agreed to a so-called protection treaty with the German Empire:

"I am very annoyed about you, captain of Great Namagualand who have accepted German protection and by doing so are giving the white people people rights and influence in our country. I look at the affair with the Germans with completely different eyes. They pretend to protect you from other big nations. But it seems to me that they themselves are the big nation that intends to come by violence into our country.

I see them govern with violence and issue regulations which include prohibitions. Therefore, I don't wish you to have over lands in our territory, on which these people are

permitted to live, practise free rights and carry out work. Because of this, dear captain, be so kind and cancel this thing and don't allow white people to move onto your lands."²

In another letter of August 7, 1982, Witbooi on behalf of the Red Nation, as the Nama called themselves, issued a further serious warning to Joseph Fredericks and appealed to him anew to stop the sell-out:

"As I've explained to you already in my first letter, it is usual among the captains of the red tribes, that our people live together at the same place conveniently, without obstacles, restrictions, difficulties or rivalry, and that we as captains can issue orders or make changes accordingly. With the Germans this is not the case; therefore, I don't wish you to grant them still further rights in our country.

I am of the opinion, that you captain who have placed yourself under German protection, should all consider how good and useful it could still become for you, that I as captain have yet excluded myself, my people and land."³

As a response to the colonial threat, the various members of the Red Nation solidified their contacts instead of fighting each other for military superiority within the region. Among the Nama and Herero, the increasing danger of losing their independent authority ultimately led to communication and an arrangement between the old rivals, Hendrik Witbooi and Maharero, who were willing to resist together the growing pressure. Proof of these efforts is a letter, in which Maharero responds to a note received from Hendrik Witbooi. On November 1, 1892, he writes back to the Nama chief:

"Furthermore, I've learnt here that the Boers plan to move into your country. Remember this and don't allow them to pass your territory, so that they don't come here or settle there at your places. Make every effort to prevent them from entering and don't come here or settle there at your place. Make every effort to prevent them from entering and don't wait until the whole country is crowded with them."⁴

But resistance to the colonial monster finally was in vain. When the Germans started to put pressure on Hendrik Witbooi to end his independent chieftainship and to force him to accept a so-called 'protection' treaty with the colonial authority, his refusal was met with military violence from the

colonial apparatus. With the forced "integration" of the Nama-Witboois into the colonial system, the German administration for the first time gained control over southern and central Namibia.

The instrumentalization and functionalization of the local leaders was intended to keep the African population at bay. But the necessary complementary measures for a general social integration of the African people into the emerging structures of the colonial settler society were neglected. The establishment of educational opportunities and other cultural institutions for domestication of the colonised majority depended solely upon the activities of the mission. Opportunities for careers within the colonial administration or the structures of the settler community virtually did not exist. The establishment of an infra-structure was orientated only towards the advantage of the immigrating whites and not designed for the benefit of all inhabitants. The policy of this time was incapable of extending integrative mechanisms to the broad economic field. The limitations of this system became obvious with the increasing settlement of Europeans. The only real economic opportunity for the immigrating whites was extensive farming, more precisely ranching. Therefore, the main interest of the settlers lay in the brutal and systematic appropriation of land and cattle hence in further expropriation from the African population. This expropriation involved the complete destruction of the indigenous peoples bases for reproduction and of their social relationships. The settler's interests were orientated primarily to the narrow goal of appropriation of land and cattle by means of violent or fraudulent practices and in obtaining "legal" backing of these methods from the colonial administration.

In spite of these rigid tendencies during this first phase of settlement and its consequences for economic penetration, the Herero remained the strongest economic group until the first half of the 1890s. They still possessed an immense wealth of cattle and occupied the best grazing lands. Although they did not yet permanently and continually participate in the established colonial network of capitalist trade, they dominated the market structures by their sales of cattle. Their economic dominance was only destroyed by a cattle epidemic in 1897. It robbed the Herero of the great majority of their cattle and for the first time endangered their basis of production, thereby decisively weakening their economic and social position. The immense loss of cattle made the Herero more dependent upon the European goods offered on the market and confronted them with new dependencies.

As trade with cattle as the basis of exchange relations was excluded, the possession and sale of land started to

become the subject of business. For the first time, impoverished Herero in sizeable numbers started to earn their living as wage laborers. White settlers now entered Hereroland to settle on a permanent basis. The Namibian economy gradually started to develop along "European" lines. As this development reduced the risk of loss, German capital, for the first time, began to participate in the long-term planning for economic development within the colony. It pressed for the construction of a railway network and other infrastructural investments for the development of the country's resources. All these measures were of strategic/military value, and at the same time facilitated the exploitation and export of Namibian resources.

The "labor question" now became an important issue. As the need for African workers increased, the labor supply became the main economic problem. There was a chronic shortage. To increase the supply laborers, the colonial authorities made use of increasingly violent methods. Settlers and colonial officials alike, failed to realize that the most brutal methods were not necessarily the most profitable ones. Laborers for white farms, mines and railway construction became a sought-after prize. The uncompromisingly violent character of the German colonial regime became even more obvious than before, as a strategy of unmitigated force was employed to force the black population into the colonial/capitalist economic system.

RESISTANCE

Under the conditions, resistance for the Namibians became essential a struggle for survival. At the turn of the century a series of local rebellions took place. Restricted to regional and uncoordinated actions, they necessarily ended in military defeat and further restrictions. The suppression of these isolated armed risings was used by the colonial authorities to further expand the policy of creating local reserves. At the same time, the defeat of these forms of resistance resulted in "peace treaties" with the colonial regime, which managed to improve the efficiency of the system of control by dictating limited areas for settlement to the defeated communities. Rebellious leaders were executed, land confiscated, the people disarmed and deported for forced labor, especially to the railway under construction. The antagonism further increased, an escalation was inevitable. In the struggle for their survival, the Herero were the first to take up arms against the settlers and their colonial regime. The "German-Namibian War" of 1904-1907 was, under the existing social conditions, a simple act of self-defence.

The war began with a secretly planned and collectively initiated attack by the Herero in January 1904 against the

male German settlers and troops. Far from being an irrational slaughter by "savages" (as the historic contemporary colonial literature claimed), this was a clearly directed response to threats posed by the immediate colonizers. The order issued by Maharero was followed with only a few exceptions:

"In my capacity as Supreme Chief of the Herero I hereby decree and resolve that none of my people lay their hands upon the English, the Bastards, the Berg Damara, the Nama and the Boers. We shall not lay violent hands on any of these. I have made a solemn pledge not to make this⁵ known to anyone, including the missionaries."

This statement, which shows a clear knowledge about the direct oppressor as the target of resistance, was later or supplemented by a statement of another of the Herero leaders, subchief Daniel Kariko, who added in a testimony:

"At our clandestine meetings our chiefs decided to spare the lives of all German women and children. The missionaries, too, were to be spared . . . Only German men were regarded as our enemies."⁶

Of course, this comparatively human approach had little effect on the colonial response. In the theory applied to the further actions of the colonial troops, the genocide of the resisting Namibian population became a necessary task and ever a historic cultural necessity. This perverse philosophy culminated in an extermination order against the Herero, issued at a time when they were already decisively beaten. Of an originally estimated 80,000 Herero, after the war only about 16,000 were believed to be still alive. The military struggle of the Herero caused hysterical reactions among the settlers and resulted in a campaign against all Africans. Inhuman racist attitudes reached a paroxysm of ignorance and prejudice, resulting in violent actions and repressions all over the country. Aware of the growing tensions and their threat, Hendrik Witbooi - for ten year passively settled within the borders of a reserve - finally led his people into battle at a time, when the Herero already had been destroyed.

In the northern Namibian areas, too, military resistance by the local Ambo-groups gave evidence of the increasing collective awareness of the various Namibian population groups concerning the threat to the indigenous people posed by the colonial power. Led by Chief Kambonde, several hundred Ovambo attacked the military outpost of German colonial rule at the southern edge of their settlement areas. Although unsuccessful, this act, nevertheless, represented an important articulation of the broad anti-colonial front existing and its

determination to fight the invaders. Prior to this action, the same chief Kambonde expressed his rejection of foreign dominance in a letter sent to the British governor in Cape Town, dated December 22, 1902:

"Honoured Sir,

I, Kambonde, Chief Captain of the Ovambo nation, south of the Kunene river, send you greetings.

I am in trouble. My people number many thousands. They are all workers. They till the soil; and are not a burden on any people. The Germans who have a Government at Windhoek are encroaching upon my territory. I learn that they also say that my territory belongs to them. They offered me much money for my country. I refused . . . My people are armed with English rifles. I shall resist the Germans . . . Englishmen who call themselves a company tell the Ovambo people that they work for the English Government. They want to build a railway through my country, and I have learned that they have lied to me, and that they are under the German Government. If the railway is built it will bring the German soldiers and taxes on my people. I will not have it. I will fight to the last man."

This document is one of the many examples of the common anti-colonial spirit prevailing among Namibians. It also supports the conclusion that the oppressive colonial system, at the same time, produced a unifying effect among the colonized. German colonialism, therefore, while aiming to separate and divide the people, unwittingly created conditions for the consolidation of a national spirit of resistance. The emergence of our Namibian nation, as it exists today, was born in the common struggle against foreign domination.

While the Herero had already, in 1904, sought a decisive and unsuccessful battle with the better-equipped German troops, the Nama, in the south of the territories conducted an efficient small-scale guerilla war. The most effective forces were led by Hendrik Witbooi and Jacob Marengo (still often incorrectly referred to as Morenga). Tribal origin played no important role among the combatants in these small battle-units. In fact, the guerilla fighting in the south could be seen as another nucleus of the emerging Namibian nation in its anti-colonial struggle. Hendrik Witbooi - more than seventy years of age - died from a battle injury, but Jacob Marengo could only be liquidated after several years, and with the support of English colonial authorities in neighbouring Cape Province. Once more the price of resistance proved to be enormously high. It is estimated that less than half of the approximately 20,000 members of the

Nama-communities survived the battles, the imprisonment and the forced labour which followed their defeat.

Another prominent leader of this early period of resistance who deserves to be mentioned here was Abram Morris among the closest followers and most experienced fighters of Marengo's unit. After Marengo's death, Morris settled in exile at a place near the South African-Namibian border. In 1922 when about 50 years of age, he returned to his Bondelwars community in southern Namibia and once again - this time against the new South African rulers/colonizers, led the people into armed resistance against the high taxes forced upon them. He fell in battle as the last of leaders who, in 1904, brought the new Namibian nation through their wars of resistance to colonial rule into existence.

SUBJUGATION

With the total and final subjugation of the Namibian fighting in the central and southern parts of Namibia, the German colonial power, by 1907, for the first time gained complete de facto control over the territory. From then onwards, Namibia, south of the Ambo-settlement areas was converted into a settler colony dominated by Europeans to an extent greater even than contemporary South Africa. Of the surviving Nama and Herero, who were initially put into concentration-camps, almost everyone was forced into a status of slave labour in the service of the colonial economy. Along with "pacification", economic activities were intensified. But the consequences of the insane philosophy of extermination, as applied during the German-Namibian wars, became obvious in an even more serious shortage of productive forces to be exploited in the capitalist economy. The physical destruction of the African communities, through calculated in the course of the military actions, ran counter to the economic logic of the capitalist interests.

Faced again with the chronic labor-shortage, the white settler community, once more relied upon the intensification of coercion. The colonial administration combined this approach with regulations which were designed to prevent further organized resistance of the African majority once and for all. In addition, a law issued in 1905 prohibited mixed marriages. Thereby, the already existing social separation according to racial categories was legally cemented. Racial differences finally laid the foundations for colonial class antagonisms and were the criteria for strict social segregation.

The greater portion of the new regulations were intended to force the Africans into employment in the colonial-capitalist sector, while at the same time the

attempted to destroy the last ties between the local communities. In 1906, all non-Ovambo were prohibited to enter the northern part of Namibia. In the same year, the authorities decided to expropriate from almost all Namibians south of Ovamboland their communal land and cattle. This step destroyed the last opportunity for Africans to continue, even on a modest basis, their traditional modes of production and social organisation.

European domination was now deeply entrenched in all social spheres and, from this time onward, serious alternatives to the newly established system were no longer even talked about. The colonial economy, however, was still faced with the labor question. It became the leading concern for the administration, and became even more urgent when diamonds were discovered in 1908, and a labor intensive diamond-industry came into being. The basis for further recruitment of migrant African labor was provided by Ordinance No. 82 of 18 August 1907. It regulated anew the control of the African population, defined the contracts for service and employment and created an obligation for Africans to carry a pass. It also called for the prohibition of cattle breeding and land-purchase by Africans, introduced organised contract labor and contained detailed provisions on the pass system.

The settlement area of the Ambo tribes, until that time influenced only indirectly by the German colonial administration and never of any real interest to the white settlers, now became increasingly attractive as a potential reservoir of black labour to be used in the colonial economy. Until that time, the Germans had not included the northern part of Namibia in their immediate and direct sphere of control. Instead, they established a moderate degree of influence largely based on cooperation with some members of the Ambo leadership. Direct control was restricted to the central and southern area, the so-called "Police Zone", which stretched from the southern border of the Ambo area to the Orange River. While the potential of the Ovambo as productive forces within the colonial economy gained greater importance with the discovery of diamonds in 1908, a regulation passed in January 1906 had already provided an organizational framework for the recruitment of Ovambo workers. In subsequent years Ovamboland became the supply base for migrant labour and was thus effectively integrated into the capitalist sector of colonial society.

Once again, in the course of these events, a natural catastrophe supported the aims of the colonial rulers, when a severe drought in the northern parts of Namibia (1912-1914) forced many Ovambos to earn their living within the cash economy of the settlers. In 1911, the first government labor management institution for contract workers was installed at

the border of Ovamboland. At the end of 1912, agents were appointed to recruit migrant workers in the northern area. With this economic penetration of the Ambo societies and the integration of their labor potential into the cash economy of the colonial sphere of production, military invasion and subjugation of this area became unnecessary. The expansion of the colonial economy had undermined the mode of production and social structures of the Ovambo much more effectively and profitably. "German South West Africa" began to flourish and, for the first time in the colonial history of Namibia, profits on a large scale were realised, but Africans were worse off than ever before.

The last stage of the German colonial era was characterised by the inhuman logic of the colonial-capitalist system in realizing as much profit as possible, even at the price of the lives of large numbers of African workers. The application of physical violence still continued under this system, largely sanctioned by the legal apparatus. Racial hostility became, in fact, identical to class antagonism. When South African troops occupied Namibia in 1914-15 and the German empire had to relinquish its colonial territories under the Versailles treaties, the loss of this profitably developing colony was widely mourned.

THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES

During the 70 years of South African occupation, the situation for the Namibian population has basically remained unchanged. Firmly integrated into structures of the capitalist world-market, while at the same time still under direct foreign control of the illegal South African administration, Namibia's natural resources (including the 'human factor') remain at the disposition of foreign interests. The basis for this situation was firmly established during the German colonial period. It should be a challenge to mankind, to contribute to the ending of this anachronism. And it should be a special concern for all Germans, to contribute to the noble goal of creating a free and sovereign Namibian state.

Since its foundation, nearly a quarter of a century ago as the genuine and authentic representative of the Namibian people our national liberation movement, SWAPO of Namibia continues the tradition of resistance among Namibians against the foreign occupation of our country. The nucleus of the Namibian nation, as it emerged during pre-colonial social interactions and became manifest again in the common struggle against German colonialism has, under illegal South African rule, grown into a broad national movement, unifying the Namibian people in the struggle for their birthright. In the

words of a fellow-Namibian, "SWAPO is the nation, and the nation is SWAPO." It is this nation, which deserves world-wide support and assistance in its efforts to free our land from colonial bondage, to finally establish "One Namibia, one nation."

NOTES

¹For full text see i.a. DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION AND PUBLICITY/SWAPO OF NAMIBIA 1981: 154 ff.; for a slightly different English version of this treaty originally written in Cape Dutch, see Goldblatt 1971:27.

²Quoted from WITBOOI 1982:33; own translation.

³Quoted from WITBOOI 1982:152 f.; own translation.

⁴Quoted from WITBOOI 1982:164; own translation.

⁵Quoted in DRECHSLER 1980:143.

⁶Quoted in DRECHSLER 1980:144.

⁷Quoted in "Pages from our Past," NAMIBIA TODAY, Vol. 1, No 2, 1977, p. 9.