

Economic and Social Transformation in the Process of Colonisation: Society and State Before and During German Rule¹

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This chapter describes and analyses some features of an early period of foreign influences in so-called modern history, shaping and contributing to emerging social structures in Namibia with a far-reaching impact upon further social development. It is the description of a fundamental process of transition, during which essential foundations of present society were laid. To some extent it can be maintained that a number of the structural elements then created continue to remain effective, and that some of the characteristics of postcolonial Namibian society are based upon or even rooted within the legacy of this past.

Such an ambitious undertaking, as incomplete as it might be, intends to offer historic background material to those periods and case studies in Namibian society that follow in subsequent chapters. Even the rudimentary evidence presented within the limitations of such an introductory chapter clearly demonstrates the violent character of the early process of forced integration into a new socio-economic system of colonial relations with a dominantly capitalist-oriented interest. This was a system imposed upon and transplanted to people(s) within a society of different stages of development and with internal dynamics of its own.

The passages that follow strive to demonstrate several results of historical research directed at Namibia's past. Firstly, it will be shown that the early stage of (pre-)colonial penetration was a matter not directly related to individual or even the collective efforts of any European powers, but more a result of the established colonial system in the neighbouring Cape region. The first phase of early colonialism, therefore, was represented more by "indigenous newcomers" to the country than by Europeans. Secondly, in the course of this process, the interaction society of those days seemed to have been far more differentiated and complex than has been assumed until recently in the bulk of literature dealing with Namibia's past (where this period before German colonialism is considered at all), with a combination of several similar important factors bringing consequences that ultimately formed the basis for the emerging colonial system. Thirdly, as much as German colonialism is related to Namibia's past, the system emerging in the early 20th century is related to the present patterns of dominance and production of power structures among the Namibian people.

¹ Revised version of a previously published book chapter (Melber 1988). For further contributions on related aspects of Namibian history, see also Melber (1982, 1985a, 1985b). Historic sources on the subject are presented and reproduced more prominently in Melber (1981, 1984, 1986).

While the role of the State is not the explicit and constant point of reference in this contribution, there are substantial implications for its assessment in terms of origin and character during the early period of formal colonial rule. As shown in the course of the following analysis, the process of imposing a different system of power structures and patterns of dominance upon the people living in the territory nowadays defined as *Namibia* has been based largely on external or exogenous forces. This process not only produced a set of values and norms, rules and regulations enforced against the will of a vast majority of people, even, if necessary, by means of applying the ultimate means of uncompromising violence; it also established the necessary mechanisms and institutions to advocate and ensure compliance with the new set of principles. If this was not achieved, the colonial Administration preferred to stoop to eradication rather than integration.

State authority, to this extent, was a mere instrumental tool more than anything else: one which, in the hands of the foreign occupants, was applied blatantly and without disguise. Any claims to represent all the inhabitants of the country proved to be mere rhetoric. After all, the concept of settler colonialism, in the specific circumstances of Namibia's case, never intended to include any members of the colonised majority in the definition of *citizen*. Civil and civic rights were exclusively reserved for the members of the settler community. In cases where such members violated the fundamental principles of the apartheid doctrine enshrined after the turn of the 20th century in the emerging laws, they and their families lost their privileged status too. To enjoy full rights as a citizen in the then German South West Africa towards the end of this specific period in Namibia's history, you had to be white. Thus, the main focus of this paper is the dynamics of interaction between internal and external social forces prevailing throughout most of the 19th century, and ultimately resulting in the consolidation of the colonial system in the early 20th century.

The “Home Front”: Features of “Internal” Development towards Socio-economic Change

The territory known as Namibia today already seemed to represent a certain entity in the early 1800s. Bordered by perennial rivers in the south (the Orange) and north (the Kunene and the Kavango), the Atlantic Ocean in the west and the dry Kalahari sandveld in the east, the people within those natural boundaries already had knowledge about and contacts with each other as well as a perception of the surrounding regions and their inhabitants. Exchange patterns existed not only among those within the natural borders, but also with southern neighbours across the Orange River and, even more so, those towards the north, where common communities of the various Owambo groups settled on both sides of the Kunene.

The northern region, a park landscape with more fertile soil and higher rainfall than the other regions, offered suitable natural conditions for a more sophisticated agrarian system of production (Clarence-Smith & Moorsom 1977). On the basis of a mixed economy (mainly with agricultural cultivation and limited livestock), several different and somewhat independently organised Owambo groups established a rather secure existence for themselves. In the course of the period under consideration, this region and its inhabitants were less directly influenced by foreign penetration and only became immediately affected by it in the 19th century (Eirola *et al.* 1983, Siiskonen 1986). These Owambo groups, which had settled for good, included a considerable number of people. Because their livelihood was rooted in the cultivated land, they were less mobile and, therefore, more resistant to threats against their existence. On the other hand, nomadic cattle herders in other areas of the country were more flexible and could try to avoid outside pressure by moving on to other acceptable regions. Being aware of these conditions, Europeans were able to establish large farms for extensive cattle-ranching. Consequently, the northern parts of today's Namibia were rarely touched directly by the emerging colonial system. This chapter will, therefore, concentrate on the southern and central regions, which possessed a dynamic different to that in the northern areas. For the period considered here, they were of more direct relevance to the process of colonisation and the following stages of settler-driven capitalist penetration.²

Most directly affected by initial colonisation were mainly the various Nama groups (members of the Khoi-khoi) and groups of the Herero, being dominant social entities of that time. The Herero, nomadic cattle-breeders who shared with the Owambo the linguistic background of being part of the Bantu-language family, occupied large parts of the central region. Some Herero clans also operated far to the east and north-west. The Nama groups, sharing a similar mode of production with the Herero, were generally less successful in cattle-breeding, owing to the fact that they operated in the climatically less favourable western and southern parts, with less rain and more sand. They were part of the Khoisan-language family, as were the other distinct groups of Damara and San. The latter two, smaller in population, tried to survive and maintain an independent existence as hunters and gatherers. For the most part, the contributing factors to social transformation represented by Damara and San have been ignored or neglected by the academic literature, which has placed them in the margins of local power, with little influence on the social dynamics. Until recently, these groups were regarded to be dependent upon the relations with the dominant groups of Nama, Herero and

² It would have been the task of another chapter to deal separately with the specific socio-economic, cultural and political aspects of the northern Namibian region(s), their people(s) and societies during this time. For more adequate recent studies see e.g. Bollig (1998), Eirola (1992), Siiskonen (1990), and Williams (1991).

Owambo, who tried to utilise them for labour purposes and often integrated them into their own structures.³

In short, in the early colonial history of Namibia one finds two semi-autonomous sets of social relations and structures. Representing one factor in local development were the Owambo, who were more related to the people of southern Angola than others in Namibia. The Owambo inhabited the northern part of the country, with an environment and internal development of its own dynamic. The other dominant factor of internal social change was represented by the Nama and Herero, who shared the southern and central regions. The latter groups were in constant contact and interrelationship, and became the focus of direct colonial penetration.

Differing ecological imperatives contributed to the varying forms of household production. A clear correspondence between environmental features, local identity and specific economic forms of production existed among the various groups. The development of class structures – while in an embryonic stage throughout the territory – had progressed further among the Owambo in the north than among the Khoi-khoi and Herero in the south. Among the Herero, differences in cattle wealth had already produced a rich elite which operated on the periphery of the traditional institutions. Further development of class differentiation was hampered, however, since land was used collectively and no private property in natural resources existed. Within the Khoi-khoi, 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. Considering the territory as a whole, it might be argued that subordinate “classes” defined along ethnic lines had already developed before German colonisation (for example, the use of Damara servants). 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 people occupying large parts of the country already possessed a clear knowledge and consciousness of the natural territorial boundaries and had continuous contact among each other. Owambo traders exchanged goods for cattle, mainly with the Herero, and local groups were connected via the Owambo with a trade network to the north. Local trade in precolonial northern Namibia rested mainly upon three staple commodities: iron, copper and salt. Long-distance trade concentrated on slaves (restricted almost

³ For more enlightened information on the Damara, see Lau (1979). While much has been published on the San or “Bushmen” (the latter term having less negative connotation in English than in German) ever since the early travelogues, most of the time these texts unduly confined themselves to a popular exotic perception, treated the San either as complete underdogs or, more recently, reactivated for them the stereotype of “noble savages”, unspoilt by so-called civilisation. On such classic colonial cases of projection with regard to “natives” in the context of Namibia, see the contributions in Hartmann *et al.* (1998); with special reference to the San, see e.g. Melber (1985d) and Gordon (1997). For a reassessment of the historic role played by various San communities in (pre-)colonial Namibia, see especially Gordon (1984, 1992).

exclusively to the southern Angola region, where constant exchange existed at that time with the related Owambo groups in northern Namibia) and ivory to the north – geared towards the interests of Portuguese traders. The main items of trade in the commodities exchange with neighbouring local communities in the east and south were metal artifacts (Clarence-Smith & Moorsom 1977).

Relationships between dominant groups in the central and southern regions were to a large extent influenced – if not determined – by existing ecological constraints, in combination with the modes and means of production. Largely dependent on their cattle and small stock, these nomadic pastoralists needed land, water and grazing opportunities as an essential basis for their individual and collective production.

At the same time, this economic basis tended to be expansionist in character. A clash of interests resulting in ambitions for control of more territory was, therefore, a logical consequence. In times of favourable natural conditions, a shared motivation to prevent an increased and notorious conflict seemed to function; but in times of natural constraints such as drought, the clash of interests and the struggle for control of the necessary means of production (land and water) increased. Accumulation of wealth was largely due to expansionism, which inevitably led to conflicts with neighbouring societies with the same patterns of production, as well as to competition among units sharing a similar identity.

Consequently, ecological constraints and imperatives often resulted in military competition among the local population, including sectional rivalry among members or units of the same language group, for control of natural resources that were necessary for maintaining the basis for economic production and reproduction. From the early 19th century, frequent (but locally isolated and restricted) military actions were characteristic of the southern and central regions, including inter-Herero conflict and raiding as well as competition between the Herero and Nama (Werner 1980).

It can therefore be concluded that, by the dawn of the 19th century, internal forces were in a dynamic process of expansionism and competition (see e.g. Dierks 1992a, 1998). Although highly influenced by natural environment factors, this competition remained manageable by those involved in the process and led to an uneasy balance of power over economic relations and social interactions. Herero groups continued to be the most influential agents of this dynamic process.

Other recent research (Lau 1979, 1982, 1987) suggests that, in the southern and central parts, the interaction of the local population prior to colonial conquest was only partly influenced by ethnic background and identity. To a certain extent, such social formations represented only one of several factors that contributed to the transformation of the modes of production during colonisation. Simplistic reductions to ethnic identities, as well as perceptions reduced to subsequent stages of

social development in correspondence with the economic change, have been challenged in such stimulating analyses.⁴

A consensus seems to be emerging that the internal development of the southern and central parts of the country (which later came to influence Owambo groups living at the southern edge of their northern settlement area) was fundamentally affected by the immigration of factions of the Khoi-khoi groups who had previously lived around the Cape in neighbouring South Africa. These Orlam communities crossed the Orange River early in the 19th century as refugees from the emerging colonial system in South Africa (for a case study, see Helbig & Hillebrecht 1992). Robbed of their land by invading Dutch colonisers, they tried to escape eventual bondage by moving further north. Many of them had already experienced dependent (wage) labour on farms or had made their living around missionary stations in constant contact with Europeans. They generally spoke Dutch and had converted to the Christian faith. Far more important for the further development within the new environment of southern Namibia, they also knew very well how to make use of their guns, as well as of the mobility provided by horses. By the time they arrived in the area which was to become their new home, the Orlam communities were organised in a quasi-military fashion and possessed a higher degree of social and political centralisation than the resident Nama. The Orlam were also superior to the Nama in terms of combat skills.

The immigration of the Orlam at the beginning of the 19th century escalated the competition for use and control of the natural means of production (land and water resources). This competition intensified further with the diminution of these resources, especially following the severe drought in 1829-30. Finally, this conflict led to a protected military confrontation between the groups in the southern and central regions, who were forced to develop expansionist tendencies. The clash between the Orlam and Herero, both of whom sought to achieve dominance, can, therefore, be seen as a struggle for survival in the face of increasingly scarce resources. At least indirectly, this development also demonstrates the far-reaching effects of European colonisation and settlement at the Cape. The migration of the Orlam indicates that local groups could not avoid fundamental threats to their original way of life. To escape these threats, migrating groups were forced to become a threat to other people in neighbouring regions.

⁴ Useful additional information for the benefit of understanding Namibian history can be found in historic analyses of neighbouring South Africa. For example, Szalay (1983) reaches the conclusion that the common differentiation between Khoi-khoi and San, as distinct groups of the common Khoesaaan-language family, seems to be artificial. Both groups were represented by their mode of production as either Khoi-khoi or San. This has led many to neglect the common roots of the two, and to an emphasis instead on their means of production (either cattle and small-stock breeding or hunting and gathering). According to their mode of production, impoverished "Khoi-khoi" existed as "San", and those "San" acquiring cattle received a new identity as "Khoi-khoi" (for information especially on the invading Orlam, see Marks & Athmore 1971 and Strauss 1979).

It was during this period of increased competition and struggle for cultural and economic survival that the first attempts were made to transcend the local communal forms of organisation 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 hegemonic rule over groups which, until then, had been independent social entities. Such a process of “State formation” implied a military rule, whose realisation and stabilisation necessarily provoked further military conflict. In this context, it is questionable whether the military superiority of Orlam groups could be considered a more advanced and sophisticated form of economic organisation. After all, the Orlam system of “production” involved the extensive practice of robbery to acquire valuable goods that could be exchanged for “European” commodities offered at the Cape market: mainly guns and ammunition, for further strengthening and securing the military basis of the hegemony, but increasingly also other products and goods for consumption. A few recent studies (e.g. Lau 1979) suggest that the supremacy of the Orlam in mid-19th century Namibia had implications for the further development of more centralised power structures and authorities, while at the same time opening the Namibian society for European interests. Lau (1979:85) notes that –

... the period of Orlam rule in a very drastic and destructive way initiated the irreversible process of merchant capitalist penetration. Since their own productive base was not at all, or only very weakly, developed, their political and military domination entailed a progressive exhaustion of some of the territory’s economic resources.

Thus, the establishment of a hegemonic structure under the leadership of Orlam groups (in alliance with other Nama factions and a few Herero chiefs) contributed to the consolidation of new, larger structures of power and a unifying tendency on a regional basis, while at the same time decisively weakening the existing local structures. As a result, the subsequent colonisation of the territory and its people was made easier (*cf.* Moorsom 1973:28*ff.*). Although Jonker Afrikaner and his Orlam–Nama–Herero allies represented a new hegemonic power structure in the mid-19th century, Namibia’s further development became inextricably related to emerging European interests.

Increasing Foreign Influence: Interactions in the Course of New Exchange Patterns Emerging and the Establishment of Colonial Relations

Missionaries, traders and representatives of mining companies were the early agents of an informal colonialism that became active in the territory from the beginning of the 19th century. Their ideological and economic influences remained rather sporadic and harmless until the 1850s. Although these agents had a somewhat catalytic effect from the very beginning of their activities, they never managed to

control or direct the internal social process of transformation during this period (Moorsom 1973:35; SWAPO 1980:26). This situation changed in the 1850s with the decline of the originally-established hegemonic structures in control of the central and southern regions. From this point forward, the increasing influence of these agents, especially the Rhenish Mission, proved to be of considerable political, economic and social importance in the further development of Namibia's internal social structure.

Less significant were the first mining activities in the country, which consisted of the exploitation of the large guano deposits on the offshore islands, as well as various coastal fishing enterprises. Although these economic activities by foreigners resulted in the first exploitative activities along the coast (Cooper 1982:1-8, Craig 1964, Liesegang 1950), this extraction of natural wealth resulted in little direct contact with the local population.

The first attempts at ideological interference and influence by representatives of Christian missionary societies also had little effect on the inhabitants. In general, the sporadic and uncoordinated activities of individual Europeans did not threaten local economic or social structures, although the effects and consequences of such activities varied according to the general circumstances of specific communities. Most Herero, for example, were able to sustain themselves economically by their immense wealth of cattle and, thus, were able to demonstrate some immunity against foreign cultural and ideological influences. As previously discussed, Owambo settlements in the north of the country had little direct contact with Europeans; rooted in the land they cultivated, their social organisations were a challenge to the Finnish Missionary Society as late as the end of the 19th century. The Orlam, on the other hand, were more directly affected by the colonial influences, which, as previously mentioned, they first experienced in South Africa. Among the Orlam, foreign ideologies had penetrated more quickly and had had greater impact. Even in this instance, the mutual relations between missionaries and local leaders were never a one-dimensional or unilateral affair (Dederig 1997). The *Kapteins* ("Captains", i.e. chiefs)⁵ always sought to realise their own interests by making use of the missionaries' position. In the early half of the 19th century, for example, the London Missionary Society had to experience this with much frustration; they finally gave up missionary activities in the territory. Another attempt to introduce foreign ideologies was made in the 1830s: this time, by the Wesleyans. Although in direct competition with the Rhenish Mission which was established in 1842, in 1844 the Wesleyans briefly managed to become the most important missionary enterprise. However, as the influence of the Rhenish Mission increased, by 1850 the English Methodists had decided to give up their activities in Namibia.

⁵ See the section headed "Chieftainships" in the "Traditional Leaders" chapter by Keulder in this volume for more on the structure of the Orlam leadership hierarchy.

By 1850, the Rhenish Mission had embarked upon a concept which proved to be more successful than the direct proselytising activities had been. Through extensive trading activities, the missionaries soon managed to influence further social and political development in the territory south of Ovamboland. It is necessary to differentiate here between the sphere of influence of Christian ideology and the effectiveness of politico-economic factors. The latter sometimes existed without ideological penetration (that is, the Christianisation of communities), and usually 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 often the existing local structures which influenced the mission's political power (Loth 1979:36).

By the mid-19th century, Namibia had reached a stage of internal competition between the Orlam and Herero for overlordship, which was leading to a rudimentary process of State formation. In this environment, the Rhenish Mission Society could profit from the fact that the Orlam factions were already Christianised and prepared to cooperate with the mission. This supported, albeit unintentionally, the extension of the mission's zone of influence and power. When Jonker Afrikaner, the most powerful and influential *Kaptein* among the Orlam, and leader of an alliance representing the 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 Society out of the centre of power. In so doing, Jonker Afrikaner objectively became an enemy of the mission's far-reaching ambitions for control of the existing power structures. This further complicated the conflict: the Herero practically monopolised the access to manufactured goods, including arms and ammunition, which it could use to selectively support specific leaders or communities. The impact of the Rhenish Mission can, therefore, be seen as tantamount to the fostering of particularistic forces in opposition to the establishment of centralised power structures.

In spite of these efforts, Jonker Afrikaner remained firmly in power as the undisputed leader and ruler of the established alliance. It was under his command that the so-called *Baiweg* ("bay road") was constructed, linking Windhoek – Jonker Afrikaner's domicile – with Walvis Bay on the Atlantic coast (Dierks 1992b:23ff.). The Baiweg was one of the more prominent examples of "modernisation" brought about by a modification of the local economy through interethnic and external trade relations.

The Baiweg constituted a transport route mainly for the export of cattle and the import of commodities such as guns and ammunition. A copper mine near the road, already under operation in 1840 and run by South Africans on concession by Jonker Afrikaner, was allowed to make use of this innovative infrastructure to transport ore to the coast. In return for this service, the South African concessionaires, including those miners who had assisted in the construction of

the road by lending appropriate tools, had to pay taxes to Jonker Afrikaner (Helbig & Helbig 1983:26).

Jonker Afrikaner's leadership was also represented in the field of agricultural development. He initiated the cultivation of figs in the vicinity of his residence at Windhoek (Büttner 1885:33). On the other hand, efforts by missionaries to stimulate agricultural production on an organised basis among the Nama and Herero seemed to have little effect.

Nonetheless, the use of European craftsmanship was more eagerly and willingly accepted and learned (Büttner 1885:39). For one thing, the rich Herero communities wanted to participate in the newly-emerging market for their large herds of cattle. While the bulk of the literature normally argues that cattle were a highly religiously-controlled possession, secured by the Herero for "obscure myths", it now seems more likely that the Herero attachment to cattle was a well-organised attempt to maintain control of the cattle market, and so secure a dominant position in the local economy (Büttner 1885:50,54). Until the mid-1890s, the Herero continued to dominate the cattle market. Nevertheless, the first European messengers of foreign interests (mainly traders and missionaries, both groups regarding themselves as "explorers" as well) began to pose an additional threat to the ambitions of local Herero groups to secure their means of production. This resulted in various attempts to protect the locally-based economy and the respective connecting trade routes. From the Eurocentric point of view, such possessiveness on the part of the Herero was often interpreted as "dishonesty" towards the missionaries, traders, travellers and explorers (see Werner 1980:40).

By the mid-19th century, Herero trade with the Cape and other European agents was estimated to amount to an annual average of 10 000 horned cattle plus numerous sheep and goats, mainly in exchange for guns and ammunition. During the 1860s, the export of ivory also gained in importance, with skins, hides, and ostrich feathers serving as complementary forms of payment to traders.

Lau (1983:41) documented "the increasing commodisation of the production process" during mid-19th-century social transformation in the southern and central regions, resulting in "competition for resources and social and political power" which focused "on access to commodities from the Cape rather than on different 'ethnic' or historical origins". With the decrease of power by the local alliance, however, indigenous opportunities to control access to resources were considerably diminished and, finally, eliminated altogether. As a result, "the country was freer than ever before – to be controlled by the agents of merchant capital and colonialism" (Lau 1983:44).

One of the earlier efforts to ensure local participation in the newly-emerging, European-dominated economy in the southern region was the Peace Treaty of Hoachanas of 1858. This agreement, signed by nearly all the representatives of local power, was an impressive, though short-lived, attempt to maintain some Af-

rican control over the changing situation. The participation of missionaries in the drafting of this document led to a strong emphasis on the independent position of the individual religious leaders, who maintained their opposition to all efforts to establish stronger centralisation of the existing power structures. Among the more important passages in the Treaty were the following:⁶

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 dispute arise between him and another chief of standing, to pursue his own vindication, but shall be pledged 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 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 17 local leaders from the southern and central parts of the territory, and in the presence of a delegate from the neighbouring Griqua of the Cape Province, as well as of Maharero – the single most powerful Herero leader of the time.

While the commitment entered into by way of this agreement may not have lasted too long, it can nevertheless be perceived as a relevant new expression of State formation among the local groups. It set a range of guiding principles and rules with which the signatories were bound to comply. In this respect, the Peace

⁶ For the full text see SWAPO (1981:154); for a slightly different English version of this document originally in Cape Dutch, see Goldblatt (1971:27).

Treaty of Hoachanas, though short-lived, represented the most advanced form of regulated interaction among the local groups.

The death of the two leading personalities in precolonial Namibia during the early 1860s, namely Jonker Afrikaner and his Herero ally, Tjamuaha, finally resulted in the decline of the established hegemony and created new tendencies of particularism among the local communities – which were encouraged by foreign interests. Such growing atomisation benefited the ambitions of the Rhenish Mission Society (RMS) to expand its control over the territory. Its activities consequently shifted from an indirect military-strategic involvement to economic and ideological pursuits. Hence, Rhenish missionaries gained far-reaching influence on the economy, as well as in religious and educational activities (on the missionary history of formal education, see Melber 1979:58 and Hunke 1995:144-149; on the missionaries' deliberate policy, see Engel 1982, Gründer 1982, and Von Moltke 1973). Through these activities, the RMS created a host of new wants and a wide range of new skills, marketable only within a capitalist economy. The values introduced by the missionaries at the same time represented their own Eurocentric and culture-bound perspective and perception (Gann 1975).

A rudimentary development of a capitalist economy emerged. Under the influence of the RMS and in the vicinity of mission stations, some Herero started to cultivate corn. As early as 1865, a surplus was sold for cash to English miners living nearby, and in the years following this surplus, production continually increased (De Vries 1980:128; for examples among the Damara, see Lau 1979:81,91).

The domestication and internalisation of these capitalist dispositions became visible with other neighbouring groups as well. Under mission supervision, some Damara, the Omene ("resident people"), who lived in separate villages within the Herero region, began to breed small stock and, later, cattle. They also cultivated crops for sale on the market (Union of South Africa 1918:105). Thus, at the dawn of formal colonial rule, the locals were, in varying degrees, already integrated into the emerging new economy, participating in subregional markets, and had adopted at least fragments of a mode of production offering them more than mere subsistence. Even a group of Nama at this time were cultivating corn at Bethanie on a moderate, but rather successful basis (Belck 1885:133).⁷

While the RMS played an influential role in this process in Namibia during the second half of the 19th century, their 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

⁷ At this stage, the Owambo societies in northern Namibia already had an impressive surplus production of corn. The average harvest not only exceeded the demand for local consumption, but even allowed the use of corn for feeding horses and cattle. Local breweries were able to produce alcoholic beverages on the basis of the surplus corn. In good years, part of the corn surplus even had to be left on the fields (Belck 1886:200).

remained limited to what might be described as creating suitable preconditions for a colonial take-over.

As such, centralised authorities trying to execute control over the territory and its people in a systematic way, were still absent. The RMS's attempts to implement its socio-economic and sociocultural concept, ideologically rooted in the values and norms of 19th-century Germany, were never based on an authority with the material power to enforce social change. At best, they created a network of alliances with those who felt that cooperation was to their benefit in the struggle for more control over territory and people. An overall State structure, however, did not emerge during this period.

Final Defeat: The Establishment of Formal Colonial Rule

During the beginning of the 19th century, the British had established a station at Walvis Bay to buy cattle from the local population, mainly to supply the island of St Helena during the time of Napoleon's exile there. In 1861 the guano trade was added to the supervisory responsibilities of the post. Finally, in 1878, Walvis Bay was declared British territory, mainly for the protection of the few economic activities conducted there by British individuals. However, these operations remained on a comparatively low scale (Davies 1943), thereby allowing the German Empire the chance to declare the surrounding land a protectorate 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" and "dream of empire" as demanded by colonial-enthusiast circles (Schmokel 1964).

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 and sometimes outright fraudulent deals with local headmen (*cf.* Goldblatt 1971:81,101, Helbig & Helbig 1983:66-70, Melber 1982:65-69). Furthermore, 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 sense, had until then been an unknown phenomenon with regard to the use of land. Land had been the collective property of the local community, and granting conditional rights for use of natural resources was a familiar practice.

On 5 September 1884, the German Empire formally declared the south-western coastal strip of Africa under its flag. Soon, however, the area under her "protection" stretched from the 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 followed by a period in which a representative of

the German Empire tried to conclude “protection treaties” with the local chiefs. In general, these individual agreements and treaties between the German Empire and the local communities were designed to prevent the re-establishment of any African hegemonic structure in the southern and central parts of the territory. The basis for this policy existed in the antagonisms produced by the decline of the former hegemony and the growing strength of other social forces with particularistic interests. The aim of the new foreign authority was directed towards the establishment of a balance of power among the local groups, which would allow further colonial penetration without coordinated resistance from the African side.

However, the German Empire at this time was preoccupied mainly with building its own internal capitalist system. It was not yet in a position to take systematic advantage of its colonial possessions. Economic interests were mainly represented by a number of private “concessionary companies”. In the main, these existed only for speculative purposes with regard to land allocation and the exploitation of natural resources. They were designed to make short-term profits and were not regarded with any interest as capital investments, nor for the development of a field of economic activity for long-term perspectives. After all, ample investment opportunities still existed at home. Economically and politically, the acquired land was attractive during this stage only in terms of developing a settler colony.

As a result of the German Government’s vague and hesitant handling of the colonial question, the concessionary companies originally had the powers of a parastatal body. At this stage the German authorities were not too interested in establishing functioning administrative structures, and left the management of the territory to the companies. These, in turn, were only interested in adding more land to their possession and acquiring more mining rights. Consequently, the territory turned out to be a complete loss for the German Government. However, while the colonial involvement faced the danger of financial collapse, individual merchants were able to take advantage of the secure colonial outlet by gaining tremendous profits in local trade (see Belck 1886:458,460).⁸ Facing this situation, by the end of the 1880s the German Government decided to increase its colonial administration with full responsibility for, and control over, the further development of the territory. The official German Administration established itself 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 undermine the existence of certain Namibian groups.

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

⁸ Among the best-sellers reaping the highest profits was cheap alcohol from potatoes, produced by Prussian liquor manufacturers. Its distribution often had devastating effects (see e.g. Belck 1885:131). On the other hand, leaders of several communities issued strict regulations prohibiting the consumption of alcohol. Such an order was proclaimed by Hendrik Witbooi for his followers.

use of those structures as part of its concept of rule. This policy aimed at 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, with active participation and leadership in anticolonial 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 collaborators in the interest of the colonial administrators, were rewarded with pensions of up to 2 000 German Marks annually. For the first time in Namibian history, reserves became established, which, later, were considered under apartheid policies as “traditional homelands”.

The implementation of German colonial policy also included the violent repression of uncooperative leaders whenever it was necessary. Some leaders were executed, and others were forced into pacts with the Administration. By the mid-1890s, under Governor Leutwein, the Germans had managed to establish a form of alliance with local leaders, applying their military superiority only in situations where the chiefs would not “voluntarily” compromise. Thus, the German colonial authorities 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 leaders of the southern and central parts, Hendrik Witbooi of the Orlam, and Samuel Maharero of the Herero. Maharero cooperated with the Germans in return for the support they offered him in the stabilisation of his powerful position, based on the claim of being “Paramount Chief” (which, in fact, was only created with the assistance of the Germans, as nothing like a “Paramount” chief had existed previously among the Herero communities).

Hendrik Witbooi, at this time ambitious to reconstruct a new hegemony, and having spent years in conflict with those particularistic forces opposed to his claims, was forced into a treaty by the uncompromising application of military violence and his eventual defeat by the German troops. Strongly rooted in the tradition of his local ethnic authority, Witbooi became the most prominent representative of resistance to foreign rule.

It seems worthwhile in this context to understand Witbooi’s position in more detail. His personal diary (mainly correspondence in Cape Dutch during 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 this phase of anticolonial resistance. At the same time, Witbooi’s position, as articulated in his letters, exemplifies how interests rooted in the authority of ethnically-based leadership sought to protect their own spheres of influence against the early colonial invaders.

On 27 June 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 Europe-

ans and who later agreed to a so-called protection treaty with the German Empire (Gugelberger 1984:73):

I am very angry, indeed, with you and other chieftains of Great Namaqualand for having accepted German protection. By doing so you now allow white men to influence our land and you give these people rights they should not have. I see the Germans very differently from you. They claim to protect you against other big nations. But it seems to me that they are the big nation trying to enter our lands with power.

I can already see them governing us with their might. I can see them passing laws which forbid us to do things we are accustomed to do. I therefore cannot agree to your giving away land which would permit these Germans to live and work here.

Please, my dear chieftain, do take back this decision and do not tolerate any white men on your territory.

If they were merely your own people I would not object at all because we are one and should be able to get along with each other. But I cannot see any peace coming out of this arrival of the Germans. Incidentally, they praise their own deeds and strength far too much.

In another letter of 7 August 1892, Witbooi issued a further serious warning to Joseph Fredericks and appealed to him anew to stop the sell-out (Gugelberger 1984:87-88):

As I have already told you at an earlier occasion, we, the chiefs, of the Red Nation, handle things in such a way that there is no problem when people live together on the same spot. Nobody shall hinder them or make things difficult for them. We chiefs have the power to make things difficult for them. We chiefs have the power to make life agreeable for everybody. This, however, is totally different from the Germans. This is why I do not want you to give these people further rights in our territory. This would amount to giving them more power and influence. And this I definitely do not want to happen. I also do not wish to see this happen in the areas between your territory and mine. I speak not only of my territory. I really do not want you to give any further land to these people. I want to stop this and wish to let you know that I cannot agree with it.

I think that you chiefs under German protection should reflect upon the fact that I have not yet succumbed to this kind of protection. This might help you in the near future. It might look to you like the piece of meat which has been stored for future and more difficult days. You have already surrendered to these people, and once these people flood you with impossible, unbearable yet powerful laws, you might see some hope in me, and you might desire to join my side.

In response to the colonial threat, the various groups intensified their contact with each other on a more cooperative basis instead of fighting each other for military superiority within the region. Among the Nama and Herero, the growing danger of losing their independent authority led to diplomatic communication and an arrangement between the old rivals, Hendrik Witbooi and Maharero, who were willing to join forces to resist the growing colonial advances. One proof of these efforts is a letter in which Maharero responds to a note he received from Hendrik

Witbooi. On 1 November 1892, Maharero wrote the following (Gugelberger 1984:96):

I have been informed that Boers are intending to come to our land. Please keep this in mind and do not permit them to move through your territories. I do not want them to come here and I do not want them to settle on your territory. Try to stop them from settling here and do not wait until too many of them have come to this land.

However, resistance to the colonialists was in vain. When the Germans started to put pressure on Hendrik Witbooi to end his independent chieftainship and to force a so-called protection treaty with the colonial authorities, his resistance was met with military violence. With the ultimate defeat of Witbooi, the German Administration gained control over the southern and central territory for the first time.⁹ The co-optation 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 (Bley 1971, Drechsler 1980). The establishment of educational opportunities and other cultural institutions for domesticating the colonised majority still depended solely upon the activities of the missions. Opportunities for careers within the colonial Administration or the structures of the settler community virtually did not exist. The establishment of the infrastructure was oriented only towards the advantage of the immigrating whites and was not designated for the benefit of the colonised majority. In short, the policy at this time was to extend and stabilise integrative mechanisms to the settler economy.¹⁰ The limitations of this system became obvious with the increasing settlement of Europeans. The only

⁹ In spite of harsh criticism from his home Government, Leutwein was intelligent and enlightened enough to present the Nama leader with acceptable conditions. They guaranteed Hendrik Witbooi his further influential position among the Nama and offered him a capitulation without humiliation. The respect Leutwein demonstrated towards Witbooi's chieftainship was honoured by the latter with personal loyalty and an unconditional acceptance of German authority for more than ten years. (On the defeat of Witbooi, see the description in Melber 1982:75-85; for the subsequent period, see Alexander 1982; and on Witbooi's fascinating personality as the ambiguous and ambivalent representative of traditionalism, see Dederich 1984, Helbig & Hillebrecht 1992, and Hillebrecht & Melber 1984.)

Gugelberger's (1984) English edition of the Witbooi papers was translated from a German translation. A more complete, direct – and therefore, perhaps, better – translation of Witbooi's papers was published by the National Archives of Namibia in 1989 as *The Hendrik Witbooi Papers*. A second edition, with new texts added, was published in 1995.

¹⁰ Nevertheless, by the early 20th century two conflicting approaches in the field of colonial policies were being discussed within Germany. The one, articulated by “modern” capitalists, was oriented towards “British liberalism” and pledged reforms. In contrast to this more enlightened position, an openly reactionary one – common to the settlers' point of view – still dominated. The protagonists of this latter attitude mainly used the Dutch/Afrikaans approach of early apartheid towards colonialism in South Africa to exemplify what they felt was the appropriate nature of a “civilising mission” (on the controversy between the two schools of thought, see especially Weinberger 1975:96-133).

real economic opportunity for the immigrating whites was extensive farming, or, more precisely, ranching. Therefore, the main interest of the settlers lay in the systematic expansion of land possessions and cattle herds which required the further expropriation of African land and resources. This expropriation came to involve the complete destruction of the people's basis for production and their social relationships, without offering, in return, suitable opportunities of employment and wage labour within the capitalist sector of the colonial economy. The settlers' interests were oriented primarily to the narrow goal of appropriating land and cattle by means of violent or fraudulent practices and the "legal" backing of these methods by the colonial Administration. Governor Leutwein, who had originally favoured more enlightened ideas of an Administration serving the interests of all inhabitants of the country (at least to a certain extent), faced a serious dilemma; but in not wanting to risk a confrontation with the settler community, he passed new legislation directed against African interests and assisted in the implementation of the settlers' ambitions. These actions resulted in a considerable shift of priorities in colonial Administration policy. While Leutwein's original concept had been aimed at the establishment of a State apparatus consistent with "European" models, one in which the Africans should have the opportunity to adapt to the emerging new structures and social relations, the colonial administrative body gradually extended more and more unconditional support to the settlers in pursuit of their own economic interests. Compensation and economic incentives, basic prerequisites for integrating the colonised majority into the structures of the new colonial society, could not be offered as essential parts of an "appeasement policy" (Bley 1971).

In spite of these rigid tendencies during this phase of settlement and its consequences for economic penetration, the Herero had remained the strongest economic group during the first half of the 1890s. They still possessed an immense wealth of cattle and occupied the best grazing lands. Furthermore, although they did not yet participate in the established colonial network of capitalist trade, they dominated the market structures by sales of cattle. Their economic dominance was only destroyed by the cattle-plague, or rinderpest, in 1897. This 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. Two examples demonstrate the devastating result of the rinderpest. Chief Tjetjo of the Herero, who resided near the Waterberg area with an enormous herd of cattle and thousands of oxen, was left with as little as five to eight cattle for every hundred he once had. Even worse was the destruction further to the west in the Herero region, where the chiefs Muambo and Kajeta, who originally possessed several thousand head of cattle, were left with only some forty cattle in total (Sander 1897:11). The destructive consequences of the rinderpest were appreciated by the Germans as being of economic advantage to their colonial inter-

ests, especially with regard to the impoverishment and destabilisation of the Herero (Sander 1897:29).

The immense loss of cattle made the Herero reliant upon European goods offered on the market, and confronted them with new dependencies. Since cattle-trading was no longer a viable option for them, the possession and sale of land started to become the basis of exchange relations. For the first time, impoverished Herero in sizeable numbers started to earn their living as wage labourers. White settlers now started to settle on a permanent basis in areas under Herero control, and the economy gradually started to develop along settler-dominated lines. As this development began to reduce political risks, for the first time, German capital began to participate in the long-term planning of economic development within the colony. Colonialists pressed forward in the construction of a railway network and other infrastructural investments aimed at developing the country's resources. These measures provided strategic military value, while at the same time facilitating the exploitation and export of Namibian resources.

The "labour question" now came to the fore as the most burning issue. As the need for African workers increased, the chronic shortage of labour became the main economic problem. To increase the supply of badly-needed labourers, colonial authorities made use of increasingly violent methods to recruit workers. Labourers for white farms, mines and railway construction became a much sought-after prize. The uncompromisingly violent character of the German colonial regime became even more obvious than before: a strategy to force the African population into the colonial-capitalist economic system.

Under such conditions, resistance to the new regime emerged. At the turn of the 19th century, a series of local rebellions took place. Limited to regional and uncoordinated actions, they ended in military defeat and further restrictions. The colonial authorities used the suppression of these isolated armed uprisings to further expand on their policy of creating local reserves. At the same time, the thwarting of these ineffective forms of resistance resulted in "peace treaties" with the colonial regime. The colonial authorities were, thus, able to improve the efficiency of their system of control, and dictated limited areas for settlement to the defeated communities. Rebellious leaders were executed, land was confiscated, and the people were disarmed and deported for use as forced labour, especially for railways under construction. However, the antagonism from the locals increased further and contributed to an escalation in wars of resistance. In the struggle for their survival, the Herero were the first to collectively rise up in arms to defend themselves against the violent destruction of their independent existence. The war of the years 1904 to 1907 was, under the existing social conditions, a simple act of self-defence and a desperate effort to regain autonomy.

The 1904 war began with a secretly planned and collectively initiated attack on the German settlers and troops by the Herero in January that year. Far from being

an irrational slaughter by “savages” (as the hysteric contemporary colonial literature claimed), this was a clearly directed response to the threats posed by the immediate colonisers. The order issued by Maharero (as cited in Drechsler 1980:143)¹¹ 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 and the Bastards, the Berg Damara, the Nama and the Boers. We shall not lay violent hand on any of these. I have made a solemn pledge not to make this known to anyone, including the missionaries. (sic)

This statement, which clearly differentiated between the colonising Germans and other “outsiders”, was later supplemented by an explanation offered by another Herero leader, Daniel Kariko (Drechsler 1980:143):

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.

This comparatively humanitarian approach had little effect on colonialist reactions. Leutwein, criticised by the colonial hardliners from the beginning for his “over-lenient” attitude towards the Namibian population, was forced to retire from his position. His successors embodied the prevailing reactionary mood of the settler community and the colonial-nationalist factions within the German Empire. These interests concluded that the genocide of Namibian population groups who were resisting, was – even culturally – a necessity (on the ideological roots of this argument, see Schmitt-Egner 1975). This dominating philosophy culminated in an extermination order against the Herero, issued at a time when they were already decisively beaten (for details on the war, see Bridgman 1981 and Drechsler 1980).

The Herero people’s military struggle for survival resulted in a German campaign against all Africans. Inhumane racist attitudes reached a paroxysm of ignorance and prejudice, ending in violent actions and repressions all over the country. Aware of these growing tensions and threats, Hendrik Witbooi – who was by then

¹¹ In a letter written shortly before the first attack, Maharero tried to inform Witbooi about these intentions. This message, sent to the *Kaptein* of the Rehoboth Basters, was instead handed over to the Germans. Maharero’s words – a quotation of which served as the title for the English edition of Drechsler’s (1980) book – demonstrates the desperate situation of the population while supporting the argument of intergroup contact, reducing the ethnic pattern to one of several factors: “‘All our obedience and patience with the Germans is of little avail, for each day they shoot someone dead for no reason at all. Hence I appeal to you, my Brother, not to hold aloof from the uprising, but to make your voice heard so that all Africa may take up arms against the Germans. Let us die fighting rather than die as a result of maltreatment, imprisonment or some other calamity. Tell all kapteins down there to rise and do battle.’” (quoted in Drechsler 1980:143). It would be an issue too hypothetical and academic to debate whether anything would have changed for the better if Witbooi had received this information in time for him to decide to join the armed resistance. In any case, it is safe to assume that under such circumstances the course of the war would have taken a different route.

in his 70s and had settled passively within the borders of a reserve for the preceding decade – finally led his people into battle at a time when the Herero had already been destroyed.

The political intentions and the military aims of the latter uprising were identical to those of the Herero: the Nama simply wanted to restore and preserve their previously more independent social and economic life. The Owambo participated only marginally in this war since they were still largely unhampered by the German authorities in their settlement area. For a while, the conflict seemed destined for a military stalemate. On the one side, the Germans with their clumsy strategy of conducting a regular war with superior but immobile material were fooled again and again by the small groups of combatants operating in the south. On the other side, by leaving their regions and keeping mobile, the local groups consistently left their remaining land to the enemy.

While the Herero had already engaged in a decisive and unsuccessful battle with the technically and militarily superior German troops in 1904, the Nama in the south of the territory were conducting an efficient small-scale guerilla war. The most effective of these military forces was led by Hendrik Witbooi and Jacob Marengo¹². Cultural differences played no important role among the combatants in these small battle-units. In fact, the guerillas fighting in the south could be seen as another nucleus of an emerging nation in its anticolonial struggle. Nevertheless, Hendrik Witbooi eventually suffered death from a battle injury, and Marengo was killed several years later with the support of English colonial authorities in the neighbouring Cape Province (on the relevance of both leaders, see Alexander 1983). Once more, the price of resistance proved to be bloody: it is estimated that less than half of approximately 20 000 members of the Nama communities survived the battles, or the imprisonment and forced labour that followed their defeat.¹³

The above events once again bore evidence of the Germans' uncompromising approach to enforce an externally rooted system upon the colonised majority. Resistance to this imposed system, which implied far-reaching consequences for the material and mental well-being of the affected majority among the local population, was even ultimately met with a degree of violence resulting in extermination. Colonial State authorities based their power on the application of physical violence to enforce compliance. If this failed to show the intended effects, the resisting people were physically destroyed. The early colonial State did not offer

¹² Often incorrectly referred to as *Morenga*.

¹³ Another tragic episode was the deportation of Nama groups to West African German colonies (*cf.* Hillebrecht & Melber 1988). A rather unfortunate controversy took place among critical scholars during the late 1980s and early 1990s, when the notion of *genocide* in this context was questioned (Lau 1989) and subjected to a debate that was exploited by conservative forces (for an overview, see Dederig 1993).

any ways or means for negotiation, mitigation or compromise between the coloniser and the colonised. This openly violent character of the colonial State underlined the exclusivity it had in terms of advocating only the interests of the colonising minority. It protected this minority's interests alone, and never even intended to claim responsibility or credibility in terms of an advocacy role for the colonised majority. It was consequently no surprise that the colonial State's Administration was never perceived as a neutral body serving the interests of all the people. The guiding principles of colonial State formation denied members of the colonised majority their legal status as citizens. Hence, they had no status that would offer them any entitlement for the protection of rights by the State's authorities. They had no rights other than to comply with the new status imposed upon them.

The New System: Colonial-capitalist Relations in a Settler Society

With the final and total defeat of the local groups fighting in the central and southern parts of the country, the German colonial power had, by 1907, gained complete control over the territory. Afterwards, those areas of Namibia south of the Owambo settlements were converted into a settler colony dominated by Europeans to an extent even greater than that of contemporary South Africa. Of the surviving Nama and Herero who were initially put into concentration camps, almost all were forced into the status of slave labourers in the service of the colonial economy (see Wege 1969 and 1971). By 1914, only about 200 men in the two groups were reported not to be in employment. With the "pacification", economic activities were intensified. However, the consequences of the applied philosophy of extermination became obvious, as a serious shortage of workers soon arose. The physical destruction of the communities, though calculated in the course of German military actions, ran counter to the economic logic of capitalist interests.

The white settler community, faced with this chronic labour shortage, once more relied upon the intensification of violence. The colonial Administration initiated regulations which would prevent further organised resistance once and for all. A law was issued in 1905 to prohibit mixed marriages between Europeans and Africans. Consequently, the already existing social separation according to racial categories was legally cemented. Racial differences were to form the foundation for the colonial class antagonisms, and the criteria for strict social segregation. From then onward, the existing racially-exclusivist underlying notion of the colonial State was translated into an ever-increasingly fine-tuned system of rules and regulations.

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, they attempted to destroy the last remaining ties between the local communities. In 1906, all non-Owambo were prohibited from entering the northern part of the colony. Also in the same year, the authorities decided to expropriate almost all

communal land and cattle from those living south of Ovamboland. This step destroyed the last opportunity for Africans to continue, at least on a modest basis, their original mode of production and social organisation.

European domination was now deeply entrenched in all social spheres; serious alternatives to the newly-established system were no longer articulated. The colonial economy, however, was still faced with labour problems. This became the leading concern for the Administration, and became even more urgent when diamonds were discovered in 1908 and a labour-intensive diamond industry came into being. The basis for the further recruitment of cheap African labour 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 the purchasing of land by Africans, introduced organised contract labour, and offered detailed provisions on the pass system.

The settlement area of the Owambo, until then 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 for the colonial economy.¹⁴ 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 the cooperation of the willing Owambo leadership. Direct German control was restricted to the central and southern area, the so-called Police Zone, which stretched from the southern border of the Owambo area to the Orange River. While the potential of the Owambo 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 organisational framework for the recruitment of Owambo workers. In subsequent years, Ovamboland became the supply base for migrant labour, and Owambos were effectively integrated with the capitalist sector of the colonial society (see Banghart 1969, Hishongwa 1992, Stals 1967).

Once again, in the course of these events, a natural catastrophe supported the aims of the colonial rulers. A severe drought in the northern parts of Namibia from

¹⁴ Again, in the course of the efforts to meet this shortage of indigenous labour, considerations were posed to subjugate the northern Namibian areas and their people by means of direct military power. Aware of the strong force necessary to realise this aim, the plans were finally substituted for “measures exclusively under the point of view of procurement of workers” (telegram of the Imperial German Government, dated 12 March 1908, addressed to the Governor in Windhoek; quoted in Loth 1979:35). The colonial Administration, therefore, relied upon methods of forcing the people of the northern regions into the emerging colonial-capitalist structures by integrating individual chiefs into the system and offering them benefits from cooperation in the field of labour supply. This strategy of co-optation was markedly different from the practices of subjugation in the central and southern parts of the country: in the north, there was a direct physical presence of both settlers and Administration.

1912 to 1914 forced many Owambos to earn their living within the settlers' cash-based economy. In 1911, the first governmental labour management institution for contract workers was founded 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 Owambo societies and the integration of their labour potential into the cash-based economy of the colonial sphere of production, a 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 Owambo much more effectively and profitably than missionary ideologies had. In an internal report to the Imperial German Government on 27 January 1912, Hanno Haathi (an inspector with the Finnish Missionary Society, who had previously travelled to Ovamboland) wrote:

Firstly, a good part of the cultivable land and that which was already cultivated before remains lying fallow as a result of the migration of young strong men as the indigenous people themselves deplore it and as I saw it with my own eyes; the arable lands became smaller and smaller and have fewer yields because the strength of women is not enough to obtain the means of subsistence from the soil necessary for a big family.

Secondly, it is erroneous to presume that the worker who returns home can even bring with him a considerable fraction of his earned wages. Men who work in the South for 6 months bring home as a rule practically nothing and those who work away from home for about 10 months return with only worthless trifles and only augment the misery of the family suffering from shortage of food.

(Central State Archives in Potsdam, *Imperial Colonial Office Document No.1231*, sheets 173ff.; quoted in Loth 1979:37)

Governor Seitz, in a letter dated 30 January 1911 to the former Imperial Colonial Office in Berlin, had the following to report:

Owambos who set out from Lüderitzbucht on homeward journey due to illness die on the way from shortage of provisions and most of them are exploited by traders on the way from Swakopmund to Okaukuejo in such a way they merely bring home scurvy and other diseases with them as a result of their work on the diamond fields. (sic)

(Central State Archives in Potsdam, *Imperial Colonial Office Document No. 1231*, sheet 3ff.; quoted in Loth 1979:34)

By 1913, about 90% of all adult male Africans within the Police Zone were estimated to be employed in the capitalist sector. More than 12 500 worked on farms, whereas about 10 000 worked in the larger mining and Government enterprises. They were joined by Owambo migrant workers, whose numbers at this time amounted to between 11 000 and 12 000 a year. "German South West Africa" began to flourish, and, for the first time in the colonial history of Namibia, profits were being realised on a large scale. Yet the colonised people were worse off than ever before (Loth 1980, Moorsom 1978).

The last years of the German colonial era were characterised by the logic of the colonial-capitalist system in realising as much profit as possible, even at the price

of the lives of large numbers of workers. The application of physical violence still continued under this system, sanctioned to a great extent by the legal apparatus. Racial hostility, in fact, became identical to class antagonism. By the time South African troops occupied Namibia in 1914-15 and the German Empire was forced to relinquish its colonial territories under the Versailles Treaties, the loss of this profitable colonial booty was widely mourned throughout Germany. At this stage of contemporary history, an “apartheid” society had already been firmly established under a German flag.

The Character and Impact of the Early Colonial State

The process described above in establishing and enforcing the structures of a centralised bureaucratic authority representing the features of a colonial settler society and overseeing the consolidation of an imposed socio-economic system with a particular mode of production, empirically confirms the notion “that virtually all the activity of colonial administrations was directed by, and in the interests of, foreigners” (MacPherson 1982:37). The emerging settler economy was ultimately driven by a demand for cheap labour. It was among the priorities of the established colonial Administration to ensure the supply of such labour. What MacPherson (1982:39) concluded on the basis of other case studies is relevant and applicable to our case, too:

Despite variation in the extent of penetration by the external economy and the particular forms of economic activity, the central features are constant. Both production and its myriad associated activities were dominated by external forces. Under colonial administrations these economies were made into extensions of the metropolitan economies. ... Both in nature and location the infrastructure which supported the economic activity, encouraged by colonial administrations, was informed by needs other than those of the mass of people.

The colonial State as a geographical extension of the metropolitan State reflected the partial implantation of this metropolitan State apparatus in a conquered territory. It was a system of administration designed for control, and the policy it administered was externally driven. The primary concern was to enforce order and stability, if necessary by the application of violence. The justification of such rigorously-executed authority was rooted in a legal system created to serve the interests of the external power, by protecting its subjects settling in the colony. This implied that the law was not neutral; similarly, neither was the role of the Administration exercising the functions of a State apparatus.

Legislation was created and applied to directly coerce local populations to respond to the needs of the imposed settler economy. Non-compliance was severely punished, and perceptions of justice/injustice outside the new legal framework were not tolerated (MacPherson 1982:44):

Thus, in addition to the achievement of maximum order and stability in what were essentially unstable conditions, law was used extensively and harshly to engineer change in the directions required for the penetration and entrenchment of external economic interests.

The legacy created by such authoritarian and partial use of law, designed to artificially stabilise situations of dependency, inequality and injustice, had far-reaching implications. The forces at work to maintain a social set-up rooted in the pseudo-legitimisation of a violent system of subordination, required administrative, legislative, military and social control. The agencies executing such tasks were no more than a totally biased bureaucracy and its executive wings with the nature of a blatantly partial pseudo-State, representing the interests of a privileged minority only. As a consequence, the colonised majority was not even entitled to any formal rights by being denied obtaining the status of citizens.

The colonial State, more than any other similar form of social organisation, draws the lines of its borders by constituting (and defining) what is inside those borders – above all, those people making up the “nation”. Thus, it also defines the people and their cultures, which remain outside the national nexus and which are implicitly perceived as inferior (since they do not qualify to become part of the national entity). This finds its formal reflection in the legal arrangements defining such matters as citizenship, rights of residence, as well as access to social benefits and legal protection. All these “services” provided by a State to its citizens virtually excluded the “natives”. The colonial State, therefore, remained primarily an appendix to the metropolitan State, to serve the interests of members in the settler community almost exclusively. It thus claimed authority (and control) over all the local inhabitants of the territory, but never tried to claim a representative character for all the people under the established system.

However, it would be too easy to dismiss, due to such circumstances, the long-term impact of the structures created. The colonial State was of a factual nature with far-reaching implications. After all, it was the direct predecessor of those States which emerged after the independence of many ex-colonies. Particularly in Africa, colonial State formation was, to a great extent, a “cultural project” (Young 1988): it had to do with the transfer of administrative techniques and skills, as well as political processes, to secure the hegemony of the colonial power. For both the colonial as well as the postcolonial State, therefore, the metropolitan State ultimately served as a model.

Essential aspects that had been fought for and were secured within these metropolitan States only during the course of the 20th century (especially the constitutionally-guaranteed participation of the general population as formally equal citizens) had, in the case of a colony, been denied to the people outside of the settler community. Such a practice of exclusive rule under foreign domination resulted in a fatal historic legacy. Not only was colonial rule oriented towards the metropolis;

but, even worse, its totalitarian character and rigid strategies of domination and oppression also led towards the infantilisation of the population, and the creation of a subordinate culture of obedience and subservience to authorities. These dispositions and structures of personalities, decisively enforced under colonial socialisation processes, resulted in the production and internalisation of normative behaviour that could at best be qualified as authoritarian in character. The colonial State, therefore, had a direct responsibility for the shaping of personality structures posing a barrier on the road towards genuine emancipation. This legacy remains a factor with far-reaching impacts for present-day Namibian society, its governance and political culture.

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